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Introduction

Gender studies is a relatively new area of research that is in continuous development.

During these decades of research, various issues have been addressed supported by contemporary theories that link gender to different aspects of life. The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the concept of female leadership, trying to give a general overview of the current situation and analyze different areas surrounding the subject.

One of the aims of the first chapter is to illustrate different theories arguing sex differences in leadership, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and decision-making. The main sources for this are the papers written by psychologist and professor Alice Eagly who's a frontrunner in the research of these topics. The other main issue brought to light in the first chapter is a list of the major obstacles that women still have to face if they decide to come across careers related to roles of power; from the lack of representation, which is a big problem, especially for girls who sometimes may have a hard time finding role models to be inspired by, to the identification of gender bias and finally to the non-inclusive language, which is a very serious topic because the absence of feminine terminology and the masculine used as neutral is a form of internalized sexism of the language.

The second chapter focuses on the representation that the media carry on of women in positions of power. The idea is to analyze the responsibility of the media and the fact that unfortunately, they are often the reason behind the tightening of gender stereotypes and double standards due to their toxic narrative of women in power. In the last section of this chapter, some cases of this hatred narrative towards female politicians that happened in the last year are going to be discussed especially the one of Sanna Marin.

The third and last chapter is an overview of the women in high levels of politics in Europe. The first macro topic of the chapter will be the paternalism that is rampant in left-wing parties and which often prevents women from emerging. Subsequently, the analysis will move on to the obsession of women of right-wing parties to fully identify themselves in the role of women belonging to the traditional conservative family: often even presenting themselves as public figures with the surname acquired from their husbands. Lastly, there will be a focus on the case study of Giorgia Meloni, the first woman in Italy who became Prime Minister.

PART I. WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP: THEORIES AND OBSTACLES

1.1 SEX DIFFERENCES IN LEADERSHIP AND PEACEBUILDING

The first knot that must be untied is the one related to the possible differences between women's leadership and men's one. This is an extremely controversial question that remains open without the absolute truth.

There are two currents of thought, the first states that the differences do exist and that they are obvious, the other side instead affirms that the differences are so irrelevant and unremarkable that they should not be even considered. Among the psychologists and sociologists who support the first thesis, which is the one that states that there are discrepancies between the two types of leadership, it is possible to find Loden who stated that the masculine way of managing something is characterized by the absence of emotions, analytic problem solving, competitiveness and so on, while women on the other side tend to be more intuitive and empathetic, cooperative and collaborative.¹ Another very important contribution that was given to this thesis was the one brought to the table by Henning and Jardim, they linked the differences between the two types of leadership to the personality traits typically known as masculine or feminine acquired in early socialization.² This theory, exposed in their textbook which explores the issues and barriers women face in the professional and business worlds and discusses 25 women who are top-level executives in major industries, was avant-garde and paved the way for research related to this area which developed fully in the second half of the 90s and the 2000s. It was then deduced that there is a close correlation between the family and school environment, which shapes our first social interactions, and the way of personifying the gender to which someone refers. And it is precisely this primary socialization that leads to the exacerbation and hardening of the so-called gender stereotypes, even at the behavioral level, which in the future will give rise to different ways of managing a leadership position.³ In other words, children's gender segregation deeply affects their play experiences, leading them to spend more time in stereotypic play and this will be projected onto their future.⁴ Another researcher who was deeply influenced by the studies of x and y was Sally Helgesen, who

¹ M. Loden, *Feminine Leadership: Or How To Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys*. New York: Times Book, 1985

² M. Henning, A. Jardim, *The Managerial Woman*. New York: Anchor Press, 1977

³ Carol L. Martin, *Gender: Early Socialization*. Arizona State University, 2014.

⁴ P. Goble, CL. Martin, LD. Hanish, RA. Fabes, *Children's gender-typed activity choices across preschool social contexts*, 2012

supported the idea that there were indeed differences between female and male leadership. In fact, in her book, she quoted that study several times and theorizes in turn the fact that workplaces run by women are “webs of inclusion” and not hierarchies.⁵ This theoretical approach confirmed the assumption that the typical ability of the so-called women’s leadership to work better in groups by cooperating has as a key element the concept of information sharing.

The other sociological current, as stated earlier, claims that concrete differences do not exist. Some of the researchers who affirmed this, between the late 70s and early 80s, were Bass, Nivea, Gutek, and Kanter. Stating this does not deny the existence of gender stereotypes that persist in many areas. The basis of this theory, however, assumes that only people with certain characteristics, all very similar, arrive at the top of managerial or leadership power and that therefore for this reason there are no gender differences. The behaviors of men and women in those managerial positions would therefore tend to be less stereotyped according to the results of these researches, precisely because they would have been chosen at the interviews and then included in a path of homologation with regard to their skills and their way of behaving. This therefore greatly reduces the possibility of seeing different types of leadership depending on biological sex in these areas of employment.⁶ Despite this, there continue to be reasons that support the thesis that a man and a woman who are in the same leadership position will still have different behaviors and attitudes, this would be due to the “ingrained sex differences in personality traits and behavioral tendencies, differences that are not nullified by organizational selection or socialization.”⁷

The issue of political leadership intersects with other macro topics such as decision-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. It’s important to underline how all these things can be connected to gender differences, creating a rift between what would be, for example, the way of handling problematic situations by a man or by a woman.

Since in the most important institutions the idea that only a leadership characterized by the typical masculine features can achieve goals and solve difficulties has been unhinged, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was signed. This precise document reaffirms the importance of women’s participation and involvement at all levels of the peace and security agenda, underlining how women and men have different experiences and reactions both during and post-conflict.⁸ Since this was announced more and more women were involved in the peace process and this has led in the last 20 years to benefits in various areas including economic development. Also, a

⁵ S. Helgesen, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*. Doubleday Currency, 1990.

⁶ JP Wanous, *Organizational Entry: Newcomers Moving from Outside to Inside*. Psychological Bulletin, 1977.

⁷ Eagly A. Johnson B., *Gender and Leadership Style: A Meta-Analysis*. Psychological Bulletin, 1990.

⁸ Speake B., *A Gender Approach to Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution*. University of Leeds, 2013

study showed that the likelihood that violence will stop rises by 24% when women participate in peacebuilding.⁹ Women, especially the ones who live in places where conflicts are still active, according to proponents of greater female representation, are crucial to peace negotiations because they concentrate on societal needs rather than just the needs of the warring parties, bringing a more complete peace plan to the table.

Two striking examples of women who have distinguished themselves for their great capacity for peacebuilding and decision-making are Melinda Simmons and Jacinda Arden.

Simmons started her career being the Head of the International Department/Associate Director at the Register Group. Subsequently, in the late 90s and early 2000s, she collaborated in conflict resolution programs both in South Asia and the Middle East, in the following years she worked more and more in these areas assuming increasingly important positions until becoming in 2018 the British Ambassador in Kyiv.¹⁰ She is therefore the British character who is dealing on the front line of the Ukrainian crisis underway since 2022. Despite playing such an important role, she is not afraid to prove herself sometimes vulnerable in interviews while remaining strongly anchored to self-confidence and her communication and political skills. Normalizing the fear that even world leaders can feel in situations such as humanitarian crises is what distinguishes her from her colleagues who want to fully identify with stereotypically masculine values.

The second example, the one which has as its protagonist Jacinda Arden, has to do with the management of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. She was during that hard-time New Zealand's Prime Minister and she gave most Western politicians a masterclass in crisis leadership. To understand why her leadership in managing the pandemic has been impeccable, we must analyze not only her decisions but also her communication skills. To do this it is useful to deepen the research in this area carried out by Milton Mayfield. His research is based on the identification of three key points of political communication: direction-giving, meaning-making, and empathy. Leaders must be public motivators, but this task is frequently performed ineffectively. According to Mayfield's research, giving directions is usually overused while the other two components are typically underutilized. All three methods are employed by Arden in her reaction to COVID-19. She concurrently gave meaning and purpose to the request made by New Zealanders by telling them to "stay home to save lives". She demonstrated empathy by openly acknowledging the difficulties remaining at home presents. Moreover, during press conferences, unlike other world leaders,

⁹ L. Stone, Can women make the world more peaceful? Article on The Guardian, 2014.

¹⁰ [Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Ukraine - Summer 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/change-of-her-majesty-s-ambassador-to-ukraine-summer-2019) , published on April 30 2019.

including Boris Johnson, she has always left extensive time for media questions to demonstrate her willingness to clarify her choices.¹¹ As pointed out before, empathy, which has often been neglected by leaders who want to embody masculine values, and which is therefore associated with women's leadership, was the trait that allowed Arden to gain international attention and estimation.

1.2 LACK OF REPRESENTATION AND THE TOOL OF GENDER QUOTAS

Women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. However, data show that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off.¹² Suffice it to say that only in 13 states in which women hold 50 percent or more of the positions of Cabinet Ministers leading policy areas.¹³ Furthermore, even when women are numerically present in politics, they are relegated to purely social and non-economic roles: the five most commonly held portfolios by women Cabinet Ministers are Women and gender equality, followed by Family and children affairs, Social inclusion and development, Social protection and social security, and Indigenous and minority affairs.¹⁴

Numerous studies have shown that when women run for office, they compete on an equal footing with males. There are no differences between males and women in terms of electoral success, vote totals, or fundraising receipts. However, women continue to be notably underrepresented in political organizations.

A study conducted by Lawless and Fox shows that unfortunately often this lack of representation is due to the fact that women tend to not run for office. There seems to be a substantial gender gap in political ambition caused by several factors that tend to overshadow women's ambitions within a patriarchal society. The research in question took into consideration nearly 4,000 people, and it analyzed and compared the results of those surveys, which have been carried on for about 10 years. Lawless and Fox came to the conclusion that there are seven factors that strengthen this gender gap

¹¹ Suze Wilson, Three reasons why Jacinda Ardern's coronavirus response has been a masterclass in crisis leadership. Article on The Conversation, published on April 5, 2020.

