

A relational approach for the understanding of the hegemonic masculinities. Insights from Pierre Bourdieu, Georg Simmel and Marianne Weber

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of relationality between man and woman and how this can undermine the forms of masculine hegemony in the society. Simmel's relational approach, rooted in an essentialist vision of gender construction, and Bourdieu's constructivist realism, seem not effective in questioning the gender relation in itself. Indeed, both are more concerned to how hegemony works in crystallizing gendered roles in the society and less on how this changes or can change. The binary scheme that informs Simmel's and Bourdieu's efforts in understanding power in gender relations is,

in line with Marianne Weber's statement, the main obstacle that hides relations generative of social transformations. Nowadays the symbolic negotiations between the pluralities of gender configurations require a focus on the relationality and we share this analytical perspective. Indeed, it is from the point of view of the social construction of gender that it seems to be possible to approach the hegemonic masculinity and how it changes in different times and places.

Keywords: masculine hegemony, objective culture, objective relations, social change.

1. Introduction

Traditional masculine qualities seem to be less and less connected to the *dominant* social and economic positions, even in political institutions. A complex process of transformation in the gender social construction has deeply reshaped the morphology of the society itself. These major social changes are debated within social sciences, for instance with reference to the cultural and institutional sphere (Fraser 2013), to gender family roles and as well as to the feminisation of labour market (Crompton 2006). At the same time scholars identify enduring gender inequalities in terms of *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell 1987, 1995) looking at hierarchies both between and within sexes. This concept has been fruitful in addressing how gender relations are shaped by cultural domination, in Gramscian terms, and exercised throughout ideological means and social legitimization. The dynamics at stake here are clearly different (and more complicated than) violence and impositions, actually they are a matter of consensus and acceptance. Indeed, the hegemonic character is situated in times and places, translated and reconfigured within specific settings of social relations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 844). Moreover masculinity is unfolded on different layers, not only in terms of micro relations but also as a construction of political and cultural discourse or, wider, as a globalized representation of values (and related stereotypes). The three layers are deeply interconnected in the objectivation of what we recognize as male domination. This acknowledgment of how diversified can be the process of social construction of

hegemony doesn't imply relativism tout court neither does it black out a critical analysis of power relations (Van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005, 8). To investigate the transformations of the hegemonic masculinity (and masculinities), the rejection of a trait approach of the dominant man and of an essentialist idea of what hegemony arises from, seems to be uncontroversial. Here we will attain a specific issue of the hegemonic masculinity that is its objectivation through social relationality. So we consider gender as a social product that is constantly negotiated and reconfigured in specific settings of social relations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 844). As stated above, we focus on the relational dimension of this process of social construction recalling three sociologists (Georg Simmel, Pierre Bourdieu and Marianne Weber), which were definitely attentive towards the relational morphology of gender in their historical contexts. We choose these authors in order to discuss the way they conceptualized masculinity (and its hegemony) and how the first two, differently from the third one, underestimate the role of women in the relational enactment of mutual expectations, roles, routines and values as well.

Our heuristic argument is designed and structured as follows. In the next two paragraphs we start our line of reasoning respectively from discussing what Simmel names as «objective culture» and from the explanation of how masculine domination works according to Bourdieu. In doing so we sketch an argument on relationality beyond and further these theoretical insights. Indeed we retrace in Simmel's writings the argument about the fragmentation of the male condition in the modernity and how he ontologizes differences (and related asymmetries) between sexes. Similarly, the Bourdieusian argument about the masculine domination will be discussed in order to put in evidence how the power relations are at the core of the theoretical explanation while gender relationality seems to remain in the background.

The last part of the article is dedicated to Marianne Weber and her contribution to the relational understanding of gender asymmetries. Her point of view seems crucial in complicating the relational scheme adopted both by Simmel and Bourdieu, in order to scrutinize the morphology of societies they were living in. We try to underline the theoretical relevance of relationality, neither reduced to an ingredient of power asymmetries nor confined in a deterministic explanation of the hegemonic (male)

character. This could push further the sociological critique on gender asymmetries in line with Connell's commendable aim of problematizing the social construction of men's hegemonic hierarchies.

