

**“His story” - the exclusion of women
in the depiction of nonfiction characters
in Italian as a foreign language
textbooks: a case study**

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Abstract

This article analyzes the depiction of famous women and men in textbooks of Italian as a foreign language. The textbooks are employed in the specific educational context that involves teaching of Italian to undergraduate students at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. We interpret textbooks from a constructivist point of view as cultural artefacts that contain not only knowledge and facts related to the specific subject that they are created for, but also dominant ideologies (Curdt-Christiansen 2017). In order to examine the relevance attributed to women in the sociocultural panorama we use quantitative content analysis to calculate and determine the overall number of male and female representatives in different professional spheres and the diversity of professions they occupy. Afterwards, we employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the ideological implications beneath the portrayal of famous women and men and the power relations that shape it. The results demonstrate that the exclusion of

women is a commonplace in all textbooks - even those published in a more recent period don't manifest progressive tendencies regarding gender equality. The sociocultural narrative shaped through textbooks reflects power-structured relations typical for the traditional patriarchal conception of society in which gender inequalities are naturalized and masked as a non-ideological common-sense (Fairclough 1989). Hence, textbooks are recognized as instruments that reinforce patriarchal ideologies and legitimize unequal relations of power.

Keywords: Italian language textbooks, Italian as a foreign language, gender inequalities, exclusion, ideologies, androcentricity.

1. Introduction

From a social constructivist perspective, textbooks are seen as generators and carriers of cultural knowledge and as such they contain not only facts and data related to the specific teaching field, but also cultural values, social norms and ideologies (Gray 2002; Curdt-Christiansen 2017). The belief that the knowledge embedded in textbooks is objective and ideologically neutral was challenged after the 1970s, and in this regard one of the turning points that stimulated a shift from the positivist to the sociocultural and critical paradigm in the education theory can be summarised in the question posed by the education theorist Michael Apple: "What knowledge and whose knowledge should be included and excluded in schooling?" (Curdt-Christiansen 2017, 3). Apple (1990, 19) elaborates the concept of *politics of the textbook*, which is closely linked to the social construction of education, and argues that textbooks are a result of "someone's selection, someone's vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's" (Ivi, 20). Textbooks are therefore closely linked to power relations and they represent a

domain in which the dominant groups' selective forms of culture and knowledge are reproduced and perpetuated, while historical experiences and cultural expression of the less powerful, such as women, are excluded and concealed (Apple 1990).

In her groundbreaking work "Sexual Politics", radical feminist Kate Millett (1970) elaborates a theory according to which the exclusion of women from history, art and culture is grounded in the power-structured relationships of male domination and female subordination that are established and reinforced through patriarchy. Another influential feminist theorist Carole Pateman (2016, 2) asserts that even though the Western society in the last decades underwent significant economic and cultural changes that allowed women to acquire public roles and improve their overall position in the society, it seems that patriarchal values are still deeply embedded in all society structures, given that men's government of women is one of the most deeply entrenched of all power structures" (*Ibidem*).

In this paper we analyze the representation of non-fictional female and male characters in a corpus consisting of five Italian as a foreign language textbooks, employed in the specific educational context of Italian as a foreign language teaching and learning at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in an attempt to expose the "cultural politics" (Apple 1990) embedded in the textbooks and interpret them in a broader context of ideological meaning. The hypothesis of this study is that the selection of famous figures will reveal discriminatory practices expressed in a hierarchy that implies that men are the authentic exponents of culture. As a consequence, women in the public sphere remain under-represented and marginalized, which on a broader scale indicates that education in many aspects reproduces and reinforces patriarchal ideologies that cause gender inequalities to be naturalized and presented as a "non-ideological common sense" (Fairclough 1989).

There is a large body of studies that investigate gender stereotypes and female under-representation in foreign language textbooks, but most of them are conducted in the context of English as a foreign language teaching and learning. To this moment the question of gender stereotypes in Italian as a foreign language textbooks, with the exception of one bachelor thesis presented at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, is not addressed in academic research. However, in the bachelor thesis the representation of famous cultural exponents is not taken into consideration, and the question of gender inequality is not interpreted in relation with its ideological meaning. Whereas the issue of gender inequality in the Italian as a foreign language textbooks results unexplored, in this research we intend to shed a light on this matter.

One of the main questions that arise regarding the critical analysis of textbooks concerns the concrete effects of gender inequalities - can they have an impact on students and their vision of the world? According to Lee and Smith (2010, 124) the answer is yes, mostly because students tend to attribute plenty of credibility and authority to educational materials.