¹² [Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters](#) , Page updated on 7 March 2023.

¹³ [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform](#)

¹⁴ [Women in politics: 2023 | Digital library: Publications | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

in political ambition. Those factors are both limiting women's political aspirations directly or by making women's decision-making processes significantly more difficult and complicated than the ones of men. These 7 factors emerged from the study are:¹⁵

1. Women are substantially more likely than men to perceive the electoral environment as highly competitive and biased against female candidates.
2. Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin's candidacies aggravated women's perceptions of gender bias in the electoral arena.
3. Women are much less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for office.
4. Female potential candidates are less competitive, less confident, and more risk-averse than their male counterparts.
5. Women react more negatively than men to many aspects of modern campaigns.
6. Women are less likely than men to receive the suggestion to run for office – from anyone.
7. Women are still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks.

Given the persistent gender gap in political ambition, we are far from achieving a political reality where men and women are equally likely to aspire to high-level elected office. Women's under-representation in politics raises grave issues involving democratic legitimacy and quintessential problems of political representation. Electing more women will increase the probability that coverage debates and deliberations encompass women's views and experiences. Moreover, the excessive charges of a political profession additionally act as a barrier for women who can't come up with the money for the low wages of state and local government positions. Considering how the gender wealth gap additionally performs a position in women's median wealth, the desire no longer to run for the workplace can be closely based totally on monetary situations.¹⁶

It can be said that the fight for equal representation of women in politics is not an attempt to make up for a perceived lack of confidence on the part of women but rather an effort to provide them with the same level of support and motivation that has been historically offered to men. Moreover, a real problem that is likely to continue, if there won't be an intervention, is that girls continue to think that they cannot access certain job positions, in this case in the context of politics, because they are

¹⁵ JL. Lawless, RL. Fox, Men Rule: The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics. Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute, January 2012.

¹⁶ M Bangs, Women's Underrepresentation in Politics: No, It's Not Just an Ambition Gap. The Century Foundation, September 2017

not represented at certain levels and have no one who can inspire them. As said in an article published on International Alert: “you can’t be what you can’t see”.¹⁷

One of the possible solutions to try to solve this situation is the introduction of gender quotas in certain working environments. In fact, gender quotas have been one of the reasons why in the last two decades, there have been unprecedented gains in women’s access to elected office in many regions across the world. The literature identifies three broad types of gender quota policies: reserved seats, which designate places for women in political assemblies that men are not eligible to contest, political party quotas, which involve pledges by individual parties to nominate a specific percentage of women, and legislative quotas, which require that all parties put forward a certain proportion of women.¹⁸ The reserved seats are mandated by national parliaments in order to revise mechanisms of election by establishing seats that only women are eligible to contest, and may be implemented through direct elections by voters or indirect elections by parties or members of parliament. The party quotas are adopted voluntarily by political parties and they set out new criteria for party candidate selection, they also affect the composition of party lists in PR electoral systems and candidates eligible for particular seats in majoritarian systems. Lastly, the legislative quotas are mandated by national parliaments and set out new criteria for party candidate selection, those tend to be found in developing countries, especially Latin America, and/or post-conflict societies, primarily in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe. These patterns may be clarified in part by the reality that legislative quotas are the latest sort of gender quota policy, appearing for the first time only in the 1990s, commonly afterwards parties in several Western countries had already adopted other kinds of quota measures.

The spread of quotas is not simply linked to efforts to escalate the number of women in elected office. In fact, according to several sociologists, this tool would also serve to implement the diversity of elected women, in addition of course to raising attention to women's issues in policy-making, the gendered nature of the public sphere, and inspiring female voters to become more politically involved.¹⁹ Quotas have been a continuously current response to the enduring underrepresentation of women in several domains, from science and politics to the corporate boardroom. Around 100 countries have already adopted gender quotas in politics, mostly since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and in 2004 Norway became the first

¹⁷ International Alert (2018), 7 women peacebuilders you should know, <https://www.international-alert.org/stories/7-women-peacebuilders-you-should-know/>

¹⁸ ML. Krook, J. Lovenduski, J. Squires, *Gender Quotas and Models of Political Citizenship*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

¹⁹ S. Franceschet, *Conceptualizing the Impact of Gender Quotas*. Oxford Academic, March 2012.

nation to mandate the presence of women on corporate boards, with a 40% quota.²⁰ Policy-makers hope that quotas will have extended effects on women's labor market results over and over the instant effect on leaders' gender balance, because the 1st women who become leaders may shape both parent's and children's beliefs about what women can accomplish, through their policies and through a direct role model effect. In revolve, this may bring up their hopes and ambitions and shape educational and professional choices.²¹

Unfortunately, gender quotas may also have unintended consequences. In fact, being a predominantly male-dominated society, some slurs have already been created to describe women hired through gender quotas, using, for example, terms like "token woman" and "diversity hire". Another unintended effect is the fact that some may think that the increase in the recruitment of women through gender quotas can somehow reduce the quality of work, in other words, quotas may create negative stereotypes about women's political capabilities.²² Moreover, in a liberal society in which usually one of the founding principles is individualism, there is often a mentality that makes people believe in individual responsibility for inequality and preference for non-intervention in candidate selection processes. This leads to doubts about their legitimacy and legality, even when they are adopted nearly unanimously within political parties or by national legislatures.²³

Despite this, since literature identifies belief in one's own ability as a key mechanism for private agency and illustrates that this belief is highly correlated with educational hopes and ambitions and consequent occupational choices, for girls having representative role models remains extremely important.²⁴ Moreover, having more women in office is important for substantive representation. In fact, it has been demonstrated that women report more concern about poverty and healthcare than men, while men prioritize national defense and military spending more than women.²⁵

²⁰ M. Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

²¹ L. Beaman, E. Duflo, R. Pande, P. Topalova, *Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India*. *Article on Science*, Vol 335, Issue 6068, 12 January 2012.

²² M. Radojevic, *The Subjective Effects of Gender Quotas: Party Elites Do Not Consider "Quota Women" to Be Less Competent*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.

²³ M. Guadagnini, *The Debate on Women's Quotas in Italian Electoral Legislation*. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 1998.

²⁴ A. Bandura, C. Barbaranelli, G.V. Caprara, C. Pastorelli, *Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories*. 2001.

²⁵ A. Clayton, *How Do Electoral Gender Quotas Affect Policy?* *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 2021

1.3 GENDER AND IDENTITY BIAS

To introduce the topic of gender bias in politics and the problems that it creates, it is useful to try to give a definition of those in order to frame the issue. Gender bias is defined as the general tendency to favor and even prefer men, who fall into the category of cisgender, heterosexual white men, over women for no apparent reason other than internalized sexism.²⁶ Gender bias can be unconscious or implicit and sometimes they carry on stereotypes that are difficult to dismantle and that over time solidify more and more.

Gender biases are often visible in the workplace and make it harder for women to achieve career goals than for men. Precisely in the workplace, gender biases are often associated with other types of unconscious biases such as performance support bias, performance review bias, and performance reward bias.²⁷ Performance support bias concerns the scenario in which managers and employers give more support and opportunities to male employees than women, despite the fact that they perform the same task and have the same skills. In fact, it has been reported that even if women perform the same work tasks as men and achieve the same results, they are still paid less.²⁸ Performance review bias, on the other hand, occurs when employers take into account, unconsciously or not, the biological gender of a person in the evaluations, not sticking only to their merit. In fact, without precise parameters on evaluations, it is easier for managers to make the mistake of relying on their mental constructs regarding gender. Finally, performance reward bias occurs when employers compliment, give promotions, or award benefits differently depending on the biological gender of the worker. In this case, therefore, it is highlighted how it is easier for men to obtain job promotions by reaching the top at the expense of their equally capable female colleagues with the same qualifications. All this inevitably and inexorably leads to the strengthening of that social structure created by patriarchy that takes the name of glass ceiling. This metaphorical term describes the barrier women encounter when they want to reach upper-level roles in leadership.

These biases can appear in different ways in the workplace, creating limiting barriers for women starting from the hiring process, that means even before actually working. For example, many recruiting strategies are biased. This phenomenon can be closely linked to the one of name discrimination. This is a very studied event that happens quite often and concerns how the resumes

²⁶ [GENDER BIAS | definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary](#)

²⁷ B. Reiners, What Is Gender Bias in the Workplace? Article on Built In, 29 September 2022.

²⁸ J. Madden, Performance-Support Bias and the Gender Pay Gap among Stockbrokers. *Gender & Society*, 2012.

associated with male names were considered better than those albeit identical but with female names. Famous is the case of the student Erin Mckelvey who, after receiving zero answers from the places where she had asked to work after graduating, sent the same resume changing just her name to a typically male one: Mack. In this case, she got 70 percent of the responses to her applications.²⁹

Obviously, this phenomenon is being analyzed through the lens of gender, but it is undeniable that this type of bias and discrimination are also implemented for example with names associated with ethnic minorities.

Another very common event concerning this kind of barrier is the fact that sometimes even job descriptions may contain unconscious gender bias. In fact, by inserting adjectives such as confident, decisive, and outspoken, which fall more into the sphere of stereotypes concerning male leadership, obviously, men will be more likely to run while for women it will be a deterrent. As a result of several academic kinds of research, it has also been shown that these biases affect people's self-esteem so much depending on their biological gender, that men will feel confident applying for a job despite even reflecting only 60 percent of the required characteristics, while women will not feel confident applying for a job in which they do not reflect 100 percent of the characteristics sought.³⁰

Finally, always during the recruitment process, it can happen that interview questions contain gender bias. In fact, if recruitment interviews are not standardized, recruiters can ask questions not only based on the personality of the candidates but also based on their gender. It has been shown that, for example, when a man does a job interview, he is usually asked mathematical logical questions, while when a woman is interviewed, questions are asked more related to verbal and emotional intelligence.³¹ The real discrimination in this case, however, occurs when women are asked during job interviews questions regarding their private life, such as questions about marriage, possible pregnancies, and work-life balance. These types of questions are the result of gender bias because it is evident that there is still the cultural heritage and the toxic and wrong stereotype that family and domestic tasks belong to women and not to men, and it is precisely for this reason that questions of this kind are never asked during job interviews to men. All these abusive behaviors in the workplace dictated by gender bias are further difficult to unhinge because 93 percent of women

²⁹ C. Gaetano, Woman Who Switched to Man's Name on Resume Goes From 0 to 70 Percent Response Rate. New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants, 8 June 2016.

