

Heteronormativity between construction and reproduction

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Editorial

Male and female polarity are the matrix of the binary system in which we are used to reasoning, in terms of opposition and/or hierarchy. The heterosexual norm ratifies them as foundations of the family and social order and prescribes them, assigning a whole series of characteristics to a true man and a "true woman", characteristics that are not presented as a historical or cultural product, but originated from nature or conferred by divinity determining the double destiny of inclusion or exclusion for all human beings, depending on whether they manage, or not, to align with the required characteristics.

Ostilia Mulas

This monographic issue represents only a small part of an articulated path carried forward in different circles by the journal AG between 2014 and 2015. In April 2014 a first cycle of meetings was organised by us in Genoa, in collaboration with *Palazzo*

Ducale (Doges' Palace) - Foundation for culture - and some Genoese LGBTQI associations, with the title: *The invention of heterosexuality: virility, homo-transphobia and other cages*. The intent of this initiative, shared by the different creators, was to bring a reflection on the theme of heteronormativity to a wider public, thereby widening the discourse on homophobia and transphobia, which had already witnessed the realisation of different events but which, nevertheless, had succeeded in involving only a certain type of public. The intent was to exit from the already sensitised environments of the LGBTQI associations to reach more heterogeneous and transversal audiences, given that - as the brief description that accompanied the cycle recited - the heterosexual norm traces invisible boundaries in our existences. It says who we can or *cannot* be, what we can or *cannot* do. It defines our spaces, our places and our desires. It delimits our rights. Heteronormativity concerns everybody, male and female. Indeed heteronormativity prescribes the behaviours "not to assume" and at the same time it strongly codifies those considered "normal" and "correct". Just as LGBTQI subjects are marginalised by this discourse, so too heterosexuals are found to be forced to conform to it and to assume a series of attitudes that characterise femininity and normative masculinity. For many people it is fundamental to be socially recognised as "true" men or "true" women, remaining trapped in the confinements that these positions produce: virility and seductiveness, for instance (Borghi 2012).

But what does one mean by heteronormativity? The concept of heteronormativity refers to a supposed interdependence between sex, gender and sexuality (Ingraham 1996) and is based on a rigidly binary conception of genders and on the naturalisation of heterosexual desire. Non-heterosexual expressions of desire (homo- and bisexuality, transgender, inter-, asexuality etc.) are not therefore only considered as a deviation from the heterosexual norm, but they are also to be regulated in that they are always seen in relation to the heterosexual norm: indeed, there is no homo-, bi-, trans- or intersexuality without reference to heterosexuality and gender as a binary category (Jackson 2006). Nevertheless, when one speaks of 'heterosexual norm' one speaks of a hegemonic form of heterosexuality that can be described in terms of «adhesion to traditional gender and permanent monogamy» (Seidman 2005, 59-60, cited in Hofstätter, Wöllmann 2011). Therefore, not all heterosexual relationships necessarily

represent a norm; non-monogamous relationships, for instance, are socially characterised as immoral. The concept of heteronormativity, nevertheless, does not only concern the erotic and intimate dimension of heterosexuality, but also describes heterosexuality as a structure of social and cultural power, to be understood as a device that contributes to defining the relationships of gender in hierarchical terms even in contexts not characterised at a sexual level (Hofstätter, Wöllmann 2011).

The concept of heteronormativity originates from the queer theory¹ as a criticism of movements and theories that consider gender as a dichotomic category. The term seems to have appeared for the first time in the text *Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet* by M. Warner (1991) where it is intended as a “pervading and invisible feature” of current societies, connected with “the ability of heterosexual culture to self-interpret itself like society”, marginalising and defining in an antithetical sense whatsoever sexuality that cannot be ascribed to traditional heterosexual culture (Falcetta 2014). In this text, among other things, one asks the important question of considering sexuality as a category of social analysis and of analysing heteronormativity as a structure of power.

Similar approaches can be found in lesbian feminist theories. Adrienne Rich speaks, for example, of “obligatory heterosexuality” as a “political body” at the basis of “masculine domination” (1980), while Monique Wittig uses the concept of “heterosexual contract”, to underline how patriarchy produces heterosexual relationships between genders and the relationship of interdependence between gender and sexuality (1989). Another important concept preceding that of Warner’s heteronormativity is that of Judith Butler’s “heterosexual matrix” (1990), understood as that symbolic and discursive apparatus based on the norm of sexual distinction which, besides producing a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, operates through exclusion, establishing the boundary between normal and abject sexuality.

