Between Cultures and Transitions: Gender Perspectives in Youth Studies

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Editorial

1.   Introduction

This issue aims to reflect about the struggle "traditionally" faced by the gender perspective for being integrated within the frame of Youth Studies. In the last decades,

the latter branch of studies has tended to split between two main "twin tracks" (Cohen 2003, Woodman and Bennet 2015; Furlong *et al.* 2011), focusing on the one side on youth cultural forms, and on the patterns of transition to adulthood on the other. Therefore, the challenge spread through the call for papers we launched was to apply the gender perspective as a way of considering both the individual agency and its structural contexts in order to overcome the epistemological and methodological rigidity in the Youth field. We conceived the call seeking to collect articles able to tackle this challenge. As editors, we made specific reference to the work of Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011), as a possible attempt of reconciliation of the twin tracks through the application of the analytical perspective of "social generation". Drawing from the conceptualization of generations introduced by Mannheim (1928), this approach indeed concerns the ways and the meanings through which the age-based experience of the world is determined by social conditions. Also referring to the gender-based dynamics, therefore, in our opinion that of the social generation seemed to be a perspective worth to be explored, in order to carry out analyses that can take into account the structural frame and, at the same time, the dialogical and subjective dimensions which produce (or hinder) change in gender order. As a consequence, we were very pleasant to receive, among the others, the article by Dan Woodman which opens the issue. Indeed, by its reading, the *About Gender* audience might find a further lens through which to achieve a deeper understanding of the three following articles, since Woodman's proposal helps in giving attention to the intra-generational variability of reactions to (and relations with) the gender order. Indeed, the article by Clarence Batan, as well as the ones by Simon Schleimer and Gabriella Cerretti and Capilla Navarro describe, by different perspectives and contextualisation, how contemporary youths deal, with different outcomes, with the expectations and the structure of opportunities they encounter as young men and women.

Before reading the articles, however, a reconstruction of the main stages of the development of the main tracks within the frame of Youth Studies is needed, aiming to further stress the limited room assigned to gender in these reflections.

2. "The beautiful and the damned": on the making of Youth Studies between cultures and transitions

Since the early stages of their development, Youth Studies gained an increasingly autonomous position in social sciences, especially at an international level. Starting from the seminal researches in the early 1900s until the late '70s, Youth Studies have gradually widened their areas of interest and (re)organised and (re)defined their(s) object(s) of study (Griffin 1993; Merico 2004). Along this process, youth emerges and re-emerges, is discovered and re-discovered, becoming a metaphor of hopes and fears (Hareven 1976; Kett 2003), and being seen in turns as "the beautiful and the damned" (Fass 1977). Nevertheless, different questions seem to have remained in the background: in first instance, as far as we are concerned, the gender dimension.

On the basis of previous contributions (Chisholm *et al.* 2011; Merico 2004; 2018), in what follows we go through a (concise) sequence of snapshots of major intellectual contributions to the field, trying to follow the line of the construction and re-construction of "youth", thus introducing some of the scholars usually recognised as the founding figures of this field of studies.

The American psychologist G. Stanley Hall is commonly recognised as one of the first modern theorist to provide a scientific perspective on the questions analysed in this issue of the Journal. In his two-volume work, Hall (1904) described adolescence as a period of "storm and stress", characterised by the challenging adjustment to biological and bodily changes, as well as by the need for protection and guidance (Griffin 1993; Stafseng, 2001). Within this analysis, we can already trace the polarised positions within which future researches can be framed: leaving young people room for an autonomous development of self-identity, and controlling their potentially "dangerous" behaviour.

From a different point of view, Jane Addams (1909) has claimed that youth can be considered as the product of the modern industrial city. Addams interpreted juvenile misbehaviour and delinquency as consequences of young people's isolation, whereas the city was unable to sustain the "spirit of youth" and its "quest for adventure" (Merico, 2018). Paying a special attention to the role of women in a rapidly changing society,

together with her colleagues in the Hull House – the settlement house she founded in Chicago – Addams engaged in campaigns for compulsory education, the provision of playgrounds as well as against the exploitation of child labour (Deegan 1988; Knight, 2010; Rauty 2017[1]).