Learning a foreign language goes beyond the strictly linguistic dimension, as the students in this process are exposed not only to linguistic, but also to cultural specificities of a target country, which results in developing not only the communicative, but also the intercultural competence. In this regard, learning a foreign language in some ways corresponds to the process of acculturation, which in this context can be intended as the process of sharing and learning the cultural traits or social patterns of another group (Thesaurus), through the process of foreign language acquisition. From this perspective, discriminatory and male-centered imagery of Italian culture can encourage foreign learners to accept and internalize the stereotypical vision of Italy, and furthermore to perceive it as authentic and non-ideological expression of the Italian cultural panorama.

Critical pedagogy and Critical discourse analysis constitute a theoretical-methodological basis of this research. Both disciplines emphasize the elements of social engagement and commitment to emancipatory education. Critical pedagogy is a radical approach to education based on the view that education can have two purposes in society - it can rationalize and strengthen the existing relations of power and mask the conditions of oppression as non-existent, or it can serve to liberate the society from the oppressive ideologies and contribute to the creation of new values, based upon the principles of social justice and equality (Darder *et al.* 2016, 1). In a similar vein, the role of education in the process of ideology change is widely recognized and acknowledged within the Critical discourse analysis. In fact, education is seen as decisive “in determining whether existing orders of discourse, as well as more generally existing relations of power, are to be reproduced or transformed” (Fairclough 1989, 244).

2. Gender-bias in foreign language textbooks

The exclusion of women in textbooks and instructional materials is recognized as gender-bias and sexism back in the 1960s, when educational materials became the focus of many studies aimed at identifying and eliminating sexism and gender stereotypes (Graci 1989). The American educational publisher Scott, Foresman and Co. in 1972 published *Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks*, establishing the definition of sexism in textbooks that emphasizes the issue of the representation of women: “Sexism refers to all those attitudes and actions which relegate women to secondary and inferior status in society. Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women [...]” (Ivi, 478). A vast body of research documents different manifestations of sexism and gender inequalities in foreign language textbooks throughout the decades, not only in textbooks published in an earlier time (Nuessel 1977; Hartman and Judd 1978; Hellinger 1980;

Porreca 1984; Kanemaru 1998; Rifkin 1998), but also in those published in the last two decades (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Gupta and Yin 2009; Johansson and Malmsjo 2009; Lee and Collins 2010; Barton and Sakwa 2012). Manifestations of sexism and gender inequalities documented so far mostly refer to the stereotypical behavioral patterns, personality traits, occupational roles, public/private sphere dichotomy, the use of masculine generics (Hartman and Judd 1978; Hellinger 1980; Porreca 1984; Poulou 1997; Evans and Davies 2000; Lee and Collins 2010; Barton and Sakwa 2012).

In the previous studies the issue of the representation of non-fictional characters in foreign language textbooks was not addressed separately from the issue of the overall representation of men and women, and as a consequence there is very little empirical data revealing the position of famous women and the relevance appointed to them. Numerous studies show that women are statistically under-represented (Porreca 1984; Poulou 1997; Bayyurt and Litosseliti 2006; Johansson and Malmsjo 2009; Gupta and Yin 2010; Bahman and Rahimi 2010; Saarikivi 2012; Amini and Birjandi 2012), which is interpreted as a sexist phenomenon delineated as exclusion (Hellinger 1980). Hellinger (1980, 272) demonstrates that women in the professional sphere occupy lower hierarchical roles that include professions such as waitress, nurse, maid, housewife, while at the higher hierarchical level among the three women included there is one historical figure - Queen Elizabeth I. Also, there is a mention of a Russian astronaut, who however remains anonymous. In Porreca's research (1989) gender-bias related to the representation of non-fictional female characters is also confirmed - for instance, in a text named *Famous Men of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* 14 male historical figures are mentioned for their achievements. Women are completely excluded from the chapter, and there is no corresponding chapter dedicated to the famous women (Ivi, 713). The analysis of two Finnish EFL textbooks shows that in one them male celebrities are included in some texts (e.g.

Marlon Brando, Elvis Presley), whereas female celebrities are absent (Sarrikivi 2012, 32).

3. Methodological framework

This research is designed as a case study focused on the exploration of ideological background in the depiction of famous female and male exponents in Italian as a foreign language textbooks employed in the specific educational context of teaching Italian at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study is oriented towards the understanding of the delimited educational and social context, but it will also be interpreted as an exemplar of the phenomenon being explored (Duff 2014, 237).

As Porreca (1984, 706) observes “when females do not appear as often as males in the text, the implicit message is that women’s accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included”. With the aim to investigate the visibility of women in Italian as a foreign language textbooks, and by extension the relevance appointed to their achievements, we will conduct a quantitative content analysis that will consist in:

- ✓ counting the total ratio of famous women and men included in textbooks;
- ✓ establishing the diversity of the professional roles that they occupy.