So reasoning around the relationship between heteronormativity and regulation of bodies and desires means trying to deconstruct the ways in which normative sexual hierarchies structure global processes such as migrations, forms of tourism, labour and

¹ The third issue of AG is dedicated to queer theory, edited by Luca Trappolin, in which the editorial reconstructs the state of the art in queer studies in the international context and the degree of penetration of these theories in the Italian context. For more details please follow this link: <http://www.aboutgender.unige.it/index.php/generis/issue/view/7>

welfare, this being a theme to which a monographic number of *Gender & Society* was dedicated (Vol. 23 No. 4, 2009). Certainly it is worth pointing out that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not synonymous, but to understand this one needs analyse the ways in which subjects, bodies, norms and heterosexual practices are articulated and naturalised in relation to “non-normative” genders and sexuality (Ward and Schneider 2009). It is important, in this sense, to remember Gayle Rubin’s work (1975 and 1993) and the tension between her old papers - primarily focused on pointing out how heteronormativity has worked at the service of patriarchal binary gender - and her most recent work, where attention has been turned to track the mobility, adaptability and the long-term effects of “normal sexuality”. Finally, the last decade has witnessed a wealth of feminist research informed by both approaches, just as by the developments of these within the feminist intersectional theory. Feminist sociologists have considered the co-construction of gender and heterosexuality through cultural, institutional and political-economic domains, working to show the multiplying effects of ethnic origin and social class on heterosexual subjectivity (e.g. Andersen 2008; Bettie 2003). Bringing the heterosexual paradigm into the analysis, this research has shown how heterosexual subjectivity, despite deriving from fragility, variability or “queerness”, still succeeds in deciding social femininity and masculinity (e.g. Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1994, cited in Ward and Schneider 2009).

This is the theoretical framework from which we started to organise the first cycle of meetings and to put together the call of this monographic number. In parallel with these two moments, a more public one, in which we chose to bring a certain type of reflection into a place usually inhabited by a more popular knowledge, and a more scientific one that wanted to bring the attention of different disciplinary communities toward an analytical perspective not yet so well-known or used - above all at the Italian level – we also decided to construct a political pathway. At the same time as the meetings held at *Palazzo Ducale* and at the request of some students, in fact, we summoned some LGBTQI associations, feminist networks and transversal secular groups of various nature, to set up a path of discussion and comparison starting from the themes that emerged in the conferences. This experience ended, or rather it would be more correct to say transformed, into a round table that closed the cycle of meetings. In this public

debate, animated and stimulated by a almost-performance by Helena Velena², it was decided to build a network that would bring together all the realities that had taken part in this path (from COGEDE to Amnesty, passing through the various feminist associations and the LGBTQI movements and groups). The network took the name of *Coordinamento Liguria Rainbow* and our journal, AG-About Gender, decided to become a member. In a historical moment such as now, where the actions and the attacks of the movement against the so called theory of gender³ acted at all levels, we believe it is more and more necessary to have a commitment that is not only intellectual, but also cultural and political.

As sociologists we have already positioned ourselves for some time in the perspective which, according to the Burawoy's well-known definition (2007), is called public (and partisan) sociology and which, before his discussed intervention, Bourdieu had seen as a "fighting sport"⁴. According to Bourdieu, sociology should allow us «not to act in the social world like a magnet in a magnetic field", and sociological thought should "help to recognise the forces that act on us, with the purpose of taking back our history»⁵. For this to have any meaning, sociology should also become comprehensible to the layman, but without slipping towards common sense which, on the contrary, must be brought into discussion and in some cases fought. What is necessary therefore so that research is useful - and this is the challenge that Bourdieu has left us - is to allow people to take on sociological knowledge making it comprehensible and suitable, but also of carrying out rigorous scientific work.

² Italian activist, writer and musician.