It is unquestionable that the Chicago School of Sociology has offered the first comprehensive approach to youth (and youth cultures). Looking at the relationship between the urban development and the everyday life of younger generations, as well as using a distinctive blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Madge 1962; Bulmer 1984), Robert Park and his (young) colleagues collected data and life histories useful for analysing the contradictory presence of young women and men in the "social laboratory" of Chicago: the hobos (Anderson 1923), the "unadjusted girls" (Thomas 1923), the "taxi dancers" (Cressey 1932a), the members of youth gangs (Thrasher 1927). Furthermore, they devoted specific attention both to juvenile delinquency (Shaw 1930; 1931; Shaw and McKay 1942) and the "motion pictures" (Blumer 1933; Blumer and Hauser 1933; Thrasher 1936; Cressey 1932b; 1934). Their engagement with field research led to a more general conclusion: that all youth behaviours were a consequence of the interplay between the social and cultural structures in the city, individual social backgrounds and the specific environment in which young people live (Merico 2018).

Karl Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations* (1928) offers a crucial contribution, still nowadays challenging youth studies. Moving from a critical appraisal of positivism and romantic historicism, Mannheim argues that new generations are the product of relevant historical and social changes. In his "formal" analysis the Hungarian-born sociologist identifies three different levels: "generation location", "actual generation" and "generation units". Not all generation locations produce actual generation and, then, generation units: the latter only emerge when the effects of rapid changes require new cultural ways of dealing with social realities (Abrams 1982; Chisholm 2002). Thus, following a line of thinking already suggested by José Ortega y Gasset (1923), Mannheim (1928) recognises that young people might play a crucial role in social change. Having as yet no vested interests, these "outsiders" can easily accommodate new attitudes, behaviours and cultural patterns. Therefore, as he pointed out few years

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[1] See also the portrait of Jane Addams published on *About Gender* (Rauty 2015).

later, the "sociological function" of youth lays in its "openness" to innovation and in its aptitude to become an active resource for social change (Merico 2012). Particularly in modern society, youth is then a "latent resource" «which every society has at its disposal and on the mobilization of which its vitality depends» (Mannheim 1943, 32).

Since the early 1940's, particularly in the United States, it emerges a more comprehensive attempt to understand modern youth, focused on the recognition of the "changes and challenges" that young people were facing in a rapidly changing society, with specific attention to their transition to adulthood, socialisation, and integration into the value system (Erikson 1963). Behind this approach was the idea that young people were subject to a "psychosocial moratorium", a prolonged period of exploration of the relationship between oneself and the social order (Erikson 1950; 1968). The main contribution of this attempt refers to the dispute about the possibility of identifying the distinctive features of the "youth culture", a concept introduced by Talcott Parsons (1942), within a more general appraisal of the relevance of "age and sex categories" (Linton 1942). It designated a cultural pattern mainly focused on irresponsibility, a strong emphasis on social activities, and «a certain recalcitrance to the pressure of adult expectations and discipline» (Parsons 1942, 606-607). In brief, "youth culture" was seen as characterised by a dual orientation: a "compulsive independence" to adult expectations, that was combined with a "compulsive conformity" to the peer group (Parsons 1954). In its plural articulations, the analysis carried out from this perspective testifies the ambivalence that characterise the attention devoted in this period to the peer group and its cultural expressions: they were meant, on the one hand, as source of a "conflict between generations" (Davis 1940) and of the so-called "adolescent society" (Coleman 1961), if not even of a kind of "teen-age tyranny" (Hechinger and Hechinger 1963). On the other hand, moving from Eisenstadt's (1956) historical-comparative account of the role of the peer-group, the fidelity to "youth culture" was understood as an outlet for tensions to which young people were exposed and as a spur to independence and responsibility, thus keeping legitimated deviance within socially acceptable boundaries and facilitating an "active adaptation" to the American value system (Parsons 1962).

While still being considered as one of the most influential perspectives for the development of youth research (Merico 2004), the structural-functionalist account has been criticised for two main reasons: firstly, because it implies an essentialist construction of youth that takes on some of the characteristics of a "myth" (Elkin and Westley 1955), thus being often disjointed from any class, ethnic or – as for our interests here – gender analysis (Brake 1985). Secondly, for its normative assumptions concerning the stability of the society and its core values (Gouldner 1970).