Since this research is not limited to the statistical description of women’s status in textbooks, but instead it aims at identifying and exposing the ideologies that underlie the textbooks discourse, we will introduce the Critical Discourse Analysis as a qualitative research tool, and apply it to interpret the power relations that shape the textbooks politics. Within the Critical discourse analysis, discourse is recognized as a social practice. According to Fairclough (1989, 163), one of the

objectives of CDA is to show how discourse is determined by social structures and to observe the effects that the discourse can have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them. CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that “focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society” (van Dijk 2015, 353). As van Dijk (2015, 355) explains, the notion of power refers to the privileged access to social resources such as status, knowledge and culture. As Fairclough (1989, 107) emphasizes, unequal relations of power are shaped and reinforced by ideologies that are naturalized and disguised as common sense. In this regard we will explore the role of textbooks in reinforcing and naturalizing patriarchal ideologies.

In the body of literature that investigates sexism and gender stereotypes in English as a foreign language textbooks it is possible to outline four main categories of their manifestation: *exclusion*, *subordination*, *distortion* and *degradation* (Graci 1989, 479). Hellinger (1980) provides a succinct overview of every category, describing exclusion as the statistical dominance of male characters, subordination as the prevalence of men in social hierarchies associated with power and prestige, distortion as behavior patterns that have negative connotations and are stereotypically associated with women, and finally degradation as downgrading, denigrating and ignoring women’s intellectual capacities and achievements. The abovementioned categories can be interpreted as indicators of unequal power relations rationalized through patriarchal ideological structures, and we will therefore examine to what extent they are manifested through textbooks.

In the qualitative analysis we will carry out the following steps:

- I. identify the professional domains in which famous women and men achieved success and obtained social recognition;
- II. illustrate the social context related to every identified professional domain and give an insight into the position of women within them;

- III. disclose the ideologies that shape the social practice and the discourse of textbooks.

4. Corpus

The research corpus is composed of 5 Italian as a foreign language textbooks: *Qui Italia* (2002), *Nuovo progetto italiano* (2006), *Chiaro* (2010), *Facilissimo* (2014), *Via del Corso* (2018). Although the selected textbooks are not the only ones that are used for the purposes of teaching Italian as a foreign language at the University of Banja Luka, they were chosen as representative samples on the basis of the following criteria:

- a. all textbooks are addressed to the beginners and they correspond to the first two levels A1 and A2 of language proficiency within The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The compatibility of the language level results in numerous similarities on the level of structure and contents, which facilitates the parallel analysis and contributes to achieving a more systematic and coherent view of the phenomenon being examined;
- b. the textbooks are simultaneously used and combined for the language acquisition of different groups of students attending the first two academic years of the first level of university studies; the textbooks are published by the prominent publishing houses, specialized in the field of Italian as a foreign language: *Alma Edizioni*, *Edilingua* and *Le Monnier*, a publishing house founded in 1840, which in 1999 became a part of the biggest publishing company in Italy - *Mondadori*;
- c. in reference to the publishing year of each textbook we can identify a precise chronological line of four years in-between the publication period

of every textbook; the precise chronological order enables confronting the textbooks from different periods (16 years total), in order to establish if there is a progressive line of changes in respect to the position of women in textbooks.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative content analysis revealed significant gender imbalance in the representation of famous men and women - men outnumber women in absolutely every domain of public sphere, and they occupy a wider spectrum of professional roles. The exclusion of women represents a distinguishing feature of all textbooks in the corpus, indicating that there is no correlation between the year of publication and the progressive gender-egalitarian tendencies, in fact, the results show that gender inequalities are embedded in the textbooks published in the 2000s, as well as in those published more recently.

The results obtained from the quantitative analysis are illustrated in two separate tables:

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>The overall number of famous women</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>The overall number of famous men</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Qui Italia (2002)</i>	16	18%	56	82%
<i>Nuovo progetto italiano (2006)</i>	11	14%	65	86%
<i>Chiaro (2010)</i>	1	9%	9	91%
<i>Facilissimo (2014)</i>	2	18%	7	64%
<i>Via del Corso (2018)</i>	11	29%	60	71%

Table 1: The numerical representation of famous women and men in textbooks

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>The diversity of professional roles (F)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>The diversity of professional roles (M)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Qui Italia (2002)</i>	7	33%	14	67%
<i>Nuovo progetto italiano (2006)</i>	3	20%	12	80%
<i>Chiaro (2010)</i>	3	25%	1	75%
<i>Facilissimo (2014)</i>	2	29%	5	71%
<i>Via del Corso (2018)</i>	5	38%	8	62%

Table 2: The diversity of professional roles occupied by women and men

The prevalence of male representatives suggests that the perception of women's role and merit in the historical and cultural panorama has not significantly changed since the 1980s, since the educational materials still imply that the accomplishments of women and their value as human beings are not important enough to be included (Porreca 1984, 706).