³ For an effective reconstruction of the debate against the hypothetical Ideology of Gender, see the work by Sara Garbagnoli in the column *incursions* in no. 6 of AG-AboutGender. <http://www.aboutgender.unige.it/index.php/generis/article/view/224/160>

⁴ *La sociologie est un sport de combat* is the title of the documentary, made by Pierre Carles in 2001, about Pierre Bourdieu and about his "*pensée en mouvement*", in which an attempt is made to show the struggle, generally invisible, that sociology should conduct against the dominant order. The documentary can be found on the website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aukfnAfZ7A>

⁵ Loïc Wacquant, another well-known sociologist and companion of Bourdieu in works and famous "dialogues", recalling Bourdieu's thinking starting from these phrases, says that it is necessary to think and use these terms, since sociology should serve to defend us against the symbolic domain, the imposition of categories of thought and the falsity of certain communicative codes. These considerations are taken from *La pensée en mouvement*, an interview about Pierre Bourdieu done by Olivier Cyran to Loïc Wacquant and Pierre Carles in 2001. The interview can be found on the website: <http://www.homme-moderne.org/images/films/pcarles/socio/cyran.html>

For this we deem it necessary to keep the three levels together. The intellectual one, because gender studies are a scientific field that must be recognised and legitimated, but also made to progress. The cultural one, because knowledge must cross the thresholds of academies and scientific communities to reach people, to raise awareness, to help to unveil the mechanisms of power and dominion, matters that for us have to be the main aim of sociology. The political one, to encourage a process of internal change in society.

This editorial also wishes to be accountable for the different levels of the pathway - scientific, cultural and political - with the purpose of showing its necessary complementariness. In this sense it seemed interesting to give a brief restitution of the contents that emerged during the two cycles of meetings, making available for closer examination the links available where it is possible to find and download all the recordings of the entire interventions⁶. This seems to us an important operation of circulation of knowledge: from the academy to public contexts - passing through the network - and back.

The invention of heterosexuality virility, homo-transphobia and other cages

The first cycle was opened with an intervention by Michela Marzano⁷ who dealt with the body in relation to the question of desire. Starting therefore from the distinction between being and having a body and crossing the overlap that operates between naturalness and normality and between identity and subjectivity, the philosopher introduced the relationship between sex, gender and sexual orientation to come to reason, with an appropriate glossary, on gender identity in terms of processes of social recognition and legitimation.

As already anticipated heterosexuality is, indeed, not simply to be thought of as a form of sexual expression, since it is, by definition, a relationship of gender, which

⁶ For each intervention in the first cycle it is possible to download the audio recording, for the second cycle also the video. The various links will be indicated as footnotes connected with the first citation of the speaker's name.

⁷ Philosopher, lecturer at the University of Paris V and Italian MP. Her intervention can be found online at: <http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/eventi-2014-linvenzione-delleterosessualita-marzano/>

orders not only sexual life, but that also crosses the management of resources, the division of rights and of spaces.

In her intervention Marianne Blidon⁸ carried out an analysis on how spaces incorporate, reflect and therefore naturalise the structures of power. Public space is, indeed, thought out, managed and modelled on the basis of a rigid dualistic (public/private, male/female, permissible/illegitimate, homosexual/heterosexual) conception. The regime of (in)visibility of the heterosexual norm traces borders, more or less porous, that allow us to consider the conditions and the formalities of everyone's access to public space (Blidon 2012). Spaces, indeed, incorporate, reflect and therefore naturalise the structures of power and the hierarchies of gender and, legitimating the confinements of visibility and invisibility, contribute to building the notions of adequacy and vulnerability of bodies (Borghi 2013).

Alexander Schuster⁹ tackled the juridical question starting exactly from the idea that the heteronormative paradigm, besides crossing social and moral norms, is the basis of juridical norms. The evolution of juridical conscience has allowed the progressive giving of substance to what Schuster called *homo juridicus*: «an unnamed figure, matrix and emblem of the very same juridical order. Western law, in particular from the nineteenth century on, has moved from a cast of the person as an individual of masculine sex (we would now say of gender), white, Christian, bourgeois and, lastly, heterosexual» (Schuster 2011, 39). Of the characteristics proper to this model that has more recently been unveiled with great vigour is the latent heteronormativity in the judicial system. According to his reasoning, one of the most relevant passages to abandon the paradigm of heteronormativity, a consequence of the disparity between genders and origin of discrimination due to sexual orientation, consists of the abandoning of the category of sex to embrace the new one of gender, an intermediary

⁸ Maître de conférences at IDUP, Paris 1- Panthéon Sorbonne, co-editor of the journal “Genre, sexualité & société”. Her intervention can be found online at:

<http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/eventi-2014-linvenzione-delleterosessualita-blidon/>

⁹ Lawyer, lecturer at the University of Trento. His intervention can be found online at:

<http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/eventi-2014-linvenzione-delleterosessuale-schuster/>

step toward a much broader change that might allow us, in the light of the new notion, to reread the antecedent legislation and jurisprudence¹⁰.