³⁰ T. Mohr, Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified. Harvard Business Review, 25 August 2014.

³¹ M. Bazerman, I. Bohnet, A. van Geen, When Performance Trumps Gender Bias: Joint Versus Separate Evaluation. HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series, March 2012.

say that they do not feel safe reporting and point out this type of behavior because they are afraid that it will compromise their job prospects.³²

Everything that has been discussed so far has serious implications in the political sphere, in fact, about half of the global population, composed of men and women, argues that a man is by nature better and is more likely to be a leader than a woman.³³ These data are particularly difficult to obtain because unless the surveys are placed anonymously, about half of those who respond, but especially those who belong to groups that are historical advocates for social equality, tend to mask their biases and their prejudices towards women.³⁴ One of the most egregious cases of gender bias within the political arena was Hilary Clinton's defeat in the race for the White House. In fact, although until the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, Hilary Clinton seemed to be the ideal and favorite candidate, the victory in the presidential elections was Trump's. This happened precisely because women are judged on the basis of their biological gender, which is not the case for men, and that is why women are classified as “un-presidential”.³⁵ Obviously, there were other causes for the 2016 defeat, such as the Russian interference in the US election, and the late intervention by then-FBI director James Comey. That being said, it is undeniable that gender bias and sexism rooted in society have made the electoral campaign extremely difficult for the first woman nominated by a major party for president in America’s 240-year history. The book written by Clinton analyzed her electoral campaign, but not only, in fact, it also described in first person the tiring, exhausting, and sometimes humiliating experience of being a woman in politics at high levels. In fact, she explains what she experienced firsthand in a raw and realistic way, describing how when women run for office in politics, they undergo an almost obsessive process not only regarding their skills in the workplace, but also regarding their private life and their aesthetic appearance. She explains how all this happens only with female candidates, and that it is therefore a subtle and ferocious form of discrimination that comes from sexist stereotypes for which it is right to analyze women's appearance and physical form even before their political ideas.³⁶ Moreover, always in this book, Clinton describes sexism and misogyny in the United States as "endemic". To demonstrate this, she explains that it is enough to look at the comments on social media, including Twitter and YouTube, under the contents in which a woman expresses her political opinion, to realize how many users insult or discredit her for the sole fact of being a woman, without even paying attention to her ideas.

³² E. Codd, M. Parmelee, *Women @ Work: A Global Outlook*. Deloitte, 2022.

³³ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2020. 2020 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI): Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities. New York.

³⁴ M. Setzler, *Measuring Bias against Female Political Leadership*. Politics & Gender, 2019.

³⁵ J. Zimmerman, *Hilary Clinton and the problem of gender bias*. WHY, 27 April 2015.

³⁶ H. Clinton, *What Happened*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.

1.4 NON-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN ROLES OF POWER

To introduce the topic of this subchapter it is necessary to try to delimit the meaning of the term inclusive language, underlining what is an inclusive and welcoming use of the language towards the majority of the population, including minorities, and what is not. This is extremely important because language shapes how issues are understood and embraced, that's why language changes all the time, particularly in areas where there is no universal consensus.³⁷ The issue of linguistic inclusiveness transversally involves all languages when it comes to LGBT+ communities, people with disabilities, or people belonging to different ethnicities. As for the question of the declension of the names of feminine professions, and more generally of inclusive language towards women, it is generally a problem of the Romance languages. This is not a problem in every language as there are genderless languages such as Hungarian and also languages with natural gender, such as English, which have genderless nouns and gendered pronouns. For this reason, in this subchapter, the research in the field of inclusive language for women is going to focus mainly on the Italian case and the structure of this idiom.

Although the problem of sexism within the Italian language has always been an atavistic issue deeply rooted in collective common thought, the idiom was examined and questioned only thanks to the advent of feminist culture. There is often the erroneous belief that this debate focused on the inclusiveness of the Italian language is an extremely recent thing, that emerged in the last 5 years or so. This is an incorrect idea because the first handbook dedicated to this issue dates back to 1987 and takes the name of *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*. The author, who was an Italian sociolinguist engaged in feminist activism, had the political objective of re-establishing, through the instrument of the correct use of inclusive language, effective equality between men and women. Alma Sabatini in fact argued that despite the fact that equal rights between men and women are declared by the Constitution of the Italian Republic, and despite this it is recognized by all the political forces of the country, equality remains a legal and moral principle not yet realized in the practice of everyday life. In the manual Sabatini, citing the sociolinguistic theories that have been developed in the United States since the beginning of the 70s, explains how first of all it is necessary to analyze the language from two aspects: the structural one and the one regarding practical use. The research carried out by the author, however, focuses mainly on the figure of women within the Italian language, including all the linguistic elements, both in the grammatical and structural aspects, in

³⁷ [Inclusive language | The University of Edinburgh](#)

which can be found differences and discriminations towards women. However, the work and research carried out were not only done to highlight the negative aspects, the vision in fact was to create a sort of guide to inclusive language was created, especially within the last chapter, so there was certainly a harsh criticism not so much of the idiom but towards those who did not commit themselves to change it to keep up with the times, but always with a constructive purpose. The aim was therefore to give a practical stimulus for a more conscious use of the language in order to better represent women. According to Sabatini, the Italian language was in fact strongly and undeniably anchored to an androcentric principle: man has always been considered as the parameter for everything, to explain this a striking example is the fact that the word “uomo” in Italian has a double meaning, that is, both man and human species. In contrast, the term “donna” means only woman.³⁸ All this demonstrates the interconnection that exists between society and language, in fact, the analysis of a linguistic element gives much information about the sociocultural context in which it is used. This concept was introduced in the early 70s by an American lexicologist, Alma Graham, who analyzed the social implications of sexist language. The researcher explained that if there is a group called A, within which there are two subgroups A and B, there is no doubt that subgroup A is considered better and taken as a parameter and that subgroup B is the lower and often invisible one. The man would therefore be configured in group A, resulting in the species, while the woman would be the B, being therefore considered and represented as the subspecies.³⁹ Returning to Sabatini's research, the “maschile neutro” used in the Italian language would be guilty of concealing both the presence and absence of women in certain situations. The example given by the author is that when talking about Athenian democracy, pointing out that “gli Ateniesi” had the right to vote, the actual truth is hidden: women, in fact, could not vote. The same bias happens when talking about universal suffrage in Giolitti's era, despite the fact that women were excluded. The Italian language therefore in many cases reflects and reinforces the identification of males as a universal population. The volume of Sabatini analyzed has an entire chapter dedicated to the feminine declination of professional names: it is here that the problem of the lack of knowledge of the possibility of using these declinations meets the fact that in entire professional fields, including the one regarding politics, the generic masculine continues to be used.

The reason why the masculine by default is still used especially in prestigious professions, inherent in this case to politics, despite the fact that since 1987 this manual by Sabatini, recognized by the Italian government, explains that the terms “la consigliera”, “la sindaca”, “la senatrice”,

³⁸ A. Sabatini, *Il Sessismo nella Lingua Italiana*. Commissione Nazionale per la Realizzazione della Parità tra Uomo e Donna, 1987.

³⁹ A. Graham, Letter to the Editor. *Columbia Forum*, 1974.

“l’assessora” must be used, need to be sought in the fact that society is still strongly anchored to patriarchal values.

This concept is best explained by Vera Gheno, an Italian sociolinguist, who affirms that accepting the use of singular feminine means accepting the new positions of women within society and the working world, leaving them the freedom to have any job they want without having to confine them into a masculine noun. The main concept that emerges from the pages of the book written by Gheno is that the language fluidly changes according to the speakers and according to their needs. A further element highlighted by Gheno within her research is the fact that from a purely linguistic point of view the problem does not exist as the morphology of our language already provides for the existence and formation of the feminine equivalents of masculine terms. If these feminine professional terms, until recently, have found little or almost no space in common language, it is because women, in fact, have only recently had the possibility to access positions and careers that were previously exclusively for men and, consequently, the problem of naming them, in the past, had never arisen.⁴⁰ There is therefore a great difficulty in accepting and recognizing as normal the presence of women in certain work environments, because it is still perceived as something anomalous and exceptional.

⁴⁰ V. Gheno, *Femminili Singolari: il Femminismo è nelle Parole*. Effequ, 2019

PART II. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

2.1 THE REINFORCEMENT OF STEREOTYPES

Media is one of the causes that reinforce the issue related to the lack of representation of women, in fact, not only around the world women are less likely to be seen in media but they are also portrayed in a very stereotypical way. This unbalanced representation of society gives a nonrealistic picture of society and really perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes. It has been seen in a 2015 report that women who were experts in news-making featured in media were just a mere 19 percent, and this data is already an indicator that shows how wrong the system is.⁴¹

To describe the phenomenon of the lack of representation of certain social groups within the media, in 1976 George Gerbner, who was a university professor of communication, coined the term symbolic annihilation.⁴² This expression was taken up by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, who classified this attitude of the media as a subtle but systemic violence.⁴³ In fact, since society is dominated by the media that consumes, if entire categories of people are misrepresented or even not represented, it is as if these minorities did not actually exist. Therefore, this behavior of the media risks making these categories even more invisible by making the integration process more difficult.⁴⁴

Subsequently, all these concepts were revised and restudied in a feminist key by the sociologist Gaye Tuchman. Her studies argued that while men were widely represented in the media in a range of different job and employment positions, women were underrepresented with fewer social roles to aspire to. In addition, Tuchman argued that women's job successes were less reported in newspapers than men's, as the media focused more on women's private lives and appearances than on their actual careers. Also according to the studies of the sociologist, it emerges that women were almost always represented in roles typically linked to the archetype of femininity, therefore as housewives or mothers. The media's maximum representation of women in the workforce corresponds to the erroneous narrative that they are exclusively part of the so-called “pink-collar” jobs. The problem also extends to newspapers targeted specifically for women. In these magazines, in fact, the focus is

⁴¹ A. Rattan, S. Chilazi, O. Georgeac, I. Bohnet, Tackling the Underrepresentation of Women in Media. *Harvard Business Review*, 6 June 2019.