Assuming this last criticism, during the 1950s and 1960s radical theorists payed a specific attention to the role of youth as actors of social and cultural change (Jones 2009; Merico 2018). We will refer here to three major contributions, which take into consideration different facets of the same theme. The first one is Paul Goodman's *Growing up absurd* (1956), where, in contrast with most celebrated views, he claimed that young people were becoming marginalized by society. According to his analysis, the disaffected youngster, the beat and the juvenile delinquent were expressing in different ways the hardness of growing up in a society which was not able to provide them with the opportunity to express their autonomy and creativity. The second contribution we consider here is from Theodore Roszak (1968). Taking into consideration young people's political awakening and student protests during the 1960's, he identified in the rise of the youth "counterculture", whose main features were – according to his analysis – the rejection of the "technocratic society" and the promotion of an "alternative society", the possible emergence of new values and sensibilities. Finally, in the third contribution that we take into consideration, looking at the large proportion of young people excluded from economic opportunity and confined in educational institutions or into the Armed Forces, as others intellectuals of the period, John and Margaret Rowntree (1968) recognised in youth the potentially new revolutionary "class".

These analyses were, mostly, ideologically oriented rather than empirically grounded. Nevertheless, if considered together with the works of sociologists such as David Riesman *et al.* (1950), Charles Wright Mills (1958), and Herbert Marcuse (1964), they show the progressive emergence of a need for critical analysis of youth biographies, lifestyles and cultural production. In this direction, it is worth considering the research

activities carried out by the social psychologist Kenneth Keniston from 1960 to 1971 on the forms of dissent expressed by American youth in that phase (Merico 2017). Moving from taking into consideration the complex interlinking between the processes of social change, the biographical dimension and the psycho-social development of individuals, Keniston (1965; 1968; 1971) identified a series of "faces of dissent" that last between the alienation of *"the uncommitted"* to the protest and commitment of *"young radicals"*.

Together with the above mentioned concept of "counterculture", another one has increasingly drew the attention of youth researchers: the concept of "subculture(s)" (Yinger 1960). In a first phase, this was linked, while from diverse theoretical perspectives, to the more general issues of delinquency and deviance: it is here sufficient to refer to Albert K. Cohen's (1955) study on the "culture of the gang" shared by *Delinquent boys*; to the critical perspective elaborated by D. Matza and G. Sykes (1957; 1961); to the analysis carried out by James S. Coleman (1961) in his *Adolescent society*; to Cloward and Ohlin's *Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (1960).

Compared to these studies, while being routed around the same concept, the last perspective here considered assumes a different focus. In the context of a debate arising from the mugging of an Irish worker in 1975 and on the basis of a neo-Marxist theoretical standpoint (Procter 2004), the researches on youth subcultures carried out by the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham analysed the "rituals of resistance" employed by British working class youth (Hall and Jefferson 1976). According to the analysis carried out by Stuart Hall and his colleagues, rather than challenging class differences, young people were "negotiating" their contradictory working class identities. This negotiation was played out at a symbolic level, through a "bricolage" (Levi-Strauss 1962) of objects, clothes, jargon and codes borrowed from other groups, transformed, combined and then re-used, disarticulating and rearticulating their original meanings in order to define the "style" of a specific subcultural group (Hebdige 1979). For the members of a subculture this subversion of conventional codes and meanings represented a form of resistance to the lived contradictions of their marginal location between their working class "mother culture" and the "dominant culture" of adult society (Hall and Jefferson 1976). However, rather than at a structural level, the ritualised resistance of mods, rockers, skinheads, and of the

others subcultural groups analysed in their ethnographies resolved those contradictions only at an imaginary, "magical", and symbolic ones (Cohen 1972; Brake 1985; Gelder 2007).

CCCS moved away from "classical" analyses on youth, questioning the boundary between "consciousness of generation" and "consciousness of class" (Murdock and McCron 1976). However, it is worth noting that this approach has been criticised for paying little attention to the cultural divisions within classes (Wallace and Kovacheva 1998), as well as – an aspect most important in the context of our discussion – to young women (Brake 1985): an issue explicitly already recognised by the so-called "Subcultures Group" within the CCCS (McRobbie and Garber 1976) and that was developed by Angela McRobbie (1980) and others scholars in the context of a feminist critique to subcultural theory. However, CCCS unquestionably contributed to (re)introduce in the debate on youth and youth culture(s) a plural approach as well as to stimulate the attention that, since the late 1970s, has been paid to the multiplicity of cultural and expressive forms that young people live through their everyday life (Jones, 2009).