2. Simmel: the *objectification* and the supremacy of male culture

Simmel's contribution is fundamental for the emphasis on human interactions and their objectification in the modern cultural forms, especially for his view of the male character of this process. Simmel explicitly identifies the modernity as masculine and asserts that the male sex is acknowledged as superior and dominant in the society.

The male sex is not merely superior in relation to the female but acquires the status of the *generally human*, governing the phenomena of the individual male and the individual female in the same way. In various media, this fact is grounded in the power position of men (Simmel 1923 [1984, 103]).

In Simmel's writings, the ontological considerations on the features the society assumes constitute the indispensable background to understand his analyses on gender asymmetries. The key issue is about the dualism in the interactions with the coexistence of polarities in mutual opposition, what Vandenberghe (1999a, 7) sees as a kind of *dialectic without synthesis*. In the web of interactions the human being has a crucial place, and his vital and creative force appears as the real motor of change in societies. This human creativity is displayed in a *cultural* process that mutually links the potential of the individuals to the *objectification* of their products. In the modernity, the dualism between the human *subjective culture* and the products transformed in *objective culture* ends up generating a tragic mutual opposition. It is in this perspective that Simmel questions the gender relations (Vromen and Degraef 1989, 13).

Simmel is mainly a philosopher but easily passes from philosophy to sociology in exposing his theses on the society. In *Soziologie*, the collection of essays written from 1894 to 1906, and particularly in the famous *How is Society Possible?* (1910), he reflects on the *a priori*, in the neo-Kantian sense (see Simmel's *Kant und Goethe*, 1906

[2008]), a set of general concepts, which give coherence to the *form* performed by the social interactions with their reciprocal effects on individuals (Papilloud 2000, 116). Indeed, these concepts are only a representation of the reality, related to a specific time and space, but they are at the basis of the *objective culture* as resulted from the process of *objectification*. For Simmel, the *form* is a conceptual tool to analyse the society as a *continuum* from the historical social transformations to the changes in face-to-face interactions.¹ Also if the patterns of social evolution are recalled from Darwin's and Spencer's organicism, as recognized in contemporary Tönnies's theses, Simmel rejects the unitary character of the society and the individual egoism as the only sentiment moving social changes (Lichtblau 1989-1990). He asserts that the modern society is the ending point of historical transformations and the process of structuring the society arises from human interactions.

In the modernity, the individuals are finally located at the *geometric point of the intersection of different social circles*, relatively free in moving within the more and more differentiated society, and really *creative* in performing different identities, actions and emotions, integration and conflict (Cavalli 1998). The *creative impetus of life*, as Bergson says, or, in Simmel's terms, the *subjective culture*, lets the individual produce and reproduce, and also transform cultural products. The problem of the modernity is that, by attaining the *objective form*, these products follow an immanent and autonomous logic of development, so that they can even display power on the individual. Like Marx, Simmel describes the process of alienation where the *form* is opposite and incapable to express the vital *subjective culture*. The historical paradox, true sign of the modernity, is that the individuals need to internalize the external cultural values to develop themselves and excel in the society. At the same time they cannot fully assimilate these values because the cultural development and especially the accentuated division of labor cause an increasing alienation. And again, like Marx and Durkheim, Simmel sees in the highly developed division of labor the strong constraint to the full development of *subjective culture* in creating the *cultural form* of the society.

¹ *Form* is a Simmelian concept that inspires Elias's *configuration*, but it is questionable up to day. Papilloud says that it was Durkheim who refused the metaphysical approach of Simmel and gave a restricted interpretation of this concept. See Durkheim's Italian article: "La sociologia e il suo dominio scientifico", *Rivista italiana di sociologia*, n. 4, 1900, pp. 127-148.