⁴² G. Gerbner, L. Gross, Living With Television: The Violence Profile. *Journal of Communication*, June 1976.

⁴³ P. Bourdieu, J.C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. SAGE Publications, 1990.

⁴⁴ R. Means Coleman, E. Chivers Yochim, *Symbolic Annihilation*. Wiley Online Library, 5 June 2008.

to praise domestic work, child care, how to satisfy the man, and how to diet in order to have the "ideal" physical appearance. And this is how not only female representations are lacking within the media, but those that are there seem to force women to think only and exclusively of topics that are anything but emancipatory.⁴⁵



These are two examples of magazines that have a female target which confirm Tuchman's theory set out above. It is also evident that this is not a problem of a specific country or culture because in each nation there are these types of newspapers with this kind of narrative that carries on and enforces stereotypes towards women. In this case, the two examples given belong to an Italian magazine and a British one. All this is undoubtedly related to the concept of the Male Gaze developed and studied by Lora Mulvey. Being an expert in cinema, she focuses mainly on that area, but this theory is also applicable to the world of television and journalistic information. This effect, the Male Gaze, occurs when women are portrayed as sexual objects of male desire and not as people with job ambitions, successes, failures, and a full life even without the need for a man. It is clear that this narrative perpetrated by the media is therefore extremely dangerous because the

⁴⁵ G. Tuchman, *The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media*. Culture and Politics. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2000.

patriarchal idea that underlies it states that a woman exists only if she is looked at through the eyes of a man. This same social construct portrays women simply as canvases on which the desires and stereotyped and often misogynistic opinions of men are projected. As mentioned earlier, Mulvey studies this phenomenon especially by applying it to Hollywood films, in which when the camera is filming a woman it does so almost exclusively through the eyes of a man. The other elements that confirm this theory are that the films prefer the point of view of the male protagonists by making them the ones who carry on the plot by performing actions while the women remain passive. All these elements are not only related to cinema, but can be transposed to any means of communication.⁴⁶ The Male Gaze permeates our society and often not even women realize how much this has caused them a deep brainwash. As highlighted also by Simone Beauvoir this phenomenon begins at a very early age, in fact, even young girls feel the pressure of the Male Gaze.⁴⁷ All this, which already happens simply because of the current patriarchal society, is reinforced by the fact that not only adult media are shaped by these issues, but also media whose target is young girls.



⁴⁶ A. Walsh, What is Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory? Perlego, London, 2023.

⁴⁷ S. Beauvoir, The Second Sex. 1949.

These covers are the demonstration that already in magazines designed for an audience of young girls, the Male Gaze is present and a brainwash to aim to always be pleasing to the male eye begins.

Another thing to take into account is the fact that on average when interviewing experts in the media, only one in five is a woman.⁴⁸ Considering the power of the impact that the media has on society, this low presence of women interviewed as experts leads to a reinforcement of the gender stereotype according to which women cannot be experts in politics, economics, current affairs, medicine, and so on. Moreover, given that media content is easy to perceive and presents one-dimensional models of rules and behaviors, it is evident how it shapes the reality and behaviors of people who will follow the trail of gender stereotypes perpetuated by television and newspapers.⁴⁹

All these factors come together and create the so-called beauty myth, that in turn further influences the way in which women in the media are portrayed. In fact, not only in movies or TV series, but in general also the female journalists who work on TV always reflect the standard canons of beauty requested by society such as flawless skin and slender stature.⁵⁰

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giornaliste televisive italiane

TUTTO | CHAT | SCUOLA | IMMAGINI | VIDEO | MAPPE | NOTIZIE | ESPANDI

Informazioni sui risultati di 274.000 | Data ▾

Questa la classifica delle giornaliste italiane più belle della Tv

- 1- Helga Cossu Classe 1980, è iscritta all'Albo dei giornalisti professionisti dal 2009. ...
- 2- Federica Lodi Ferrarese, classe 1981, la sua vera passione è la canzone, è un volto conosciuto di Sky Sport 24. capacità di catturare lo schermo con uno sguardo.
- 3- Deborah Schirru ...
- 4 - Federica Masolin ...
- 5- Giulia Mizzoni ...
- 6- Veronica Baldaccini ...
- 7- Sara Benci ...
- 8- Lavinia Spingardi ...

Altri elementi

Classifica giornaliste italiane più belle della tv - Newsly.it
www.newsly.it/classifica-giornaliste-italiane-piu-belle-della-tv-foto/

È stato utile? 🍌 🍎

Ricerche correlate

- giornaliste bellissime
- le più belle giornaliste italiane
- giornaliste più belle in italia
- elenco giornalisti italiani
- giornalisti italiani più famosi
- giornaliste italiane famose
- grandi giornalisti italiani
- i migliori giornalisti italiani

In order to demonstrate how women in the media are sexualized and considered just for their beauty, it was enough to carry out a little research by typing on a browser “giornaliste televisive

⁴⁸ [The crucial role of media in achieving gender equality | IMS \(mediasupport.org\)](https://www.mediasupport.org/)

⁴⁹ N. Signorielli, Gender stereotyping on television. In *Media Psychology*, ed. G Brewer, pp. 170–86. New York, 2012.

⁵⁰ A. Davtyan-Gevorgyan, *Women and Mass Media*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, *Feminism and Gender Democracy*, 8 April 2016.

italiane” which translated from Italian means Italian television journalists. The first result that appears is a ranking of the most beautiful female Italian journalists on TV, obviously written by a man. Among the related searches suggested instead, we find again “who are the most beautiful Italian journalists” and then famous male Italian journalists. This is a striking example of how women journalists must be beautiful, and in any case, their aesthetic image must be approved and judged by a man, while their male colleagues can be intelligent, famous, and successful. This reasoning made about women journalists is undoubtedly applicable to every profession, and the fault of the media is precisely that of handing down from generation to generation these harmful stereotypes that chain and relegate women to be appendixes of men.

To conclude, we can therefore say that gender is a social construct and that the different traditional behaviors characterizing men and women have multiple origins and depend on numerous factors. However, the toxicity of the narrative perpetuated by mass media, such as magazines, movies, and newspapers, lies in the fact that they can shape very easily people's minds with extremely stereotypical attitudes and behaviors that cage people in their biological gender.⁵¹

2.2 Double Standards in Media and Toxic Narrative

In this subchapter the intention is to expose the double standards in the media and the toxic narrative that derives from it that is then used against female characters in politics, taking as an example case studies. It is necessary to first frame the meaning of the term double standard; this is a sociological term used to explain the series of different behavioral reactions that occur when the same action is carried out by two people of different biological genders.⁵² Being a yardstick that follows the thought of the morality of the current society is obviously impregnated with sexism, so the behavior of a man will be considered more acceptable than the same actions carried out by a woman.

The chosen victims of double standards in the newspapers are obviously women, specifically those who work in politics. A trivial and less mortifying example than others is that a man in assertive

⁵¹ E. Altszyler, CM. Felcher, F. Gonzalez, D. Kozlowski, G. Lozano, Gender bias in magazines oriented to men and women: a computational approach. ResearchGate, 2020.

⁵² [double standard definition | Open Education Sociology Dictionary](#)

politics is a great governor while a woman with the same characteristic is considered strident and overly demanding.⁵³ A phenomenon closely linked to that of double standards is the one of slut shaming, which affects women in politics from two fronts, both by the media and by their male colleagues. Since politics, as has been shown so far, is still an environment predominantly governed by men, these phenomena mentioned above are used to mortify women by reminding them what their place should be according to patriarchal society: either at home with children or at most working, but not in an area that does not belong to the pink-collar set of jobs. Precisely, when a woman reaches a position of power, slut shaming is a tool used to hit her by using her private life, very often inventing completely fake and defamatory storylines, insinuating for example that she reached this position not thanks to the effort, study, and dedication, but only by granting sexual favors to a man. This form of gossip, which does not remain so from the moment it is reported in the mass media, is extremely demeaning for women because not only are they portrayed as unscrupulous, but their competence is questioned, defining them as unqualified. The phenomenon of slut shaming is so corrosive because the private life of men and women are differently appraised. If a woman in fact receives certain epithets from the press her political career is automatically sabotaged, for men instead, the problem does not arise at all because, in the first place, there is no equivalent of the term “slut” that has the same value of meaning and subsequently, even if it existed, men are praised for sexual behaviors. All of this comes from the fact that still in today’s society persists the medieval myth of the virgin woman who can’t lose her chastity or have a large number of partners because otherwise, she is going to lose her value as a person, automatically becoming a bad example. So this form of bullying perpetuated by the media and male colleagues would serve to alienate women from politics by further increasing the gap in representation and equality.⁵⁴

The fault for the presence of slut shaming and double standards in the press lies in the fact that the positions at the top of journalism are also almost completely in the hands of men, at least in the Italian scenario. In fact, analyzing the directors of the most important newspapers in Italy, without making any distinctions of political color, it turns out that they are all men. The newspapers taken into consideration were: La Stampa, La Repubblica, L’Espresso, Panorama, Libero, Il Corriere della Sera, Il Foglio, Il Messaggero, La Verità, Il Giornale, Il Tempo, Il Sole 24 Ore. And the problem obviously lies not only in the fact that the directors of these newspapers are all men, but also in the

⁵³ B. Lollar, Even in 2020, a Duple Standard is Still Applied to Women in the Spotlight. *The Conversation*, 27 September 2020.