As we have seen so far, bringing together the social and cultural issues related to youth lives and experiences (Berger 1963), these diverse approaches emphasised, in turn, the distinctive features of the youth cultural models, the intergenerational conflict, the settling of youth countercultures and their connotations in terms of antagonism and rebellion, up to the elaboration of the concept of youth subcultures (Wyn and White 1997; Feixa 2006; Dimitriadis 2008; Bennet 2017; Merico 2018). In its heterogeneous and contradictory complexity, this process has enabled the emergence of what can be identified as the "paradigm of youth" (Cristofori 1997), or, as we have tried to illustrate in another context, of «a *corpus* of theoretical and methodological approaches, topics and interpretative categories, frameworks for discussion and guidelines, shared – in its intrinsic and essential complexity – by a wide international scientific community» (Merico 2018, 13). Also, an awareness of the global youth research and a reconceptualization of youth in the inter-cultural understanding contributed to the cross-fertilization of the theoretical and methodological perspectives of youth research (cf. Helve and Holm 2005). The emergence of this "paradigm" contributed to the definition

of the (open) boundaries of a new field of research, thus opening, in the next couple of decades, the way to the making of youth studies (Furlong 2013; Côté 2014; Wyn and Cahill 2015).

However, in our opinion in the building up of that "paradigm" several dimensions have been underestimated, overlooked if not neglected: in first instance – and this is the starting point on which this issue of *About Gender* was firstly conceived – the gender dimension.

3. Which room for gender in Youth Studies?

To sum up the path tracked so far, gender has struggled to receive specific attention within the frame of Youth Cultures Studies (Brake 1985; Bianchi 1988; Griffin 1993). Moreover, also the analysis of youth subcultures has often favoured the male component, "naturalizing" an almost exclusive overlap between subcultural styles as a whole and the specificity of the masculine ones (McRobbie 1991). As a consequence, little attention was given to feminine styles, thus producing a certain opacity in the gaze of social sciences.

Such a restriction influenced a significant part of the scientific debate on youth cultures, and was questioned mainly by feminist analyses (e.g. McRobbie and Garber 1976; McRobbie 1978; McRobbie and Nava 1984; Gilligan *et al.*, 1990; Walkerdine 1990; Hey 1997; concerning the critical and interdisciplinary tradition of Girls' Studies, e.g. Lipkin 2009). In this respect, it seems useful to emblematically acknowledge some ground-breaking experiences coming from our backgrounds.

Let us consider in first instance the European Nordic Countries context, where already in 1988 the Finnish Youth Research Journal *Nuorisotutkimus* published a special issue on the theme of "Girl Research". The articles included e.g. research on how school remakes sex roles, different worldviews of girls and boys, girls and work, girls' relation to rock, different conceptions of heroism of girls and boys, and about girls' "one nightstands" and double standard morality. The theme of the volume was the growing interest of Finnish youth researchers in the lives of both sexes. The studies were interdisciplinary and the research problems pursued were similar to those in other

youth research traditions; the only difference was the gender focus. There was a need to know more about girls and their lives. The Finnish Youth Research Society also put forward a proposal, that every youth research symposium or conference should organize a stream devoted to interdisciplinary gender research (Helve 1988).