The second table demonstrates how male representatives generally occupy a wider range of professions, for instance, while included female representatives are mostly singers and actors, men are chosen as representatives of different professions, many of which are associated with the social prestige (e.g. domains like opera, painting, literature, film directing). In the part focused on the results of the qualitative analysis, we will specify the types of profession associated with men, as well as those associated with women, in order to illustrate another facet of unequal power relations perpetuated through textbooks.

5.1. Qualitative analysis

In this part we will firstly specify all the professions that famous women and men occupy, since, as already anticipated in the quantitative section, men are included in a much broader spectrum of professions, while women in most cases incarnate professions related to entertainment, such as singing and acting, which itself

stands as another indicator of ideologically shaped representations that legitimate the androcentric view of culture.

The professional roles of famous women and men are listed in the tables below, each of which contains a list of professions related to a specific textbook:

<i>Professional roles of famous women</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Professional roles of famous men</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
<i>Actress</i>	7	<i>Musician</i>	22
<i>Singer</i>	2	<i>movie director</i>	9
<i>fashion designer</i>	2	<i>athlete</i>	8
<i>architect</i>	1	<i>writer</i>	6
<i>neurobiologist</i>	1	<i>painter</i>	5
<i>tennis player</i>	1	<i>fashion designer</i>	4
<i>journalist</i>	1	<i>journalist</i>	3
<i>writer</i>	1	<i>actor</i>	2
		<i>doctor</i>	2
		<i>philosopher</i>	1
		<i>agriculturist</i>	1
		<i>photographer</i>	1
		<i>architect</i>	1
		<i>pope</i>	1

Table 3: Professional roles of famous women and men in “Qui Italia”

<i>Professional roles of famous women</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Professional roles of famous men</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
Actress	7	Singer	18
Singer	2	movie director	14
Ruler	2	Actor	13
		fashion designer	9
		Writer	2
		General	2
		Ruler	1
		explorer	1
		scientist	1
		philosopher	1
		painter	1
		inventor of the expresso machine	1
		pizza maker	1

Table 4: Professional roles of famous women and men in “Nuovo progetto italiano”

<i>Professional roles of famous women</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Professional roles of famous men</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
Singer	1	movie director	3
		Writer	3
		Singer	2
		opera composer	1

Table 5: Professional roles of famous women and men in “Chiaro”

<i>Professional roles of famous women</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Professional roles of famous men</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
politician	1	politician	2	fashion designer	2
singer	1	painter	2		
		athlete	1		
		actor/movie director	1		
		fashion designer	1		

Table 6: Professional roles of famous women and men in “Facilissimo”

<i>Professional roles of famous women</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	<i>Professional roles of famous men</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
actress	4	movie director	17
singer	4	actor	15
tv host	1	writer	8
entertainer	1	singer	6
president of the National Museum of Cinema	1	opera composer	5
		painter	4
		tv host	4
		scientist	1

Table 7: Professional roles of famous women and men in “Via del Corso”

The data related to the distribution of professional roles of women and men indicate that the exclusion of women, or their stereotypical portrayal, are

particularly evident in the depiction of the following seven domains: opera, literature, painting, sport, film directing, acting and fashion, all of which constitute important elements in the construction of Italian and European cultural heritage and identity. Hence, the focus of the qualitative analysis is posed on the above indicated domains.

As Zaharijević (2018, 4) observes, the role that women played in history is often forgotten, or even intentionally concealed, which is why instead of focusing only on the representation of the women that are included in the textbooks, we will bring up those that regardless their accomplishments remained excluded and invisible. We will also contextualize the status of women in the identified professional domains in reference to the dominant gender ideologies.

5.2.1. *Opera*

Since Italy is the motherland of opera, this music tradition represents a constituent part of Italian cultural heritage, and as such it is commonly integrated in the Italian as a foreign language textbooks. Opera is reserved exclusively for the canonical male representatives: Giuseppe Verdi, Gioacchino Rossini, Giacomo Puccini. This androcentric perspective is shaped by ideologies that rationalize the exclusion of women and disguise discriminatory practices by presenting them as a historically established natural order. In opposition to the dominant male narrative in music, American musicologists Christine Ammer and Penny Brandt re-interpreted the history of opera through feminist lens, which resulted in creating a digital archive containing data about more than 500 operas composed through history by female authors (name of the composer, nationality, name of the opera, year of composing, genre) (WOPHIL). The authors state that the project they initiated will always be a work in-progress, since there are many female operas that are yet to be discovered, as well as those that are yet to be created (WOPHIL). Among the Italian composers included in the database we will single out only three: Adelaide Orsola

Appignani, the composers of five operas in the period between 1827 and 1876, Carolina Uccelli (4 operas) and Carlotta Ferrari (3 operas). All three authors are representatives of nineteenth-century Italian opera tradition, and some of their work at the time received appraisal by the audience (Michelon 2019).