⁵⁴ L. Rosewarne, Slut-shaming and the double standards in Australian politics. Published by the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation, University of Canberra, 29 August 2018.

fact that even the roles of editor-in-chief or deputy directors are again almost always held by men, with few women appearing. This facilitates the perpetration of these toxic and stereotyped narratives.

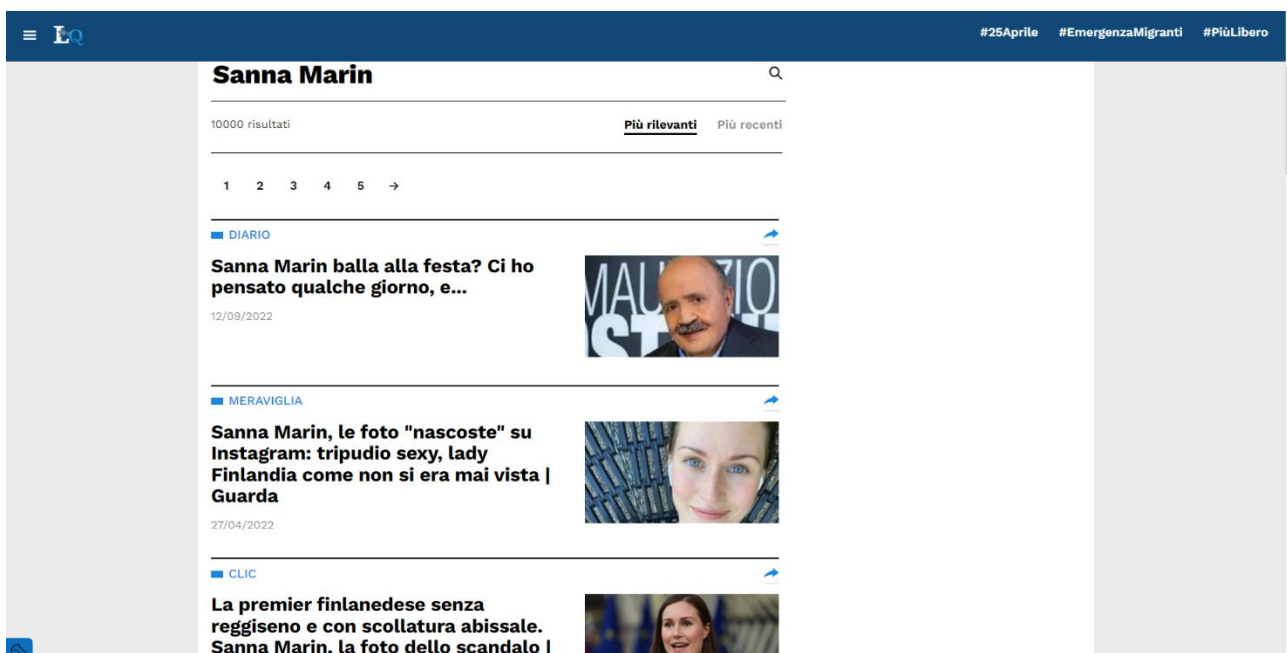
Obviously, this problem intensifies in the newspapers that follow and support the most conservative political sphere, this happens because, in addition to the absence of women in editorial offices, who can bring their point of view in first person on certain topics, there is also a form of systemic sexism and misogyny, not always veiled.



These are two examples of misogyny on the front pages of newspapers, the image on the left is a cartoon published by Il Fatto Quotidiano against Maria Elena Boschi, a woman working in Italian politics who is the leader of ItaliaViva since 2019 in the Chamber of Deputies and Former Minister during the Renzi government, while the image on the right is a headline against Virginia Raggi, Former Mayor of Rome from 2016 to 2021, published by Liberò. Obviously, the criticisms made in this thesis are not aimed at the freedom of expression guaranteed and protected in Italy by Article 21 of the Constitution, but at the way in which women are judged by the press in a predominantly destructive and demeaning way, clinging to their private lives rather than their work. Something that does not happen to heterosexual white men involved in politics.

Another example of how the press attacks women is the case of Sanna Marin. Marin was the youngest government leader in the world, in fact at just 34 years old in 2019 she became the premier of Finland, coming from the Social Democratic Party. She laid the groundwork for Finland's entry into NATO, an event that was completed at the beginning of April 2023. Moreover,

Marin was also highly praised for her contribution to welfare and youth policies and for her interest in ecology and inclusivity. However, in 2022 she ended up on the front pages of newspapers all around the world and in the headlines of articles for a scandal concerning her private life. In fact, a video of her at a private party at her own house was enough for her to undergo a drug test and publicly apologize because other than dedicating herself to her career she also enjoyed celebrating in her free time, like any other human being. But, since she is a woman, this is not something granted to her without a moral judgment. The issue is also further thorny because the videos in question were not shared by herself, but were hacked and spread by third parties.



For example, searching for Sanna Marin on the online page of the Italian newspaper Libero, these are the first 3 articles that appear as the most relevant. Nothing to do with her political value, but these articles refer only to the video of her at the party, to her photos defined by the journalist as “sexy” and finally to her low-cut piece of clothing.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ [Sanna Marin | Libero Quotidiano.it](https://www.liberoquotidiano.it)

Nuovi e piccanti guai per **Sanna Marin**: gira un nuovo, ben più esplicito e compromettente video sulla folle serata della premier finlandese in discoteca, a poche ore dalle prime immagini pubblicate sui social. I balletti scatenati tra amici sembrano acqua di rose a confronto delle effusioni spinte in discoteca tra un uomo e la bella leader nordica, indicata dal magazine tedesco *Bild* come "**la più cool**" (a scampo di volgarità, potremmo tradurre con "alla moda") del mondo, e come dare torto ai teutonici.... La 36enne premier socialdemocratica è stata pizzicata in tenera compagnia dello sconosciuto, intento ad abbracciarla e far scivolare le mani sul corpo dell'influente politica, nel **privé di un club** di **Helsinki**.

This is an extract from another article published by Libero about Sanna Marin. The article refers to an evening where the premier was simply having fun in a club, something that also her male colleagues do, but since she is a woman the terms with which everything was described by the newspaper are: "video esplicito", "compromettente", "folle serata", "effusioni spinte", and so on.⁵⁶

This article published by one of the major newspapers in Italy in the section dedicated to foreign section suggests that Italian journalism is still anchored to a toxic narrative towards women, in which their behaviors inherent to their private life or their way of dressing are more important than their political ideas.

⁵⁶ [Sanna Marin, il nuovo video: effusioni intime con 3 uomini nel club privé – Libero Quotidiano](#)

PART III. EUROPEAN OVERVIEW

3.1 PATERNALISM IN LEFT-WING PARTIES

The aim of this third and final chapter is to explain why most of the women who emerge in European politics belong to far-right parties and therefore are very conservative. The main topics that will be discussed are the explanations of why the left-wing parties are not able to bring out women, why right-wing women do not challenge patriarchy but play according to its rules, and finally an analysis of case studies both at the Italian level, Giorgia Meloni, and at the level of other European countries, investigating the path of important political figures such as Thatcher, von der Leyen, Lagarde and Metsola.

Therefore, starting to deal with the first macro-theme, the reasons why it seems so difficult to have prominent female figures who are entrusted with prestigious positions in left-wing parties, it is necessary to introduce the concept of paternalism. Paternalism, which turns out to be a behavior that remains very frequent among men who infantilize women trying to impose themselves as figures able to find solutions or give better advice, is an extremely controversial phenomenon and unfortunately even better known in left-wing parties. Paternalism can be defined as an obstruction of women's right to self-determination, who are deemed incapable of doing so at any level, whether politically, economically, sexually, or in the workplace.⁵⁷ In addition, paternalism is configured as an apparently benevolent attitude that however conceals a sense of superiority from those who practice it, as those people are aware of having greater power. Therefore, the problematic nature of this attitude is expressed by the fact that in politics the space occupied by women is considered to be a benevolent concession from men and not something built and obtained thanks to their education, dedication, and commitment.⁵⁸ In fact, as can be seen from the etymological meaning and the Latin origin of the term, which means father, paternalism does not consider the will of the people it promises to help, at least to some extent, but instead, it takes decisions for them. The etymology of the word reflects the implicit and well-known social hierarchy that persists in a patriarchal society, in which the male figure is perceived as a responsible authoritarian, like the

⁵⁷ [Cos'è il paternalismo legislativo e come agisce - Il ControVerso](#)

⁵⁸ [Paternalismo: Definizione e significato - Dizionario italiano - Corriere.it](#)

stereotype of the father of the family. The underlying assumption is that those people, in this specific case women, are incapable of doing what is convenient for them.⁵⁹