More in general, researchers from Nordic countries have been at the forefront of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary youth research. In the mid of 1980s they began to develop a Nordic Youth research network through the Nordic Youth Research Information Symposium Series (NYRIS). The first NYRIS in Oslo (1987) established the Nordic youth researchers community. Thirteen years later in the 7th NYRIS conference 2000 Making and Breaking Borders, organized by the Finnish Youth Research Society, the gender perspective was already in focus throughout the conference programme. Under the topic of gender there were sessions on Constructing Girlhood Culturally and Constructions of Age and Gender in Young People´s Lives. There were all together 14 papers presented by researchers from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Latvia and Italy. There was criticism that much research within the youth culture tradition has been concerned with young men with a concentration on male themes. Young women´s lives were less interesting for those studying youth culture. On the other hand, in Italy the attention to the gender dimension in youth research also found in the Feminist movement a driving force, supported by its political and historical relevance (Piccone Stella and Saraceno 1996; Bianchi 1988). In this respect, social research started to pay attention to the young women – and to young female students in particular – only since the late-1970s (e.g. Zanuson 1975; Balbo *et al.* 1976; Saraceno *et al.* 1976; Piccone Stella 1979), before assuming a more systematic focus only during the 1980s and 1990s (Calabrò 1886; Bianchi 1988), also trying to trace back their social presence within the so-called "first generation" (Piccone Stella 1993). As acknowledged by Letizia Bianchi (1988, 408) in a seminal paper, «this is a very important step because it rejects the deduction of the feminine as a mere difference from the masculine and makes young women the protagonists of research. This is the case, to give some emblematic examples, for the researches carried out by Carmen Leccardi (1996) on the future orientations of young women, by Renate Siebert (1991) on the relationship between the different daughters, mothers and grandmothers or, most recently, by Elena

Besozzi (2003) on *"gender as a communicative resource"*. It is also worth noting how this process had recently acquired new vitality, in youth research (de Luigi and Gobbi 2010) as, more in general, in the Italian sociological debate.

Even recent researches - also in connection with their prevalent micro–ethnographical approach - have been typically carried out making a distinction between the processes of construction of femininity and masculinity at a young age. A holistic perspective capable of understanding and more deeply representing the dialogical and negotiated relation among genders (Nayak and Kehily 2008) was thus unattained. Recently, though, an increasing attention to the construction of genders has been given, and more specifically to gender (and gendered) practices and to everyday life as a field of juxtaposition and mutual trespassing among the supposed male and female domains (Helve 2000; Nayak and Kehily 2008; Jones 2009; Griffin 2011; Hollingworth 2015; Wyn and Cahill 2015).

Considering the other main strand in youth studies, namely the Transition studies, we might find in the analysis of the effects of the life-course de-standardization a potential opportunity to give more room to perspectives able to understand the subjective meaning-making, as well as the individual agencies applied in constructing biographies. This might be put into relation with the gender dimension, focusing for instance on how biographicity (Alheit 1992; Alheit and Dausien 2002; Stauber 2006) is acted in order to "synchronise" the individual biographies according to subjective interpretations of gender and the systems of (gendered) opportunities and constraints they have to deal with in rapidly changing contexts.

Indeed, the depiction of the standardised life-course seems to be less and less worth and usable because of the fragmentation of professional and training careers, as well due to the weakening of the super-individual oversight acted by the institutions of Modernity. In order to achieve a deeper cohesion to the changing patterns of biographical construction, a progressive shift of paradigm has therefore been adopted within this strand of youth studies, specifically addressing the re-conceptualization of the transition dimension. In this sense, by switching from a focus on the outcomes of transitions throughout diverse life's phases - and particularly between the status of "young" and "adult" and of "student" and "worker" - to a multidirectional and

processual representation, researchers aim to overcome analyses based on stereotypical representations of "normal" or "irregular" life courses. Furthermore, by a methodological perspective, "traditional" Transition Studies privileged quantitative/longitudinal analysis, with a particular focus on the school-to-work transitions and mobilities in early professional trajectories. Starting from the first researches in this context, Transition Studies have maintained a constant attention to the gender dimension, although this was considered as one of the structural variables involved (also in predictive terms) in the production and reproduction of inequalities, thus lacking, in many cases, the possibility of analysing youth agency. Such an approach has often contributed to further strength the normative visions of the life course, therefore conveying value judgments on the "incomplete", "interrupted", "misleading" transitions. The definition and negotiation of new biographical patterns were thus neglected as a process of critical rereading of the "age norms" (Settersten 1998), even in relation to gender.