The abundant list of more than 500 female opera composers is a testimony that women played an active role in this field, however, their achievements remained excluded from the official culture and the male-dominated opera canon. In the article *Why is nobody performing operas by female composers* the journalist Elizabeth Davis (2016) reflects upon the issue of the invisibility of female composers, concluding that even though it is impossible to change the past, marked by the dominance of male composers on the opera stages, it is nonetheless possible to intervene on the present by introducing female composers in the theaters, and perhaps more importantly, including them in the textbooks.

5.2.2. Literature

Alongside with opera, literature constitutes another field of women's exclusion. Within the field of literature it is possible to identify only one female author - Oriana Fallaci. The exclusion of female writers from textbooks comes as a result of their marginalized position in the traditional literary canon, defined from a feminist perspective as a patriarchal institution whose norms and values are created by the privileged male elite (Robinson 983, 84). In this light, literary canon can be interpreted as ideological instrument that legitimizes unequal relations of power, presenting them as indisputable objective knowledge. As Tyson (2006, 82-83) points out: "unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to under-represent the contribution of women writers", which is certainly confirmed through the marginalization of women in the traditional literary canon, and consequently their exclusion from anthologies and textbooks.

Although literature has been traditionally portrayed as a male field, there are many female writers whose valuable work and contributions are left out. The first Italian novel written by a female author is considered to be *Urania* by Giulia Bigolina. The novel dates back to the 16th century, but it was published for the first time only in 2002 (Vescio 2018). Another example of marginalization involves the Italian literary academy - Accademia dell'Arcadia, which in the course of the 18th century counted around 450 female poets. Even so, Faustina Maratti Zappi and Petronilla Paolini Massimi are the only two Arcadia poets whose names didn't fall in oblivion, both however are usually only vaguely mentioned and kept on the margins of literature (Vescio 2018).

The tendency to exclude women writers from the official canon and curriculum protracts throughout the 20th century, and perhaps one of the most striking examples in this regard is Sibilla Aleramo, the author of the novel *Una donna*, considered to be a milestone of Italian feminism (Vescio 2018). In the novel the author treats the position of women in the Italian society from the perspective of personal experience, marked by inner conflicts and the difficulties to reconcile motherhood and personal ambitions. Among the important social matters treated in the novel stands out the act of rape, written for the first time in the Italian literature in the first-person point of view, from the victim's perspective (*Ibidem*).

Elsa Morante, the first female author who received the most prestigious Italian literary award *Strega*, was described as an author whose writing had the force of a political act. Her friend Raffaele La Capria, also a writer, stated the following regarding the awarded novel: "It is a book full of strength and imagination. It seems (no hard feelings!) impossible that it has been written by a woman" (*Ibidem*). Although La Capria spoke with no malice intended, his attitude however suggests that discrimination is a naturalized component of the patriarchal consciousness. In regard to the success and recognition of Italian female writers, the work of Grazia Deledda is taken as a main reference point, given the fact that the author in 1926

won the Nobel Prize in literature and became the second out of 14 women that received this prestigious international award (until 2019). Nonetheless, it seems that even the highest literary recognition makes little or no difference at all in regard to the acknowledgment of female authors in the Italian literary tradition. At least that is what suggests *Rosa fresca aulentissima*, the anthology of Italian literature published in 2009, in which the name of Grazia Deledda is only vaguely mentioned, together with Sibilla Aleramo (Palumbo 2014), while some less noted male authors receive far more attention (*Ibidem*). When asked about the marginalization of women in the anthologies of literature the publishers respond that the education system imposes a specific curriculum that hinders all potential changes towards inclusion (*Ibidem*).

5.2.3. *Painting*

Female painters are not included in textbooks, and the rationale beneath the exclusion is once again attributable to the patriarchal ideologies embedded in the art canon.

In the first edition of Janson's History of Art established as the classic and seminal work about the Western art, not a single female author was included (Broude and Garrard 1996, 16). In some of the further editions that followed women were included, remaining however under-represented - for instance, analyzing the edition from the 1987 the art historian Bridget Quinn discovers that on over 800 pages depicting the entire history of art there are only 16 women (Gotthardt 2017). In an attempt to overcome the dominant androcentric paradigm in art the author writes an entertaining essay collection *Broad Strokes: 15 Women Who Made Art and Made History (in That Order)* where she provides an alternative, feminist outlook on the art history from 1600 to the present day and sheds light on 15 women artists excluded from the official mainstream art canon. The book includes the Italian baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi, who was creating her art

in the 17th century, however it was only during the era of feminist revision of the art-historical canon in the 1970s that she was (re)discovered and recognized as one of the most important women painters (Bal 2005). Due to tragic events that left a deep mark on her personal life - as a young girl she was raped by her art teacher, Artemisia Gentileschi became a symbol of feminist rebellion against the patriarchal power and violence, and even though her position in the canon remains marginal (Bal 2005), in a modern feminist culture she achieved cult status as a feminist heroine (Bohn 2005, 107).