The use of the term paternalism has now a long history and its meaning, while remaining almost unchanged, has gradually adapted to the situations to which it referred. In fact, initially, this terminology, which developed during the industrial era at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, referred mainly to the relations between the rich and bourgeois classes to the poorer ones, for example between factory owners and workers or between members of the ruling elite and the masses. A researcher who deepened the subject, studying and classifying it, was Dworkin, who described different types of paternalism, indicating some types as more harmful and toxic and others as more subtle. These types of paternalism were classified as hard or soft, broad or narrow, weak or strong, pure or impure, and moral or welfare. Deepening these distinctions, it is clear that hard paternalism is so focused on protecting and preserving people at all costs that in some cases it will impose very strict limitations on personal freedom, soft paternalism instead will impose these limitations only if people are not autonomously able to perceive danger. This distinction is extremely similar to the one between weak paternalism and strong paternalism, in fact, the first one is close to the concept of the soft one, meaning that it is considered legitimate to impose certain rules for alleged consequences hoped by people. Strong paternalism instead prevents people from achieving that desired consequence on the grounds that they may be confused or mistaken about their ends. Subsequently, the difference between broad paternalism and narrow paternalism is that while in the first case, the impositions can be made by anyone, in the second case the limitations on the freedom of the individual can only be placed by the state. Pure paternalism imposes legislative restrictions on people who risk harming themselves while impure paternalism wants to protect third parties who are identified as potential victims. In conclusion, the last branch explains how the difference between moral paternalism and welfare paternalism lies at the base of what is limited to people.⁶⁰

At the legislative level, the use of paternalism to limit actions that could harm citizens is known as legal paternalism. This happens in almost all countries, although in different ways and circumstances, but as long as these decisions, which are subsequently turned into laws, are really protecting citizens, the problem should not exist. The problem arises when as in this specific case analyzed, paternalism silently enters the mechanisms of political parties, especially in less conservative ones that promise to counter gender stereotypes by embracing feminist battles. In fact,

⁵⁹ [Cos'è il paternalismo? Definizione Significato Esempio - Economia industriale](#)

⁶⁰ L.J. Thompson, Paternalism. Encyclopedia Britannica, 23 December 2013.

although the conception according to which the struggles against gender inequality and feminist issues in general, are topics in which only women can be interested is wrong, it is also true that the role of men in this area remains very controversial. In fact, although men, who remain socially more advantaged, can promote positive changes, it is also true that in some cases they could only perpetuate their status quo by rising themselves as paladins to the defense of women without really doing anything but bringing the spotlight back on them.⁶¹ In fact, although the participation of men in the movement for the emancipation of women remains important and necessary, as seen by some studies it is essential not to fall into the error of further legitimizing the privileged status of men at the expense of women who, feeling grateful for the help received, risk accepting the social inequality.⁶² All this discussion does not want to diminish the figure of men by pointing them out as guilty because as has been shown in other research, it is also possible that instead, the negative aspects do not happen and that men may become serious allies in the fight against the demolition of the patriarchal structure.⁶³ For example, one of the ways in which men could ideally be true allies without falling into paternalistic attitudes would be if they worked alongside rather than on behalf of women. These two different ways of working refer precisely to the intention, even unconscious, with which men approach the problem of sexism, either embracing feminist instances or with a paternalism that, although benevolent, remains noxious.⁶⁴ Dismantling protective paternalism, which is often synonymous with benevolent sexism, is essential to avoid reinforcing gender norms that imply behavioral and identity stereotypes for men and women.⁶⁵ Moreover, as shown by a study, this benevolent sexism is a huge stumbling block for women as they suffer it more frequently than hostile sexism. Moreover, this study shows that protective paternalism is often associated with something subtle that triggers a destructive mechanism for the mental health and self-esteem of many women. In fact, hostile sexism, however wrong and horrible, is easier to recognize and therefore despite being tiring, it is easier for women to get away from it. On the contrary, this form of benevolent sexism, which masquerades as helpful but in truth conceals a subtext of misogyny, can be almost considered as psychic and mental violence.⁶⁶ So, for women, it is obviously more

⁶¹ J. Good, D. T. Sanchez, C. A. Moss-Racusin, A paternalistic duty to protect? Predicting men's decisions to confront sexism. *Psychol. Men Mascul*, 2016.

⁶² A. Nadler, Inter-group helping relations as power relations: maintaining or challenging social dominance between groups through helping. 2002.

⁶³ E. Subasic, S. Hardacre, B. Elton, N. R. Branscombe, M. K. Ryan, K. J. Reynolds, "We for She": mobilising men and women to act in solidarity for gender equality. *Group Process*, 2018.

⁶⁴ J. C. Becker, S. C. Wright, M. E. Lubensky, S. Zhou, Friend or ally whether cross-group contact undermines collective action depends on what advantaged group members say (or don't say). 2013.

⁶⁵ N. Sattari, S. DiMuccio, J. Ohm, J. M. Romero, Dismantling "Benevolent" Sexism. *Harvard Business Review*, 8 June 2022.

⁶⁶ D. L. Oswald, M. Baalbaki, M. Kirkman, Experiences with Benevolent Sexism: Scale Development and Associations with Women's Well-Being. *Sex Roles* 80, 13 June 2018.

difficult to recognize the toxicity of protective paternalism, even because this is not being made of extremely sexist and openly denigrating behaviors and attitudes toward the female gender, and for this exact reason, it can be confused with genuine kindness.

As a further demonstration of how unguarded paternalism is, there is a study that shows that individuals who performed benevolent sexism appreciated and preferred women who did not challenge socially accepted gender roles. Moreover, all this is even more murky and difficult to separate because the same study shows how men who implemented mechanisms of benevolent sexism reflected and embodied the values of chivalry, thus appearing courteous and kind, despite their internalized misogyny. In contrast, men who were openly sexist in a hostile manner did not embody chivalry values and so their misogyny was not confusable as kindness.⁶⁷

All this tends to spill over into the left-wing parties, in this case, a European overview is analyzed but the phenomenon is repeated in a similar way also in the United States. The problem of benevolent paternalism in left-wing parties arises from the need for men within these parties to portray themselves as valiant warriors fighting against discrimination of all kinds. For example, embracing the struggle for gender equality for these men is often nothing more than an opportunity to show their great commitment to social causes, without a real ideology behind it. All this, of course, involves not only an evident attitude of concern for the causes only at a superficial level but also great hypocrisy. So coming to the understanding that no party would seem to be interested in the protection of women's rights for ethics, there is a distinction to be made. In right-wing parties, there is a complete distancing from the principles of feminism, both according to men and women. So, in this first case, the feminist movement is ridiculed and belittled. In the second case, in left parties, instead, men claim to be progressive and feminist, but at the same time, they try to change the rules of feminism, in order to make them more useful to their advantage. In addition, being able to say that they are part of the percentage of people who say that gender inequality is wrong, for men of left-wing parties is almost an excuse to not feel obliged to try to do anything on a practical level by trying to modify or supplement certain laws. All this superficial attachment to the desire to defend women carried out by men on the left can have an extremely negative impact because first of all, as explained before, this benevolent paternalism imposes itself on protecting women by infantilizing them, later it wants to explain to women how to live feminism according to a male interpretation and finally it does not bring any concrete legislative action.⁶⁸ Therefore, it should not

⁶⁷ G. T. Viki, D. Abrams, P. Hutchison, The "True" Romantic: Benevolent Sexism and Paternalistic Chivalry. *Sex Roles* 49, November 2003.

⁶⁸ J. Bindel, The sly sexism of Left-wing men. *UnHerd*, 4 March 2022.

be surprising that paternalism in left-wing parties does not raise women to high levels of politics but often traps them in less important roles.

Specifically, analyzing the situation in Italy, we can say that the sexism of left-wing parties is obviously less explicit and blatant than the one carried out by right-wing parties, but this does not mean that it is less problematic, as has been shown so far. Although the national secretariats of the PD in recent years have always been quite balanced in terms of the numerical presence of men and women, in any case, this has not allowed women to aspire to the party secretariat until 2023, the year in which for the first time at the head of the party there is not a middle-aged heterosexual cisgender white man but Elly Schlein, a woman. The election of Elly Shlein unfortunately is still configured as a unicum in the game of politics, this is because even in a left-wing party that declares itself progressive like the Democratic Party, women have always been limited to the usual pink-collar roles, so the highest positions to which they could aspire were, for example, Minister of Equal Opportunities or Education. The sexism of the left is distinguished from the blatant misogyny of the more reactionary right by its benevolence. If misogyny is the overt hatred for women as such, which in the political dimension manifests itself through measures aimed at erasing their freedom and self-determination, sexism is discrimination based on sex, that is, the idea that men should behave in a certain way, and women in another, with all the consequences of the case.

Another Italian episode, which took place some time ago, that demonstrates the sexism of the left-wing parties is the one concerning a fellow founder of the Italian Communist Party, Teresa Noce. Her name is one of the best-known of the Italian, Spanish, and French resistance. During the Second World War, she was captured and interned in various concentration camps in Czechoslovakia where she was forced to stay and work as a factory worker until the Soviet liberation. After the war, once back in Italy, she was a personality of great importance for the history of the construction of the new constitutional order because she was elected to the Constituent Assembly and to the Commission of 75. Whenever she could, she always rose to the protection of equal opportunities, demonstrating to be firmly convinced of the need for equal pay for men and women. In private life, she was married to the deputy secretary of the PCI, Luigi Longo. Both within the couple were political figures of a very high level who had proven to be equally respectable. Despite this, when Longo falsified Noce's signature on the divorce papers, and she denounced this event, all the people belonging to the PCI, even in the face of proof and shreds of evidence, defended him, because he was a man. Moreover, no one liked the fact that a woman denounced the behavior of a man and for this reason Noce was, as well as mocked and belittled, also expelled from the party. This, in addition to being considered as one of the first famous public

cases of victim blaming, is also clear proof that even in left-wing parties, which promise to be progressive and inclusive, men are always ready to defend a man just because he is one, even if at the expense of women. Like almost all other left-wing parties at the European level, the PCI have historically always supported emancipation and gender equality, but always with counter-limits, such as that the man-centric ideology should never be questioned.⁶⁹

Another much more recent case always sadly known in Italy, for the presence of sexism in left-wing parties, is the one involving Mauro Laos, senator of the PD, and Alessandra Maiorino, senator of the M5S. This case, which makes it clear that too often the members of the left parties do not take equality issues seriously but embrace them only for external façade, begins with Laos screaming and inviting Senator Maiorino to “return to the kitchen” while she was exposing her speech in the chamber at Palazzo Madama. Even in this case, the PD has remained silent, trying to bury the issue in order to defend Laos. He also tried to avoid the issue, and only after several interviews where he tried to justify his sentence, impregnated with sexism, by explaining that he had been misunderstood or that he did not consider it an offensive expression, and only after Maiorini demanded an apology, he effectively apologized. This episode explains well the dynamics of sexism, which usually remains veiled in left-wing parties but in some cases becomes evident, that weighs down the women of these parties who not only find themselves in a world that, as it has been shown so far, it is made by men for men but who cannot even trust their party comrades.⁷⁰

The most recent case is the one that overwhelmed Elly Schlein following an interview with Vogue in which out of 30 questions, mainly concerning political and social issues, one of those was dedicated to her way of presenting herself aesthetically and she claims to rely on a stylist.⁷¹

⁶⁹ J. Guerra, La Sinistra Non è Immune al Sessismo. Il Paternalismo del PD lo Dimostra. The Vision, 20 November 2018.