Simmel describes the modernity thinking about *man*, because the only human being involved in the division of labor and amenable to the specialization of functions is unequivocally male. In essays as *The Relative and Absolute in the problem of sex* (1911-1912 but lastly published in 1923), *The Female Culture* (1911), and *How is Society Possible?* (1910), he claims that the male is the being determined by and for the division of labor, so making evident the male character of the modern cultural universe. Frisby (1981, 123-124) rightly points out a line connecting the process of *objectification* to the *division of labor* and *male experiences of life*. And Oakes highlights how «through the medium of the division of labor there is an effective affinity between objectification and masculinity» (1984, 22-25).

Historically, this process of objectification involves the relationships of superiority and inferiority that Simmel in *Superiority and Subordination* (1896, 169) affirms to be the two polarities found in every human association. In spite of this male characterization of the whole modern society, men are involved in relationships between dominants and subordinates. Thus, there are social hierarchies, but if the hierarchy between men is found especially in the field of economics, the asymmetric relations between men and women will be found in the family².

Consistent with the *a priori* in every specific society, the forms of supremacy and subordination change over time, as a progressive liberation of the individual from the pre-modern total dependency. In the modernity, the form of the social asymmetry assumes a novel character. Regarding this issue, we find some key points in Simmel. Firstly, the dominion seems to be rooted in the social stratification. «Since the power gradually percolates, a continuity and graduation of superiority and inferiority must develop itself» (Simmel 1896, 176). Secondly, it becomes functionally specific and limited to a particular time and place so that the individuals are involved up to a certain extent. The modern employer, for example, cannot go so far as to control the whole personality of the worker, because the power is exercised within the limits of the specific economic context and for a specific number of hours. Out of this context, the

² Simmel's *On the Sociology of the Family* is a text that may also be read in the context of Simmel's contributions to the sociology of gender (Frisby 1998, 278). Simmel will speak about the female relations between unequal human beings in the familiar context. We will see that in the next paragraph.

same worker takes part in other social relations in other social circles, where he can become dominant, thus compensating inferiority in one area by superiority in another. Thirdly, the objectification of cultural and moral principles, although created by the subjectivity of the dominant, entails the de-personalization of the dominion as well as the modern subordination, which is the tragic emblem of the modernity.

The case of the organization of work shows the increasing predominance of technical elements over the personal ones. «The superior and the inferior are equally subordinated to an *objective* purpose, the subordination of the one to the other persists only as a *technical necessity*» (Simmel 1896, 186). In the labor relations, Simmel leads us to see the contract of the wageworker in the perspective of a relation of exchanging labor as an economic good rather than a rental contract. In this way, the relationship can be considered «only a subordination to cooperative progress, which is essential for both the entrepreneur and modern worker» (*Ibidem*). The cooperation between a dominant man and a subordinated man increases the self-consciousness of the latter, who feels like being part of the process of objectification.

He has no longer the feeling that he is a subject person. He regards himself only as servant of an objective economic *technique*, within which the element that as entrepreneur or leader is superior to himself works no longer as a personal superior, but simply as a technical necessity [...]. He now belongs to the relationship only as a factor of the process of production, thus in so far *coordinate with the leader* (Simmel 1896, 187).

In the modernity, Simmel sees the hegemony of a superior male playing through the extension and de-personalization of his power. This seems to be similar to a process of legitimation of that superior male, who represents and practises the authority given by the objectified power.

It is quite different the case of the *pater familias*, whose traditional arbitrary power becomes a feeling of responsibility, and therefore he is seen no longer as an authoritarian owner but only as a manager entrusted with safeguarding familiar interests (Simmel 1896, 186). In his essay *On the Sociology of the Family* (1895) Simmel adopts

his usual epistemological scheme, here in evident debt to Spencer's theory, in order to analyse the evolution of the asymmetric relations between men and women until the modernity. He illustrates how the paternity passes from the old possession regarding children through the possession of the mother-wife, towards a relation mediated by the private ownership requiring the absolute fidelity on the part of wife.