5.2.4. Sport

Except for one female tennis player, Silvia Farina, all the other exponents of sport are men (10). According to the Nielsen Company report (2018, 5) on the commercial success and audience reception of sport involving 18 world's countries from 4 continents in the period between 2013 and 2017, football is ranked as the most popular, while basketball occupies second place on the scale. It seems that the commercial success was not a decisive criterion for selection, since less popular sports such as volleyball, swimming, gymnastics, are also included and overall equally distributed as football and basketball. In some of these sports women have active roles and achieve noticeable success at various competitions, including the Olympics and European and world cups, however, they remain excluded from textbooks. Here we will limit ourselves to mentioning just a few representative Italian female athletes: Sara Simeoni, high jumper who won a gold medal at the Summer Olympics in 1980, two times a world recorder in women's high jump (Pisa 2015); Federica Pellegrini, swimmer who won 8 world and 2 Olympic medals and set more than once a world record (Pisa 2015.); women's national volleyball team that won a gold medal at the FIVB Women's World Championship in 2002, as well as at the World Cup in 2007 and 2011 (Federvolley).

The exclusion of women athletes from textbooks is a mere reflection of their marginalized position in the sport community: even though women make up 40% of all sports participation, they are largely ignored by the mainstream media (Hanson 2012, 17). In fact, according to UNESCO women's sport receives only 4% of all sports media coverage, and within that limited space they are often objectified and demeaned (Unesco). Textbooks, in this regard, can provide an alternative gender-balanced image of sport and emphasize the importance of women's accomplishments.

5.2.5. *Film Directing*

In all textbooks cinematography is presented in a very extensive manner encompassing an ample panorama of different directors and films. The importance attributed to film directing on the one hand, and on the other hand the complete exclusion of women imply that they have no role whatsoever in film making and reinforce the idea of their inferiority in comparison with men. The texts *I grandi registi* ("The great directors") and *Cinema italiano moderno* ("Modern Italian cinema") included in the textbook *Nuovo progetto italiano* construct a narrative of cinematography as the field of male's success and are perhaps the best examples of how the profoundly discriminative perception of film directing as an authentic male activity is presented as a natural order.

The report *Where are women directors?* brings together comparative research about the women's position in the European film industry from seven different European countries, including Italy. The obtained results related to the period between 2006 and 2013 demonstrate that the European film culture privileges male directors and perpetuates gender inequalities (EWA 2014, 7). The most important findings can be summarized as follows: paradoxically, even though the share of women and men graduating from film schools is almost equal, 44% of male directors enter the film industry, as opposed to the 24% of women; only 21% of films are

directed by a woman; 84% of funding resources is invested into films directed by men (Ivi, 8).

The presence of women in the film industry is not a mere question of statistics, but an important social issue that can potentially contribute to the transformation of dominant ideologies. In the questionnaires distributed to 900 male and female professionals associated with the European film industry the respondents consider possible social impacts of movies directed by women. In this regard, 85% of respondents states that gender equality in the film industry would impact positively on the status of women, represent women differently in comparison with films directed by men (83%), improve representation of women on screen (78%), and increase the number of women in leadership roles (78%) (Ivi, 71). According to the 90% of respondents the process of inclusion of women in the film industry should be initiated through education, more specifically through the incorporation of more female-directed films in the curriculum (Ivi, 75). Textbooks from the corpus are however limited to conveying the discriminative images of the film culture, depicted through the accumulation of male directors' accomplishments. Contrary to the ideological imagery of film directing in the textbooks, we will remind the names of two accomplished and yet excluded female directors: Francesca Archibugi, the winner of the most prestigious Italian film reward *David di Donatello* for the film *Mignon è partita* in 1989 (Cinquelpalmi 2015); and Alice Rohrwacher, a young director affirmed during the last decade - she won *David di Donatello* for the film *Felice come Lazzaro* in 2019, and in 2014 she received Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival for the film *Le Meraviglie* (*Ibidem*).

5.2.6. Acting

Actresses are among main famous female representatives, in fact, in *Qui Italia* actresses outnumber actors. However, the inclusion of women does not guarantee gender balanced representation, as a matter of fact, it can be counterproductive

and reinforce inequalities if the portrayal of women is embedded with gender stereotypes and sexist implications, which is why providing an answer to the question *how* are women depicted becomes crucial for the analysis - are they presented independently or in relation with male actors; what is outlined as their fundamental value.