4.   The articles collected for the present issue

Aiming to contribute to the spreading of youth research capable of considering both the individual agency and its structural contexts, overcoming the epistemological and methodological rigidity which has traced different trajectories for the so-called "twin tracks" of youth studies, in the present issue of *About Gender* we have collected four articles. In the first article, *Gender and Generations: Using a Generational Framework to Rethink Continuity and Change in the Gender Order*, Dan Woodman accurately tackles the issue of the separation between the twin tacks by proposing the generational perspective as a solution for bridging this gap. As the author argues, indeed, by drawing on the sociology of generations youth research could be able to find concepts and tools by means of which to give attention to the structural change and, at the same time, to the cultural reworking, considering their constant interaction in reproducing (and changing) social divisions such as gender. Yet, it's noteworthy that the recurrence of the notion of "generation" in the mainstream discourse tend to produce a shift towards "generationalism", namely the stereotypical understanding of generations based on the

"external" inter-generational difference and the "internal" alleged homogeneity. Instead, it's the very cornerstone of sociology of generation, Mannheim's *Problem of Generation* (1928), to focus on the intra-generational differences in youths' reaction to the changed social condition relative to previous generations. By the lens of the "generational units", in fact, the analysis gains the capacity to consider the multiplicity of the ways in which young people respond to, and in turn shape, the social conditions they experience. This also regards the reproduction of class and gender inequalities, which risk to be interpreted as stable processes by scholars, overlooking the different ways in which they are articulated in changing times. In order to show examples of empirical application of the generational perspective in relation to gender, Woodman introduces the results from a recent work by Barbara Risman (2018) on changes to gender structure among "Millenials" and from a his own (and colleagues') longitudinal analysis of the life trajectories of Australian youths. Through 116 interviews with young people in Chicago, Risman builds four profiles according to the different ways in which young people belonging to the same generation – the so-called "Millenials" - relate to the gendered social structure, alternatively contributing to reproduction and change. As Woodman argues, these typologies - labelled as "rebels", "innovators", "straddlers" and "true believers" - correspond to different generational units in relation to different ways of doing gender. Thus, they show differences at the intra-generational level, in a complex frame where innovation and continuity are in tension with each other, both at the micro level of peer and inter-generational relations and at political level (see, for instance, the concurrent rise of "alt right" and the emergence of the "fourth wave" feminism).

By the work of Woodman and colleagues using the Life Patterns longitudinal study of Australian youth, we observe the emergence of a new generation in a context determined by economic shift and changing educational patterns. In terms of gender, this gets particular evidence when it comes to the cultural and structural contradictions between the strong investment of the Australian Government in fostering the prolonged stay in education and the still increasing difficulties faced by the highly educated youths, especially women, in the labour market integration. Furthermore, the persistence of average pay gap in favour of men creates the condition for gender-based inequalities,

which are perceived as even more greater than before, because of the changes entailed by the new educational patterns on the subjective aspirations. Hence, this generation of Australian young women seems stuck between incompatible structures and demands, where the coherent relation between education and work is weakened. As Woodman argues, by the youth research standpoint this questions the very foundation of the "transition track", since education and work represent no longer statuses linked by transition, rather they appear like two spheres with different power dynamics, logics and temporalities. Dealing with this complexity is thus a generational challenge, which is tackled with different resources, aims and strategies within the same generation and according to the gendered unequal distribution of opportunities and constraints.

With the article by Clarence Batan, *Emerging Typologies of Young Filipinos Waiting for Employment Known as "Istambays"*, we explore another phenomenon which "contradicts" the alleged linearity of the "traditional" understating of the school-to-work transitions. Indeed, the author works on the experiences and visions of the so-called Filipinos "istambays", namely youths waiting – "on-standbys" - for employment. Drawing on life course data of Filipinos born in the '70s, Batan's research finds emerging typologies of istambays, reflecting on how they are shaped by salience of vulnerability and the gendered expectations, working along the education-employment nexus. In the context of the widespread youth unemployment in Philippines, indeed, the istambays are however stigmatised, since their prolonged wait for the labour market integrations is generally depicted a (mainly) male-centred individual choice and failure, disregarding the structural and cultural conditions that shape it. In terms of vulnerability, data show the salience of education: Batan's survey respondents primarily overlap their istambays condition with problems in their educational trajectories, which led them to individual reaction of discouragement. This occurs both in terms of perception of "education being a waste" for those who achieved higher education, and in terms of "desire to return to school" for those who have not completed formal schooling. According to the author, the more educated istambays are then experiencing a symbolic violence related to the non-translation of their investments in education into labour market integrations, while the ones who have not accomplished spendable qualifications share an idealistic view of the value of education, which leads them to attribute to their