Recalling Spencer's evolutionary scheme applied to the gender relations, Simmel seems to draw the increasing distinction between men and women as rooted in the rational division of labor within the marriage as well as in the whole modern society. From this point of view, it is not love, which is metaphysic and unexplainable, but the reciprocal and distinctive duties that assure the social functions of the modern family. Not to mention that this form of gender relations makes the superiority among social groups and social circles:

Marriage brings about a division of labor between man and woman, which primarily benefits the children. The wife feeds the children and the husband furnishes the wife food; or the husband provides the food and the wife prepares it for him and the children [...] marriage creates a direct superiority of the group with respect to a group without marriage [...] (Simmel 1895 [1998, 291]).

However, Simmel finally underlines that the asymmetric relations between men and women go on changing *as commandments of simple justice*, and this passage sounds as very sensitive to the movements of women's emancipation.

The issue of paternity was not so significant, as it were, as long as no serious consequences with respect to property were associated with it. [...]. It brings about the demand for absolute marital fidelity on the part of wife [...]. This demand on the man probably only occurs to the extent that the equality of women grows, as a result of which those limitations to which women are subjected also appear to men as commandments of simple justice - even though the real cause which brought them to existence for women does not apply to men (Simmel 1895 [1998, 289]).

3. The essential dualism between male and female cultures

Simmel argues that the distinction between the *male breadwinner* and the *housewife* is the result of the modern dissociation between the market economy and the household. The former is the public realm of the man as developed into differentiated and specialized human being, the latter the private realm of the woman as unified and undifferentiated (Simmel 1890 [2004, 52]). Consequently, not only the difference between high-ranking and low-ranking women is much smaller than the same levels between men, but also the domestic culture leads the female psyche to adopt home as a symbol and women not to get interested in occupations outside the house (Simmel 1904 [2004, 213]). Even in his late writings Simmel says that «the home remains the supreme cultural achievement of women» (Simmel 1911 [1984, 97]) and «the entire history demonstrates [...] the division of labor is incomparably more congruent with male nature than with the female» and justifies it with the male experiences in the objective world (Simmel 1911 [1984, 70]).

In other words, the gender dualism arises as from two separate spheres, each of them projecting a different ethical model (Wobbe³ 2004, 62-63, Oakes 1984, 26-29). Thus, whilst the hierarchical relations between men show the social stratification and the fragmentation related to the modern division of labor, it is in the family that gender asymmetries are performed. However, Simmel goes beyond the study of this historical level of gender relations⁴ for two reasons, we suppose. One is theoretical: evident contradictions seem to be opened in his social theory when the cultural development is found within the living experiences, also for women (Antinolfi 2004, 24). In line with this, Witz points out that Simmel «exiles metaphysically women from the social» by crafting «a deep masculine ontology of the social, in the form of an a priori» (2001, 353). The other reason is theoretical and political at the same time: Simmel becomes aware of the *breakthrough* in the history of women, when the outlines of the difference between sexes are pointed out (Fraisie 1996, 86-87). He feels involved in this new

³ Wobbe quotes Simmel's *Psychology of women* in original version, 1890, 28-44, and more precisely 46.

⁴ Most of criticisms claim that contemporary level of gender relations has influenced Simmel's point of view so that his analyses *ontologize* his own experience of living, but we agree with Oakes (1984, 7-8) that this happened to Marx, Freud and every theorist, indeed.

philosophical and political culture by discussing this issue with some cultivated feminists⁵ (Wobbe 2004, 54-68) and confronting directly the emergent Women's Movement in Germany.

He takes up themes as the form of gender interactions and the cultural and power constraints upon the development of a distinctive *female culture* in about 15 essays from 1890 until his death in 1918. In the essays on *the problem of the sex*, firstly collected by Oakes⁶ (1984), Simmel seems to accept the traditional ethics by assuming the female modes of the experience of sexuality and the interactions with men as rooted in the household's cultural space. But, at the same time, he establishes the modern autonomy of the female culture, by distinguishing human beings into two absolute forms of being-a-man and being-a-woman. For most of the influential feminist criticism, his sociological analyses of the male-dominated character of the social and cultural forms of modernity make him «remarkably prescient in its anticipation of elements of contemporary feminist critique» (Witz 2001, 354), and absolutely a reference for the essentialist feminism (Collin 1989, Oakes 1984).