In his intervention Georges Louis Tin¹¹, through a historiographic perspective that covered a long period that goes from the Middle Ages to the contemporary epoch, showed how heterosexuality progressively imposed itself as the natural norm and for this it has become invisible and taken for granted. According to his vision, historiography has little questioned heterosexuality since it has become dominant in time and a criterion of definition of other forms of sexuality. Georges Louis Tin (2010) calls it therefore “invisible evidence”, previously defined as “absent presence” by Jonathan Ned Katz, the historian by whom the work of Tin is inspired and from whose book we took the title of our meetings. Indeed, Jonathan Ned Katz wrote *The invention of heterosexuality* in 1995, a text that deals with the construction, the permanence and the change to the social and cultural norms in relation to matters of sexuality. His thesis, definable in some way as constructivist, starts from the presupposition that the social and cultural categories of learning and understanding of the social and sexual order are constructs and, through an analysis above all of the nineteenth and twentieth century, shows how, even starting from Freud, the heterosexual ideal was built. Indeed, as Judith Butler has shown, the norms that determine the sexual position of individuals in society are all traceable to the norm of obligatory heterosexuality, identified as the product par excellence of the patriarchal order. The heterosexual norm governs the discourse of the West, through the production of the matrixes of psychoanalytical discourse, of anthropological discourse, including its structuralism version, and finally, and this paradoxically, is also part of the feminist discourse (Butler 1990).

¹⁰ In the measure in which jurisprudence has already revealed a discrimination by sex, the same should therefore be reread as attesting a discrimination of gender, so as not to constitute an obstacle to continuity with the past.

¹¹ Lecturer in History of sexuality at IUFM in Orleans and the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris, he is among the creators of the international day against homophobia and transphobia. His intervention can be found online at:

<http://www.palazzoduciale.genova.it/eventi-2014-linvenzione-delleterosessualita-tin/>

The invention of heterosexuality. Males and other males

It was 2013 and we were still working on the planning of what would be the first cycle of meetings at *Palazzo Ducale* on heteronormativity, when Ostilia Mulas¹², Lilia for those who knew her, friend, lesbian activist, feminist, asked to speak to us. For some time she had been going over the idea of organising some conferences on *Other* masculinities, those usually neglected in discourses and in public reflections, even in the apparently more “open” intellectual contexts, perhaps in that improperly not considered true masculinities. She had already talked to *Palazzo Ducale*, which was made available, and she already had a lot of ideas on the go, but she knew that she had little time left and wanted to make sure that, as editing board, we would take on the burden and the honour of realising this desire of hers, in case she did not have enough time.

We welcomed her request affectionately, flattered and touched by her trust, but not without strong resistance: accepting the baton meant being resigned to the idea that Lilia would be leaving us. This way we kept on postponing the moment of discussion on the contents and the only time in which we met to speak of the project, unfortunately we took no notes. The magic thought had taken the upper hand on acknowledgement of the inevitable.

When on 8th June 2014 we learned of her death, our second thought went to that promise. This way the second cycle on *The invention of heterosexuality. Males and other males* was born, a series of five meetings held in Genoa in March 2015.

This second cycle, had an unbelievable acclaim, to the point that it was necessary to move into the largest room in the building, but the real success is, in our opinion, linked with the heterogeneity of the public, transversal in terms of gender, generation, sexual orientation and commitment in civil society. In this, as in the preceding cycle, in the room there were the young and the not so young people, students and citizens, people active in LGBTQI associations as well as elderly ladies extraneous to the debate, and it was when one of these ladies spoke explaining that she was confused but that she

¹² Ostilia Mulas was President of *Arcilesbica "Sharon Kowalski"* in Genoa from 2009 to 2012, national secretary of *Arcilesbica* from 2009 to 2012 and President of *Arcigay "L'approdo"* in Genoa from 23 March 2011 to 8 June 2014, date of her death. Recently, *Arcigay "L'Approdo"* in Genoa named its territorial committee after her.

wanted to understand, that we realised that we had chosen the correct strategy with respect to the perspective of Public Sociology that we were pursuing.