In *Qui Italia* we identified one text dedicated to the actress Mariangela Melato and one dedicated to Roberto Benigni. The texts are fundamentally different - the one about the actress is focused on her experiences and opinions regarding vacation, while the one about the actor is centered on his career and professional success. Woman is therefore associated with everyday informal topics, whereas man is seen through lens of his established social role. The text about Benigni contains a sentence that provides a good insight into the relations of power reproduced through textbooks:

Prima di lui, [hanno vinto l'Oscar] solo Anna Magnani e Sophia Loren
("Before him only Anna Magnani and Sophia Loren won the Oscar") (Mazzetti
et al. 2002, 214).

Even though the famous Italian actresses Anna Magnani and Sophia Loren also won the prestigious film award, the international success of Italian cinema is measured through the accomplishments of a male actor. The structure of text with Benigni as the main protagonist and Magnani and Loren as accompanying elements reflects the patriarchal hierarchy where man has a central and woman a peripheral position.

Another example of the propensity to present women in context of their relationship with men is extracted from *Nuovo progetto italiano* and it refers to the description of actors Sofia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, famous for their numerous collaborations on screen. The description of Sophia Loren contains a

sentence in which the actress's professional success is additionally emphasized through the reference to her collaboration with Mastroianni:

Ha recitato in importanti film internazionali, mentre indimenticabili sono le commedie insieme a Mastroianni (“She acted in important international films, and the comedies with Mastroianni are unforgettable”) (Marin and Magnelli 2006, 114).

As opposed to this, the description of Marcello Mastroianni's career doesn't contain references to Sophia Loren, which implies that the value of women increases when presented with an established male figure, whereas the value of men is not conditioned or determined by his relation with women.

Another example of devaluing women's professional engagement can be found in sentences in which the priority is given to their physical attractiveness rather than their professional accomplishments. Both examples that follow are extracted from the *Nuovo progetto italiano's* text *I grandi interpreti del passato* (“The great performers of the past”), dedicated to the famous Italian actors, among which Sophia Loren and Monica Bellucci:

Grazie alla sua straordinaria bellezza e al suo talento, Monica Bellucci sta facendo una grande carriera internazionale (“Thanks to her extraordinary beauty and talent, Monica Bellucci is building a big international career”) (Marin and Magnelli 2006, 113).

Sofia Loren: napoletana, simbolo della bellezza mediterranea. È stata la prima attrice a vincere il premio Oscar per un film non-americano (“Sofia Loren: Neapolitan, symbol of the Mediterranean beauty. She was the first actress to win an Oscar for a non-american movie”) (Marin and Magnelli 2006, 114).

From a critical feminist perspective, the emphasis on beauty is far more detrimental for women than it may seem at first glance. From this standpoint beauty standards of Western society constitute vehicles for the oppression of women (Forbes *et al.* 2007, 266). The negative effects of beauty ideals are multifaceted and complex, as they, among other things “shift social awareness from women’s competencies to superficial aspects of their appearance” (Forbes *et al.* 2007, 266), like in the case of the portrayal of two famous actresses. According to Scott (1997, 12), one of the oppressive effects of beauty ideals derives from the presumption that beauty is woman’s most important attribute, which is exactly what the above indicated description of actresses imply.

Another problematic depiction can be identified in the lesson centered on the events that marked the 20th century, which contains the following sentence: *Marilyn Monroe è diventata il mito della femminilità.* (“Marilyn Monroe became the myth of femininity”.) Both femininity and masculinity represent social constructs that are closely related to and reinforce gender stereotypes. According to Windsor (2015, 893) femininity is a socializing ideology that tends to cast “some forms of femininity as hegemonic, or dominant, while marginalizing and subordinating other versions of femininity”. In the patriarchal context, femininity also implies the specific physical characteristics that women are supposed to embody in order to satisfy the conventional standards of attractiveness and attract the opposite sex (Windsor 2015, 894). According to BBC, Marilyn Monroe “is perhaps Hollywood’s most enduring sex symbol”. Since the actress is remembered as the world’s most famous sex symbol of all times, the kind of femininity that she embodies is based on objectification, and as such it reflects the oppressive effects of beauty ideals (Forbes *et al.* 2015, 266). Since in this example femininity - a complex and fluid concept, is reduced to the objectified female figure, we consider it to be highly inappropriate for educational materials.

5.2.7. Fashion

Textbooks sustain the imagery of fashion as a male-dominated field, however, unlike in some of the previously analyzed domains, female figures are also included.