Simmel, in effect, underlines the essential diversity of the female human being, based upon the self-contained nature and the absence of the dualism that characterizes the whole existence of the modern man.

The more refined sensitivity and the pronounced vulnerability of women may also rest on this disposition rather than upon the more fragile or delicate structure of their individual psychic elements [...] there is a sense in which the lack of differentiation and the self-contained uniformity of woman's psychic nature make it impossible for any attack upon her to remain localized. [...]. This is because they have a more integral nature, in which the part has not differentiated itself from the whole and taken on an autonomous life (Simmel 1911 [1984, 70]).

⁵ Feminists as his wife, the philosopher Gertrude Kinel, who used to write under the pseudonym Marie Louise Enckendorf, his lover friend, the poet Gertrude Kantorowicz, and, specifically, Marianne Weber, the philosopher wife of Max Weber and the major critical reader of his works on Female Culture.

⁶ More recently, Antinolfi (2004) has collected a number of Simmel's writings on women and their relations to the objective culture as well as to the sex in order to draw out the radical questions that are important to discuss yet today. For the Italian translation of Simmel's work on women, see also more recently the collection edited by Perucchi in 2016.

Then, as *cultural beings*, women do not have the specific capacity of the male in generating cultural products, which assume the modern form of the *objective culture*, but as not involved in this tragic dualism of modernity, women are not tormented by the difficulties in incorporating the relatively unreachable *objective culture*, in order to develop the individual personal culture. For men, the way to overcome these difficulties is highlighted through an increasing awareness and cooperation between men, mainly in the economic field characterized by an advanced division of labor. For women, untouched by the economic fragmentation, given the condition of a harmonious unity expressed in the domestic relations, the issue of cooperation does not exist. Simmel admits there is a rising cooperation in women's movements, because of interactions between equals, which was impossible in the household, because of interactions between men and women, evidently unequal (Wobbe p. 63 quote *Soziologie* 1908, 315-336).

Simmel terms female character as intuitive, emotional, even positively illogic, definitively antagonistic to the cultural male products, as a legal and ethical system of values⁷. But, Simmel cannot just fail to see that women's emancipation claims the right to active participation in the labor market, especially in the professions, a very masculine field⁸. He is sceptical and in a certain sense he seems tormented (see conclusions of *The Female Culture*, 1911) about the possibility for female subjective culture to be objectified, as replacements for the cultural male sphere or as completely different cultural products.

Our culture is male not only with respect to its contingent contents but also with respect to its form as objective culture. Suppose that the active bearers of this culture experience influences, no matter how profound, from women. There is no sense in which this makes the culture as such "female" [...] it is a problem [...] the question of whether the objectivation of its contents does not contradict the innermost essence of the distinctively female existence [...]. The concept of objective culture seemed to be so abstract that, even if historically it had been

⁷ Oakes (1984, 47) notes that the essentialist thesis of the feminist Carol Gilligan supports the main claims of Simmel's essays "Female culture" and "The relative and absolute in the problem of sex".

⁸ Even though Simmel makes a distinction between middle-class and salaried women when he sees the dangerous effects of a neglect of familial and parental care (Oakes, 27-28).

realized only by male contents, the idea of a future female realization of its contents could still be possible. But perhaps objective culture [...] is so heterogeneous vis-à-vis the female nature that the idea of an objective female nature is a contradiction in terms [...] (Simmel 2011 [1984 95 ss.]).

4. Bourdieu: the *objectivation* of masculine domination

The relationality is definitely at the core of the epistemology which the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu lies on (Vandenberghe 1999b). He rejects a *substantialist* approach in the conceptualization of social positions claiming for their relational nature, even if in a very peculiar way (Bottero 2009). Indeed he detects in the *objective relations*⁹ one of the main *foci* of analysis for the sociologist who has the conceptual tools (and the moral commitment) to unfold those collective interactions from which modes of domination, and freedom as well, arise (Bourdieu 1989a; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The relationality can be intended as the main feature of those *fields* that for Bourdieu are objective structures of relations (Bourdieu 1982) in which actors express and perform their agency. At the same time relationality plays a fundamental role connecting this structural/objective/field of interactions with the so called *subjective dispositions* that are expressed in terms of *habitus* that, in turn, is intended as a «system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action» (Bourdieu 1990a, 12-13).