⁷⁰ C. Mastronicola, “Torna in cucina”, senatore Pd contro senatrice M5s. The Post Internazionale, 7 November 2018.

⁷¹ [Elly Schlein, intervista a Vogue Italia: “Se non ti occupi della politica, la politica si occupa comunque di te” | Vogue Italia](#)

Passando a un argomento più frivolo – ma forse non troppo visto che è parte importante della comunicazione, anche di quella politica – tu credi nel cosiddetto “power dressing”?

Allora, se sapessi che cos'è, ti potrei rispondere! Scherzi a parte, le mie scelte di abbigliamento dipendono sicuramente dalla situazione in cui mi trovo. A volte sono anticonvenzionale, altre volte più formale. In generale dico sì ai colori e ai consigli di un'armocromista, Enrica Chicchio.

This is the part of the interview, concise and very normal, which however was followed by many critical articles with negative judgments from different people, most of whom are left-wing oriented. All these articles of harsh criticism are based on the fact that a female leader evidently cannot entrust her appearance to an expert because this way she'll appear as frivolous and superficial and therefore she should take care of it by herself. However, it is no secret that the image and appearance of all leaders, especially at public events, is part of the political campaign itself, and consequently, it is not new to rely on experts. In this specific case, the paternalistic attitude par excellence was implemented mainly by Gramellini, who in his column published on Corriere Della Sera, said that it was not a topic to talk about and that she should have explained her opinions on political issues, which in truth Schlein did anyway.⁷²

⁷² [Elly Schlein e l'armocromista | Il Caffè di Gramellini- Corriere.it](#)

ZTelly e l'armocromista



di Massimo Gramellini | 28 aprile 2023



Ringrazio **Elly Schlein** perché fino a ieri ignoravo colpevolmente l'esistenza dell'armocromia, l'arte di abbinare i vestiti alla carnagione. Ignoravo anche che esistessero [persone pagate 400 euro l'ora](#) per segnalarmi che il maglione grigio topo con losanghe arancioni in stile fidanzato di Bridget Jones sbatte terribilmente con le occhiaie giallastre. E non mi scandalizza che una giovane leader politica affronti questi temi apparentemente voluttuari su una prestigiosa rivista di moda.

Il problema è che [quella di Elly Schlein a «Vogue» non era un'intervista qualsiasi](#). Era la prima da segretaria del Pd, per di più alla vigilia della Festa del Lavoro, un tempo «core business» della ditta. E per la sua prima uscita pubblica, quella che dà il tono di una leadership, mi sarei aspettato una conversazione sul salario minimo, o una di politica estera con i quotidiani stranieri, oppure una sui diritti civili con qualche settimanale popolare.

Una tazzina di parole ogni giorno sul Corriere della Sera.

"Il caffè è un rito quotidiano, una pausa, un piacere e anche un luogo di incontro in cui si discute, si scherza, ci si sfoga e ci si consola".



In the first place, the paternalistic attitude is exercised by Gramellini in ridiculing the figure of the image consultant to whom Shlein claimed to entrust. The way it is written also suggests that the journalist tries to infantilize the political leader. Finally comes the advice, obviously given by a cisgender heterosexual white middle-aged man, who affirms that talking about these issues is inconvenient, in fact, according to him, she should have talked about something else. Obviously, this article did not want to take into account the reality in which political marketing is also based on the image and that men and women in politics have always relied on someone for their looks, first on the best tailors and now on consultants, but in this case the issue is raised in a paternalistic way by a left-wing journalist because the protagonist of the story is a young leader of a left-wing party.

These examples and all this research therefore show that unfortunately even in environments that claim to be equal, avant-garde, and in which women should be respected and treated as equal to men, very often, in truth, they turn out to be places in which women are not valued, listened to and do not receive equal opportunities. As has been demonstrated, the culprit is the sexism present throughout society, which branches out in various environments and reaches left-wing parties assuming the form of paternalism.

3.2 Women Who Personify Conservative Values

After addressing the topic of paternalism within left-wing parties and after carrying out a brief analysis of the most important names in European politics, it is clear that often the women who emerge mainly belong to parties that reflect conservative values. In fact, most of the women involved in European politics have always belonged to right-wing parties, starting with Thatcher. Precisely for this reason, most of the female leaders belong to the same group at the European level, namely the European Peoples' Party, which is configured as a “moderate” right-wing group even if in reality it not so moderate because there are also politicians who support Orban's positions.⁷³

One of the reasons why it seems easier for conservative women to come to power is that European countries not only have heavy religious traditions but also have a history that is intertwined with fascist movements that ended only a short time ago. By stating that this is the European socio-cultural context, it is almost obvious to think that it is easier for women who embody the traditional values of mothers and wives faithful to the homeland, family, and religious values of the country in question to achieve a greater number of consents than women who challenge these stereotypes. In fact, both for the religious traditions of Christianity, which is the most practiced religion in Europe, and for the fascist culture, the role of women was primarily that of a mother dedicated to the family, and this is why conservative women leaders take positions against abortion, against same-sex families and against anything that could go beyond what was perceived as a traditional family.⁷⁴ It is therefore undeniable that these two cultural elements have been determined for the formation of political classes composed by women in the last 70 years. It would be difficult for things to be different because until less than a century ago, women who did not match the female archetype that in Germany was described with three words, *Kinder, Küche, and Kirche*, which means children, kitchen, and church, were locked up in asylums because they were considered as deviants. In fact, until the end of the first half of the 1900s, women were hospitalized even just if they were considered bad mothers whenever they did not personify the traditional values required. Women at that time could not afford to feel overwhelmed by the parental responsibilities combined with the work they tended to do in the fields if they belonged to the lower classes, nor could they let

⁷³ C. Hermanin, Women leaders are always (from the) right. European University Institute, School of Transnational Governance, 24 January 2022.

⁷⁴ K. Passmore, Fascism, women, and gender. Oxford Academic, 22 May 2014.

themselves be overwhelmed by postpartum depression because in both these cases they would have been considered bad mothers and consequently locked up and tortured in an asylum.⁷⁵ This obviously does not mean that automatically everyone is influenced by the Christian or the fascist culture, especially since the latter should be considered as a phenomenon concluded and extinguished at the end of the middle of the last century, however, it is undeniable how these experiences have profoundly marked the socio-cultural context of today's European society. If until a few decades ago the only way it was possible to survive if you were a woman was to embody certain values, it is implicit that it is still difficult to undermine these beliefs, although not impossible.

However, right-wing women who become political leaders must not only personify, as explained above, the archetype of the traditional woman but at the same time they must also resemble men, implementing austere and coercive policies. In fact, the system of access to power that still survives today has the same connotations as the patriarchal system in which power is configured with prevarication. Even today, in fact, access to political leadership, and therefore to power, inevitably passes through a rhetoric of success made of aggression and arrogance, the typical connotation of toxic male leadership. So women belonging to right-wing parties are more successful in politics than their left-wing colleagues because the first ones espouse the ideals on which the patriarchal system is based, and therefore do not challenge it. Right-wing women do not fight for gender equality or civil rights, they are not in favor of minorities and indeed they somehow take on masculine connotations, showing even more how only those characteristics are the ones that guarantee success.⁷⁶

Taking a European overview it turns out that 3 out of 5 of the leadership positions in European Union organizations are occupied by conservative women, confirming the theories explained above. In fact, the roles of President of the European Commission, President of the European Central Bank, and President of the European Parliament are respectively held by Ursula von der Leyen, Christine Lagarde, and Roberta Metsola. First of all, although this may seem an irrelevant detail, all these women, despite being successful, have decided to take on their husband's surname, following the patriarchal culture. Moreover, in order to gain their place in a male-dominated world, these women do nothing but behave like them, using their political weapons and choosing the same battles that a right-wing man would embrace, moving away from feminist issues. This is why, for example, Metsola takes a tough stance against abortion. The great master of this strategy was undoubtedly

⁷⁵ E. Viale, *Why Thousands of Innocent Women Were Locked Away in Asylums*. VICE, 14 June 2017.

⁷⁶ C. Barbati, *Perché al potere accedono solo le donne di destra*. MDS, 31 October 2022.

Margaret Thatcher, who managed to lead the British Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990, inspiring all women in politics in conservative right-wing circles to use her own techniques. The political techniques used by the leaders in question include distancing themselves from being women attached to feminist issues in order to do what conservative males would like them to do in those specific situations, which is to govern like a right-wing man.⁷⁷

In addition, another common feature of women from right-wing parties in Europe is what Sara Farris describes as “femonazionalismo”.⁷⁸ This term is used to indicate the Islamophobic behaviors of right-wing women leaders, these attitudes were born in the early 2000s but have intensified since 2014, the year in which conservative and nationalist parties emerged and established themselves even more throughout the European continent. Women right-wing leaders in fact exploit their xenophobic co-motors and try to justify them with false and pretentious pseudo-feminist demands, which obviously do not fall within the truthful ideological current of feminism. Moreover, it can be defined as a real instrumentalization because in truth these right-wing conservative parties have never engaged in real emancipatory policies for all women. For this reason, it seems that right-wing women are interested in gender equality only if it is combined with racial ideologies and Islamophobic campaigns. Precisely for this reason, Farris creates the term femonazionalismo which would be the abbreviation of feminist and femocratic nationalism and refers precisely to the instrumentalization of feminist themes by women at the head of nationalist parties. This is obviously used by these women to gain electoral support from conservative people who support the theory of Western supremacy. Femonazionalismo, therefore, develops from apparently positive promises, namely the demand for emancipation and equality, but it develops by creating tensions and contradictions.