We will focus on one particular example from the textbook *Facilissimo: Italia è famosa per i suoi stilisti - Valentino, Fendi, Versace* (“Italy is famous for its stylists: Valentino, Fendi, Versace”). Unlike English, which as a natural gender language mostly doesn’t specify sex through human nouns and uses identical forms to indicate both women and men (e.g. *professor*) (Gygax *et al.* 2019, 4), Italian belongs to the group of grammatical gender languages, in which the grammatical gender of human nouns considerably corresponds with the sex of the referent (e.g. *professore/professoressa*) (Ivi, 3). However, the practice of using masculine generics to indicate women is still widespread in Italian language, in spite of the fact that as far as in the 1980s it was identified as a sexist marker (Sabatini 1993) that “reinforces the male-as-default ideology of a patriarchal society” (Paterson 2020). Beyond the ideological interpretation of masculine generics, they also impact language on a practical level, by generating ambiguity and uncertainty about the person they refer to. Such is the case of the above indicated sentence in which due to the fact that Fendi and Versace can refer both to men and women, it is impossible to determine with certainty if “stilisti” is used to indicate the male stylists - Edoardo Fendi and Gianni Versace, or as a generic form indicating the female representatives - Adele Fendi and Donatella Versace. Anyhow, this example confirms the implications of masculine generics identified in the previous research - they are almost always perceived as masculine, and therefore erase women from mental representations but also from discourse (Paterson 2020, 3).

Fashion is another professional sphere in which women have marginalized position. In North America most fashion design students and graduates are women - for instance The Fashion Institute of Technology had 84% women students in 2012

and 85 percent of graduates from Parsons New School for Design are women (Stokes 2015, 224). Also, labor market statistics indicate that 53.5% of working designers in the USA are women (Stokes 2015, 224). Yet, men designers are those who receive far more prestigious awards and canonizations (Ivi, 226).

According to the statistical data obtained in a survey conducted by the Business of Fashion magazine, with the aim to shed a light on gender imbalance in fashion, in 2017 out of 371 designers helming the 313 brands surveyed, 40.2% were women (Esposito 2017). The survey also showed that among the world's fashion capitals (New York, Milan, Paris, London), Milan had the lowest proportion of female designers (31%) (Esposito 2017).

6. Conclusion

The study was based upon the hypothesis that the depiction of famous female and male representatives in textbooks reflects androcentric sociocultural narrative, shaped through marginalization and/or exclusion of women from the cultural and professional domains portrayed in the textbooks. The quantitative analysis demonstrated the male prevalence in the selected textbooks - men outnumber women in the professional roles and they also occupy a much wider spectrum of professions. In the field of acting men and women are almost equally distributed, however, the analysis revealed gender inequalities and sexist connotations in the portrayal of women. From the perspective of the four-dimensional framework *exclusion/subordination/degradation/distortion* (Hellinger 1980) textbooks reflect not only exclusion, but also subordination, displayed through prevalence of men in social hierarchies associated with power and prestige, as well as degradation, since women's intellectual capacities and achievements are ignored, in spite of the fact that in each domain, as we demonstrated, there are successful and accomplished female representatives. The hierarchy established through

textbooks reflects the power-structured relations typical for the traditional patriarchal conception of society - the public sphere is depicted as an authentic male space, and men as creators of art, culture and history. The male-dominated narrative is manifested in all the textbooks comprising the sixteen-year period, which leads to the conclusion that the time factor plays no role whatsoever - the patriarchal ideologies embedded in textbooks persist and progressive tendencies oriented towards inclusion and gender equality are absent from textbooks published in the last decade.

The portrayal of famous women and men, marked by systematic erasure of women from art, culture and history, indicates that textbooks are cultural products shaped by patriarchal ideologies. As Fairclough (1989, 107) outlines, ideologies are most effective when they are disguised as common-sense. The ideological mechanisms within textbooks present difference, privilege, power as “the way things are: the obvious that goes without saying” (Ebert 1988, 26). Since textbooks naturalize the principle of male as norm, we can conclude that the concept that Millet defines as “sexual politics” constitutes an integral part of “politics of the textbooks” (Apple 1990).

Since discourse is “socially constituted as well as socially constituting” (Breit 2010, 621), it implies that educational discourse not only reflects gender inequalities and sexist ideologies entrenched in society, but it also recreates, reproduces and naturalizes them. The exemplar case analyzed in this study suggests that education, instead of transforming dominant ideologies and contributing to gender equality, continues to “rationalize and strengthen the existing relations of power and mask the conditions of oppression as non-existent” (Darder *et al.* 2016, 1).

Furthermore, in relation to the intercultural perspective, recognized as an important component of foreign language education (Bertucci and Rossetti 2019), the androcentric narrative perpetuated through textbooks, not only legitimizes

gender ideologies, but it can also produce detrimental effects related to the perception and understanding of Italian culture by foreign language learners, given that it can potentially encourage them to perceive the stereotypical vision of Italy as an authentic and non-ideological expression of Italian culture.

Being limited to the critical analysis of textbooks, this study does not provide data and insights about the implications and consequences of gender inequalities and sexism on students, which emerges as one of the fundamental concerns. Therefore, further research on the subject should be more student-centered.

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