Gender was poorly developed within the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and some feminist scholars underlined an androcentric bias in his theoretical proposal about social order. Actually the debate about the legacy of Bourdieu to gender studies includes different stances (Lovell 2002), some of them suggesting a reformulation of the relational scheme linking habitus and field, through a *gendered* idea of the cultural capital (McCall 1992). In this case the aim is to overcome the binary classification system (masculine/feminine) that, for Bourdieu, is the way social actors signify their

⁹ With this label Bourdieu doesn't refer to relations that are objective in itself, but to those connections between agents that are placed in different social positions that, in turn, are endowed by different quantities and forms of resources (Bourdieu 1989b).

life in the social world (Laberge 1995)¹⁰. Others stressed the strong commitment of Bourdieu in the work of deconstruction of the taboo about the feminine circumstances (Susca 2011, Giannini forthcoming/a).

In order to understand how the Bourdieusian relational scheme explains the mutual construction of the masculine dominance and the feminine subordination, we need to complicate the previous theoretical snapshot by looking on how forms of cultural capital, symbolic violence and habitus are intertwined in the construction of what Bourdieu considers as an objectified system of domination. In doing so we make reference mainly to those writings of Bourdieu in which gender is explicitly debated (1984, 1990b, 1998)¹¹.

The pivotal line of reasoning in Bourdieu's conceptualization of gender is that the socialization process reproducing the hegemonic representation of masculinity is objectified in the social structures (and in the fields) and is incorporated in subjective perceptions. In this way the gender order is an artificial establishment that is reified in symbolic terms, it becomes something that people acknowledge as real in their subjective disposition because it is performed as real in the objective relations structure. This reasoning is quite close to that one Bourdieu provides for the analysis of social distinction, when he describes how differences of status among agents are built upon the reasonable, practical, legitimate and shared knowledge that embodies asymmetric social structures (Bourdieu 1984). Thus, the dominant man is first of all something different from the subordinate women because of their specific (that is to say gendered) way of distribution of cultural capital, strictly related with their real *power* and their position in the space of the objective relations (Susca 2011).

In *La domination masculine*¹², the statement that gender represents one of the fundamental symbolic classifications of social order entails that gender lines up firstly with the way the agents adopt to classify themselves with reference to the other in a

¹⁰Ashall (2004) put in evidence how Bourdieu recalls and updates the argument of Levi-Strauss about gender translating it from the original intellectual context to a post-structuralist and materialist framework.

¹¹ At the same time we need to recall works of Bourdieu's works on reproduction and on objectivation of power as well, because gender is mainly presented as a matter of power relations.

¹² "La domination masculine" is the title of an article of 1990 as well as of a book published in 1998. In the article of 1990 Bourdieu recalls more extensively the descriptions by Virginia Woolf of the complicity between man and woman in the ordinary maintenance of the masculine dominion.

hierarchical social world. This book is primarily focused on how the domination is a *mise-en-scène* of objective relations through a recursive pattern of social practices. The consistent similarity with Goffman in looking how people face freedom and constraints in their everyday life is clear. Generally speaking, individuals react to those that they consider unfair conditions in line with a *sens pratique* (Bourdieu 1980) that is to say they enact a reasonable (more than a reflexive) strategy linked to the position in the social structure (class, age and gender as well) (Giannini *et. al* 2017).