The objective of this second cycle was to reflect on masculinities, problematising the tensions between hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) - by definition white, western, bourgeois and implicitly and unequivocally heterosexual - and *Other* masculinities, those that society considers, arbitrarily, subordinate, with particular reference to gay and transsexual ones. The idea was that of investigating the boundaries and border violations, the mutual conditionings, the hybridisations and the unknown spaces of subjectivity, starting from the point of view of different studios and from their respective positioning.

The first meeting. Stefano Ciccone¹³. Ciccone chose to start from himself and from his own positioning: male hetero (and we add, white, bourgeois, western and autochthonous). Starting from his own partiality to recognise subjectivity, the existence and the rights of other people, but also as an occasion to know and to reflect on himself, on his own body, on his own desire and on the cages of heterosexuality that all men and women cross. Starting from his own partiality of *being a subject among subjects*, a more enriching experience compared to the more solipsistic one of *being*. The social construction of heterosexuality, says Ciccone, gives rise to a concept of virility understood as power, as norm, as pre-historic, a virility that is defined by difference and that has to be demonstrated continually. A virility emancipated from the body and from emotions (Ciccone 2009). Masculine identity, therefore, is based on sociality, and not on corporeity. It is an identity built outside of men, and therefore always precarious. Obligatory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) does not only imply denigration of anyone who has *another* sexual orientation but structures, organises and disciplines the behaviours of all men and women. It also represents a warning for all males: anyone who steps out of the enclosure of obligatory virility will fall into the throes and every insult with a homophobic background represents a memento. Homosexuality, therefore, as a metaphor of our system of representations. It is here that men become, in this sense, terrain of conflict, because before transforming the world, every man must transform

¹³ Co-founder and ex-president of *Associazione Maschile Plurale*. His intervention can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL6a2mxnQf0>

the perception that he has of his own body, of his own fantasies and of his own desires, trying to find a space of liberty to be understood not as power, but as a relationship. Being oneself, concludes Ciccone, is always a terrain of conflict.

Also the second speaker, Cirio Rinaldi¹⁴, started from a specific positioning: male *frocio* (faggot, poof), a term used by him as a form of provocation aimed at a political reassignment of a generally denigrating appellative. Male gay (*frocio?*) and, we would add, white, western, bourgeois and autochthonous. Rinaldi's intervention forced the public to put on new glasses and to reorientate their gaze to take in unheard of nuances in comparison to the traditional representations of relationships of domination/subordination. Just as a heterosexual masculinity exists, as such hegemonic, there also exist relationships of domination in the homosexual world, improperly represented as a homogeneous whole flattened along the common condition of subordination. In reality, also within the gay world hierarchies exist and it is possible to find a hegemonic homosexuality. But how is this hegemonic homosexuality constructed? Are we really dealing, asks Rinaldi, with an unheard of masculinity, resistant and alternative to the original model? Are we sure that homosexual males embody some forms of critical masculinity and impregnated with desertion from normative masculinity? The analysis of a large quantity of media material - from the covers of the magazine *Pride* to the promotional video of LGBTQI meetings, and on to reaching the advertisements (rigorously foreign) of egalitarian marriages - induce us to answer these questions negatively. The model of hegemonic male homosexuality seems to faithfully trace that of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Hegemonic homosexual males are, indeed, represented as young, beautiful, strong, virile, muscular, sexually active people and decidedly different from females and from the loser masculinities (weak, old, ugly, fat, hardly desirable sexually and/or effeminate). Declaring oneself not effeminate, sustains Rinaldi, means constructing ourselves as subjects of gender through forms of normalisation and control of masculinity (Rinaldi 2012 and 2014). A *normal* body, a *normal* appearance, are the result of the forced reiteration of the order of gender: a specific incorporated and performative practice that is surely accomplice of

¹⁴ Sociologist and lecturer at the University of Palermo. His intervention can be found online at: <http://ducaleblog.com/2015/03/11/le-maschilite-negoziata-nellomosessualita>

hegemonic masculinity. Through confirmation of this masculinity, one confirms belonging to a masculine society and the group of privileged males. Even though starting from a positioning of a different type, Rinaldi comes, in the final analysis, to the same conclusions as Ciccone, when he states that analysing homosexual masculinities means reconsidering masculinities in their complexity.