failures in education the main reason for their distance from employment. Furthermore, by focusing on high educated women among the respondents, Bathan counters the widespread view of the istambays' phenomenon as male-centred. Specifically, the author refers to high educated female istambays who have completed collegiate education degrees but were not able to pass the examination required for the teaching licensure. Interplaying with the social expectations concerning their role as housemakers, this condition produces a gendered experience of "being istambays", where these women are both subjected to the demands of contributing to the household incoming and at the same time fulfilling the (not acknowledged) homemaking responsibilities. Beyond the specific case of these women, as Batan's concludes, the gender perspective is thus worth integrating in the analysis of istambays phenomenon, especially regarding life events when gender-based expectations (e.g. the ones related to the diverse forms of caregiving) stop women's education-to-work trajectories, since women are expected to take charge of. This shapes different forms and possibilities to negotiate the only apparently homogenous istambays condition.

In *Dynamics of Gender, Religion and Education among Young Female Muslims in Malaysia*, Simon Schleimer analyses different young women in Malaysia cope with the rapid changes of the Country in terms of pluralisation and diversification, and the concomitant retention of religious values. Specifically, by in-depth interviews the author aims to represent different ways in which religion is used by these high educated young women as a resource to achieve autonomy and legitimate "non-traditional" career and educational pathways yet maintaining strong ties with their families. In order to overcome the rather established trend of studies about the Malaysian youth condition in representing the youths' experiences as contradictory, on the basis of their will to conflict with the conservative orientation of their families, the author focuses on how the young women perceive the different social environments they are in touch with. Presenting two stories in the form of case studies, Schleimer reflects on the different meanings attributed to religion by two young women belonging to contrasting social backgrounds (the first has a wealthy family, while the second grew up in a sub-urban working class family). In a nutshell, in the Schleimer's work we find interesting insights about the dynamicity of intergenerational relations in Malaysia, also drawing attention

to the agency of young women who are able to reconcile their own visions and requirements of their families and society, re-interpreting their roles (as professionals, students, young women, daughters and so son) by relying on religion as a resource.

Gabriella Cerretti and Capilla Navarro explore the sentimental and sexual choices of adolescents in relation to the reproduction of myths of romantic love. In their article, *Myths of Romantic Love: Gender perspectives in adolescent dating*, the authors analyse the data deriving from a survey conducted with Spanish high school students, giving specific attention to the gender differences in the construction and representations of romantic love. The article considers the dimension of love and physical attraction as socially built, stressing the role of socialisation and cultural reproduction in this construction. Moreover, the prevailing models of romantic love in contemporary societies are put into relation with the patriarchal conception of inequalities of gender, which produces a naturalisation of gender differences and expectations in relation to sexual-affective relationships. The results of data analysis confirm previous researches on the topic, showing statistical differences between genders in the reproduction of the mythology of romantic love. Specifically, the mainstream female socialization patterns still seem to foster the representation of love as a vital project for women, and this ideological approach threatens to constitute, among others, the cultural background for the gender-based violence. To critically deconstruct these long lasting models in the socialization of young girls and boys, the authors claim for profound changes in education, aimed to equally promote concepts like self-awareness and empowerment in the scope of sentimental and/or sexual relationships, disrupting the tricky notion of "better half" which seems to still affect the expectations of (mostly) female adolescents.

In conclusion, the articles collected in this issue of *About Gender* represent in our opinion a good attempt in overcoming the "traditional" division between the culture and transition tracks of Youth Studies. Significantly, the articles have been proposed by scholars from Europe, Asia and Australia, giving us the feeling that the challenge of reconciliation of the twin tracks through the gender perspective is potentially an "hot topic" in the international debate. Moreover, the intra-generational perspective as a fruitful lens for observing both the agency in changing and the continuity in reproducing the gender order confirmed worth applying in further research. We thus invite

colleagues form different disciplines to consider this issue as a potential first step of a branch of youth studies which we hope to have contributed to foster.

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