3.3 Giorgia Meloni’s Case

Giorgia Meloni is one of the most emblematic characters of Italian and European politics because in September 2022 following the national elections she became the first woman in Italian history to hold the position of President of the Council of Ministers. Her political commitment began at the

⁷⁷ D. Di Maio, Perché le donne conservatrici arrivano ai vertici di potere? Perché tutelano il modello patriarcale. *The Vision*, 28 January 2022.

⁷⁸ S.R. Farris, Femonazionalismo. Il razzismo nel nome delle donne. *Alegre*, 13 November 2019.

age of 15 and developed through the foundation of the student association called “Gli Antenati” and, subsequently, through obtaining the position of national manager of “Student Action” in 1996, the student movement of Alleanza Nazionale. This experience in her youth was classified by several International newspapers including the BBC, the largest and most authoritative radio and television publisher in the United Kingdom, as activism in a neo-fascist party.⁷⁹ She consolidated her youthful ideals, and in 1998, at the age of 21, she was elected councilor of the Province of Rome for Alleanza Nazionale, remaining in office until 2002. She continued to be politically involved first in Alleanza Nazionale and then in Popolo della Libertà until December 2012, when she detached herself to establish, together with Guido Crosetto and Ignazio La Russa, the political movement “Fratelli d'Italia”. The party in question exponentially increased its electoral consensus base and because of this, as mentioned before, on October 22, 2022, at the Quirinale Palace she took the oath in order to become President of the Council of Ministers.⁸⁰

As already mentioned, in the center-right parties the promotion of some women in leadership roles is less uncommon than in the center-left ones: a classic example was the election to the presidency of the chamber of Irene Pivetti, in 1994. Already on that occasion, it was clear that in those parties figures of conservative female leaders were coming forward helped by male co-optation. In any case, Giorgia Meloni's victory was not well received by progressive public opinion and by the feminist and LGBT environments. This is because the gender belonging of Giorgia Meloni is not the necessary condition, nor is it sufficient, to guarantee a more inclusive transformation for women and minorities of the forms, languages, and contents of politics. And this is demonstrated by her ideas related to abortion, to the defense of the "natural" family, to the fight against what her party defines as “ideologia gender”. In fact, although the presence of a female figure in a position that had never been held by a woman until now may seem like a very good thing for the problem of lack of representation, on this occasion it may not be so. This is because representation is important both for a descriptive vision that emphasizes the correspondence and similarity between the representative and represented and also for the activity carried out by the representative. Analyzing this second perspective it is possible to understand how the election of Giorgia Meloni, is undoubtedly a numerical step forward for the quotas of women at the top of the political sphere, but it is also configured as a step backward as it does not involve advancements in the response to feminist's questions on the abolition of a patriarchal system. And, although Giorgia Meloni, like her colleague Marine Le Pen in France, tries to focus on certain women's problems, such as low employment rates, this is never done in a universalistic logic because numerous sections of the

⁷⁹ P. Kirby, Who is Giorgia Meloni? The rise to power of Italy's new far-right PM. BBC News, 21 October 2022.

⁸⁰ [Biografia - Giorgia Meloni](#)

population are not taken into consideration. In fact, it is well known that the apparently emancipatory battles carried out by the right-wing parties are in truth a diversion to combat the things that really interest them and their voters such as the so-called danger of foreigners and the “Islamization” of Europe, or the “gender ideology” that in their opinion threatens to erase forever the figure of traditional mothers.⁸¹

Another element, which denotes that Giorgia Meloni's victory is not a victory for women, is given by the setting of her public speeches that leak her disinterest in feminist issues. The first example of this is her famous slogan repeated at every political rally, which is “io sono Giorgia, sono una madre, sono cristiana, sono patriota, sono italiana”, this sentence, in addition to emphasizing its fixations on identity and labels, is also the inverse, conceptual and political, of the anti-identity conception of difference in feminism.⁸² The second example of a speech that was not exactly successful was her first speech held at Montecitorio in which she wanted to thank a long list of women who allowed her to break the Glass Ceiling. And although the premises were excellent because it seemed that she was recognizing the importance of the women who paved the way to be here today, it was badly realized because she mentioned their names without the surnames, and in this way, it seemed like she was trying to take away part of their identity and their personalities. Moreover, she had this attitude only with women because she always mentioned men with proper names and surnames. The contestation, in this case, arises from the fact that the use of names without surnames cancels the personality, diminishing the path of women, in fact without a surname that gives specific to the person, the woman in question becomes just “a woman”.⁸³

Giorgia Meloni's obsession with embodying the conservative values typical of right-wing parties led her to take also rigid positions against abortion. And this unhealthy fixation leads her to write a falsehood in the first pages of her autobiography, in order to empirically demonstrate how morally wrong abortion is. To try to justify her morals and the one of her political party, she explains that her mother had considered the idea of getting an abortion during her pregnancy. The story is certainly touching both because it is told in the first person and because Meloni emphasizes several times how she may have never been born. The leader of Fratelli d'Italia claims that her mother on a spring morning was going on an empty stomach to a clinic in order to do the analysis that precedes the termination of pregnancy.

⁸¹ G. Serughetti, Non basta che sia donna. Perché le femministe si oppongono a Meloni. Domani, 18 August 2022.

⁸² I. Dominijanni, La nave distopica di Giorgia e i suoi fratelli. L'Essenziale, 26 August 2022.

⁸³ M. Castigliani, Meloni alla Camera cita gli uomini con nome e cognome, le donne solo con il nome (rendendole anonime). Il Fatto Quotidiano, 25 October 2022.

La mattina degli esami clinici che precedono l'interruzione di gravidanza si sveglia, rimane digiuna e si incammina verso il laboratorio. A questo punto, mi ha sempre raccontato, si ferma proprio davanti al portone, esita, vacilla. Non entra. Si chiede: è

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davvero una mia scelta – rinunciare a essere madre ancora una volta? La sua risposta è puro istinto: no, non voglio rinunciare, non voglio abortire. Mia figlia avrà una sorella.

È una mattina di primavera. C'è un'aria dolce e pulita. Sente di aver preso la decisione giusta. Adesso deve solo ratificarla, in qualche modo. In qualsiasi modo... Sul marciapiede opposto scorge un bar, attraversa la strada ed entra. «Buongiorno. Un cappuccino e un cornetto.» Digiuno infranto, analisi boicottate, interruzione di gravidanza dissolta in una bolla di sapone.

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However, this story is completely false or in any case highly inaccurate for a simple reason: when Giorgia Meloni's mother was pregnant with her the law on abortion did not exist. In fact, considering that Giorgia Meloni was born on January 15, 1977, the mother would have remained pregnant in April of the previous year, and this coincides with the book passage as Meloni specifies that it was spring. The year in question was 1976. What makes the truth not coincide with what has been described in the book is that in 1976 the voluntary interruption of pregnancy was an illegal practice, in fact, abortion was a crime that could have been punished with 2 to 5 years in jail. Law 194 which decriminalized abortion and made it practicable in Italy dates back to May 1978, a period in which Giorgia Meloni was already more than one year old. Consequently, either Giorgia Meloni lied to preserve the “sacred myth of birth” or she created misinformation at the public level, because even if her mother had wanted to get an abortion, she certainly would not have done it in a clinic with suitable sanitary conditions, as at the time it was illegal, and therefore at most, she would have turned to some woman known as “mammane” willing to do it clandestinely.⁸⁵

All this perfectly summarizes and explains the theories reported so far which explain that women who emerge in right-wing parties are obliged to follow the myth of the archetype of a woman dedicated to family and traditional values, but at the same time must be aggressive, austere and have

⁸⁴ G. Meloni, *Io sono Giorgia*. Rizzoli, 2021.

⁸⁵ S. Lucarelli, “Nata perché mia madre scelse di non abortire”. *Cara Meloni, nel 1976 l'aborto era illegale*. *The Post Internazionale*, 13 May 2021.

the behavioral characteristics typical of a conservative man. Giorgia Meloni turns out to be a living example of this.

Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to analyze why in the European socio-cultural context it is actually easier for conservative and right-wing women to emerge.

Thanks to the first chapter, it was highlighted how first of all the gap between male and female leadership is caused by the way of perceiving certain character traits by society and by the different ways in which children are raised, directing them from an early age to a future studded with stereotypes and gender biases. All of this added to what has been studied and developed in the second chapter, namely, the fact that women are very often treated differently than men by the media, means that obviously the figure of a female leader is traditionally often discredited and treated with less dignity in the narrative compared to a male colleague. This process that holds back women from reaching the top of the political sphere has been demonstrated, thanks to the analysis carried out in the third chapter, to be amplified in the case of women who challenge the traditional female figure. It is therefore more difficult for women within Europe's left-wing parties to emerge as they challenge a whole set of values that are unfortunately still deeply rooted in today's society. And this, coupled with the fact that there is another aspect in left-wing parties that holds women back, namely paternalism, is the reason why the only women who break the glass ceiling are right-wing conservative women who are against the expansion of civil and social rights for minorities and, in general, progress.

The thesis has therefore shown how and why women who play the men's game while always remaining within the limits of what the patriarchal society considers right, are advantaged in reaching high institutional positions.

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