There is, nevertheless, another aspect that emerges forcefully from these two first meetings, although perhaps latent in the debate, and that strikes, vice versa, the attention of we authors of this editorial in virtue of our personal positioning as women, sociologists and feminists: the persistence of the hierarchisation between male and female and the transversal nature of sexism, one of the outcomes of heteronormativity.

Third meeting. Roberto Todella¹⁵, offers us his point of view on masculine sexuality starting from his experience as male sexologist and from the requests for help of his patients. How to translate today the behaviour and the uneasiness of many males in relation to their own sexuality and the requests for help that sometimes derive from it? The theme of his intervention is the distinction between need and desire. Forever the expression of power and a pillar of identity, masculine sexuality - heterosexual just as homosexual - is dealing with new scenarios that disclose its fragility (Todella 2004). The predatory and abusing formality that is still proposed clashes with the fear of disappointing expectations and with the models in the media. This results in an "escape" toward easier opportunities made accessible to every age group by the technological invasion of means and proposals. In the supermarket of sex (cybersex, prostitution, sexual tourism, etc.) everything can be bought without too many risks: a virtual identity at a low price, an unconfutable virility. A fair of opportunities to rapidly satiate every need. On the other hand, the desire, that feeds itself on the wait and on images of the other, risks to be locked away among old stereotypes of gender and infuriating models of the ability to perform. What space then for desire, for the shared pleasure in a relationship and for the intimate love that includes them? What space for the freedom that Ciccone hoped for?

¹⁵ Sexologist and president of CIRS, *Centro interdisciplinare di ricerca sulla sessualità*, founded by Jole Baldaro Verde. His intervention can be found online at: <http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/sexualita-maschile-bisogno-desiderio/>

Fourth meeting. Rachele Borghi¹⁶, introduces her intervention with a reflection, in line with that of Blidon in the preceding cycle, on how bodies cross and live in public space which, in spite of appearances, is never neutral (Blidon 2012; Borghi 2013). It is, indeed, the concept of normality, as socially constructed, that defines the criteria of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of which there are *right* bodies (such as those of white, heterosexual, autochthonous, middle class, tall and healthy men) and *inadequate* bodies (such as those of women - at night or in certain places - of men not adhering to the model of winning masculinity, of foreign or socially marginal people, homosexuals, transsexuals or diversely-abled). Inadequate bodies are noticed more and attract our gaze more easily, which can be a look of curiosity or of disapproval that can also become threatening and violent. Inadequate bodies, in a few words, do not enjoy what the anthropologist Delgado, interviewed by us some years ago in *Yo non me complico*¹⁷, a documentary produced by the Laboratory of Sociology in Genoa, defined the *right to indifference*. There is therefore a socialisation of gender to the use of public space, for which one learns to cross the space conforming oneself to norms considered adequate to the meanings socially attributed to bodies.

One learns to move in space, just as one learns to become a man, even if later memory of such a learning path does not remain. In this sense, Rachele Borghi explains, the Drag King can be thought of as a political tool, in that it represents a form of unveiling of the socialisation of genders. Disguising oneself as a man and putting masculine roles on show, one understands how one becomes a man, how one learns to become a man, how masculinities are incorporated and consolidated. As Simone De Beauvoir would indeed say today: *males are not born*.

Males are not born, but one becomes a male through a long path of socialisation. And this consideration leads us in a natural way to the fifth and last meeting with Stephen

¹⁶ Social geographer, lecturer at the Sorbonne in Paris and Drag King performer. Her intervention can be found online at: <http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/drag-king-mettere-in-scena-decostruire-rappresentazioni-maschilita/>

¹⁷ *Yo no me complico* indeed deals with gender border violations i.e. social resistance that is produced when the social order of gender is broken by those who do not come into the socially prescribed dichotomic categories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc2xqvXv65Q>

Whittle¹⁸, a university professor and, above all, a transsexual man. What does becoming men mean? Whittle tries to reply to this complex question through a reflection on the experience of people that became men at an adult age, in a period of life, therefore, in which learning is aware: transsexual men no longer young. Dealing with people who have taken hormones and who have undergone surgical reassignment of sex already as adults to finally have their desired body, talking to them can be illuminating to understand the key dimensions to becoming men. Through their experience, we are able to know the courage of young boys, in as much, as already remembered by Ciccone and Rinaldi, and implicitly also by Todella, being men costs fatigue, since one is never male enough (Kimmel 2012; La Cecla 2010), regardless of sexual orientation.

Thus the theme returns of the cages of males from which we started at the beginning of the cycle, and of the constrictive power of a heteronormative order that compresses the areas of freedom in the name of the maintenance of a symbolic order founded on the hierarchisation of genders and sexual orientations.

The articulation of this monographic issue

This special issue on heteronormativity opens with the contribution of Marci Cottingham and Jill Fisher, in which the authors propose a stimulating reflection on the role of heteronormativity in North American biomedical research. More specifically, the idea is that clinical tests on medicines and the informed consent linked to them, are places of reproduction of the sex/gender binarism and of the heterosexual norm. Indeed, the inclusion/exclusion criteria naturalise a binary system of gender that makes heterosexuality appear inevitable and the female body as primarily fertilisable and, therefore, to be protected. Such a representation thus tends to make LGBTQI people (just as those not sexually active) invisible, and to reproduce the idea of an active and responsible male, and of a female to be protected since she is incapable of managing her own fertility.

¹⁸ Lecturer in Equality of Laws at Manchester Metropolitan University. His intervention can be found online at: <http://www.palazzoducale.genova.it/maschi-maschi-i-percorsi-nelle-transizioni-ftm/>

One of the territories on which the heteronormative paradigm seeks a base and legitimation, and on which reactionary movements, who define themselves as against the “theory of gender”, consequently find easy rooting is the idea that just one “natural” family model exists, the one based on a monogamous heterosexual couple. Any analysis of historical or anthropological matrix can easily show that family forms, just as the relationship between public and private and the relations of gender, have been and still are variegated and multiform and that the so-called traditional family is just «one of the many adaptations that family life has had over the centuries» (Casanova 2009). The fact then that the adjective “natural” is often used as a synonym of “traditional” is a further functional device to construct the discourse of the normality of the monogamous heterosexual family in opposition to all the other possible forms of affectivity and family. This discourse, nevertheless, has permeated the thoughts of legislators in the West who will base the juridical norms on the basis of models that are structured around the roles and the functions of the white, heterosexual and bourgeois male (Schuster 2011). Through the process of juridification, the law tends to make heteronormative assumptions appear normal and natural; at the same time however, at least in certain circumstances, the law can operate an instrument of repair for the discriminations founded on sexual orientation and on the gender identity of people, contributing to overturn the heteronormative social order and to anticipate “desirable” cultural changes (MacKinnon 1987 and 1993).

The contributions of Silvia Falchetta and Daniele Ferrari, starting from an analysis of the most recent legislative, jurisprudential and doctrinal developments on the subject, both reflect, at times also in a comparative way, on the argumentative paths that still tend to exclusively recognise rights to that model of subject and social formation that comes into the heteronormative ideal, but also on the instruments and formalities through which in some judicial systems the juridical culture or part of it, has moved and/or is moving in the direction of abandonment of the so called heteronormative dualism, based on the assumption that there is just one “correct” sexual orientation and just one model of acceptable family deserving protection at the juridical level.

Silvia Falchetta’s paper concentrates on the relationship between heteronormativity and judicial interpretation, with specific reference to the jurisprudence of the European

Court of human rights on the theme of sexual orientation. According to her analysis, which uses a specific declination of heteronormativity for the juridical context, the judicial interpretation represents an important symbolic key to promote a legal culture free from a heteronormative perception of sexuality and the family.

Daniele Ferrari's paper instead concentrates on the relationship between homophilia and subjective juridical condition in the matrimonial institution. The presupposition from which it moves is that the choice of different European States to introduce formulas of juridical recognition of couples formed by people of the same sex, has determined an important evolution in the criterion that the interpreters of the different national constitutions use to attribute the right to marry to subjects and to set up a family; in particular the juridical and cultural evolution of the notion of marriage and family, that has happened at normative level, has filtered into the interpretation of national constitutions when the constitutional courts, called on to establish the legitimacy of homosexual marriage, have affirmed the neutrality of sexual orientation with respect to the institution in question. The Italian situation, on which Ferrari's analysis is concentrated, is different. Here heterosexuality has ended up assuming the function of criterion of interpretation of the dispositions and constitutional principles; such orientation of the Italian Constitutional Court - which has sustained the existence of «a constitutionally defined notion of *coniugio* (marriage), centred on the difference of gender of the subjects and that accordingly has excluded homosexual couples from this institution» - this would also have a limitative effect on the discretion of parliament with respect to this subject.

The theme of sexual orientation returns in Armela Xhaho's paper, which takes its cue from a homophobic reaction to an episode of coming out of one of the participants on the Big Brother reality show, to reflect on the relationship between homophobia and Albanian nationalism. The analysis of the discourses of the men that resulted in the protest - aimed at throwing the boy, who came out in the open through the media, out of the country - reveals how homosexuality is understood, by the group in question as a collective shame and a betrayal not only of hegemonic masculinity, but also of the blood and honour of the nation. The rhetoric used contextually is indeed founded on misogynous, homophobic and heterosexist national values, on the basis of which

heterosexual and heteronormative men represent the dominant norm. In this perspective, defending the state means defending hegemonic (heterosexual, misogynous and homophobic) masculinity.

Heteronormativity, nevertheless, conditions all men and women and the idea that heteronormativity is not constructed only for opposition to homosexuality is well illustrated by the contribution from Elisa Virgili, focused on the role of language within the heteronormative system. The analysis of hate speech and of the insult *slut* is, in this sense, illuminating, in as much, as Butler reminds us (1997), it is offences that performatively reproduce the social subordination that they name. Thus hate speech contributes to mould hierarchies between identity and subjects through a process in which hegemonic affirmation and alterisation feed one another reciprocally. Language, however, also holds a subversive potential (Butler 1997), since in quotation and in repetition I am knowingly able to give a term another meaning taking repossession of it, a political action adopted by Rinaldi in his defining himself *frocio* (faggot, poof), for instance. Virgili dwells on this performative dimension of language, reflecting and problematising the concept of resignification starting from an analysis of the movement of *Slut Walks* and the criticisms aimed at them.

Finally, Eugenio Zito, through a mythological, anthropological and literary excursus, describes a Capri that, between the nineteenth and twentieth century, becomes a place of cultural experimentation of gender identity not subjected to heteronormative obligations. Due to a series of historical and political circumstances, Capri in a certain historical period becomes a privileged destination in which those not conforming to the heteronormative models of the epoch can find not only shelter, but also a “border of sense” of alternative community spaces to the social order.

In Zito’s work, the operativisation of the concept of heteronormativity, according to an original and at times surprising multidisciplinary perspective, aims to disclose the relativity of the gender order, showing once more how historical and social conditions build the conditions of normality and deviance, but also, and above all, how it is always possible to construct spaces and practices of resistance and subversion.

Using the heteronormative paradigm as the key to reading the analyses and the reflections produced in research carried out in the field of gender studies, did not prove

to be an easy assignment and the fact that the call was answered by many contributions not completely centred on the theme is a demonstration of how heteronormativity is still a little used perspective. Perhaps because, as Hofstätter, Birgit & Wöllmann, Torsten (2011) sustain, for the same researchers (male or female) it is a concept that can result opaque in that it is strongly introjected. Heteronormativity, indeed, has a strong impact on the way in which the world is interpreted and consequently on the way in which research is carried out, and it is for this reason that we at AG-About Gender deemed it opportune to go into depth on the theme moving ourselves on the three levels illustrated above - scientific, cultural and political - so as to train ourselves (to use once again the sports metaphor used by Bourdieu) not to reproduce it in the construction of knowledge.

We will continue therefore to work in this direction, already taken at the beginning of the adventure of AG having chosen to dedicate one of the first numbers of the journal - edited by Luca Trappolin - to the queer theory and to its role in the construction of social reality, but we will also keep on looking for different ways to put knowledge into circulation. Also for this reason, despite the efforts that it involves, we are carrying on with an open-access, online scientific journal, since we believe that free access to scientific production is both an essential objective, just as to continuing to “to go down the road and talk to people”.

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