So, social relations, including gender relations, are performed in a mundane and «gentle way» which naturalizes asymmetries (McNay 1999). The empirical background here is the ethnography with Kabilians in Algeria carried out in the sixties where Bourdieu shows the complex interplay of objective relations and subjective dispositions in the social construction of masculine domination, even if sometimes it is not clear enough how much the function of the symbolic market of gendered values can be extended to other contexts. This is a symptom of what was considered a sort of overlapping between the general theory of power relations and the explanation of how symbolic gender classification works in Kabyle society (Lovell 2002). Bourdieu puts in evidence how the *bodily hexis* of women is the external manifestation of a historical process of incorporation that objectifies what he acknowledges in terms of objective relation of inequality between sexed social roles. In other terms the relation of domination affects both male and female habitus in a sort of pre-conscious script. Then he shows in detail how the symbolic violence works through the shared meanings of those qualities ascribed to sexed bodies and enacted through the ordinary patterns of practice performed in everyday life. In particular the symbolic violence is entrenched on an artificial (but socially reified) differentiation and segregation between what is considered nobility, virility and strength from what is not. In a way, man is the dominant agent also because of the embodied nature of woman with her perceptions, disposition, and behaviour; in short with her feminine habitus. From this point of view the process of embodiment of social structures that Bourdieu talks about is made *through* relations but not *by* these relations:

Dispositions (*habitus*) are inseparable from the structures (*habitudines*, in Leibniz's sense) that produce and reproduce them, in both men and women, and in particular from the whole structure of technical and ritual activities that is ultimately grounded in the structure of the market in symbolic goods. (Bourdieu 2001[1998], 67)

5. *Illusio* and distance. The *lucidity* of the dominates

The gendered *habitus* is a *socialized subjectivity* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 2) that is expressed in action by the agents in the *illusio* that they choose which part to play in a game. The marriage is the main game that performs the market of the symbols we are referring to. Men participate, as well as women do, in line with the legitimate expectations of the social order. In doing so, both of them are rewarded within a binary scheme that puts in *objective* relation the subject of dominance (male) with the object (female). Indeed, Bourdieu shows how women are considered in terms of very special goods, objects of desire and exchange as well, with an intrinsic and distinctive value that is femininity. Very feminine women are the right reward for the best men that, in turn, have to lead the game of the production in society. How can this specific way to enact the female agent, as well as the dominant male agent, be generalized? How are the rules of social construction of the masculine hegemony performed among men in different contexts? Is men's power a variation on the theme of the power in itself? Is this basically a matter of *reproduction*? This seems definitely a challenging point in the Bourdieusian argument of symbolic violence and its incorporation, and we know that gender inequality represents «the paradigm» of symbolic dominance¹³ in terms of naturalization of what is considered a self-evident status (McNay 1999, 99). Ashall, in line with this paradigmatic view of masculine domination, puts in evidence that while the division of gendered labor changes in societies, gender in itself structures all societies (Ashall 2005, 27). Actually gender is not a structuring principle of the social

¹³ «[...] gender domination constitutes the paradigm of all domination and is perhaps its most persistent form. It is at once the most arbitrary and the most misrecognized dimension of domination because it operates essentially via the deep, yet immediate, agreement of embodied schemata of a vision of the world with the existing structures of that world» (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 134).

space in Bourdieu's writings (Laberge 1995, 137) even if dynamics of gender domination seem to be so peculiar to be partially autonomous within his general theory of power.

The issue of change, in terms of space of possibilities, allows us to go deeper in the argument of what resembles an overlapping between power relations and gendered relationality. In fact, habitus are constantly enacted in objective/structural sphere of action, which consists in a space of possibilities, even if these are different among different people (Sapiro 2010, 104-105, Giannini 2011, 14).

Bourdieu pays high attention to the details of the embodiment of the dominance into the habitus of women while fewer descriptions are dedicated to men. However his description of how a *proper man* is socially constructed shows a significant key point especially when the domination is accounted as a *trap*: «Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances» (Bourdieu 2001[1998], 50).

Manliness needs to be affirmed and displayed in a relational space that is firstly the space of males. Male has to perform himself as an agent that reacts and distances femininity from his person. Paradoxically, this sounds like a quasi-impossible space of possibilities for men to escape from the huge weigh of the legitimate habitus. But Bourdieu doesn't explicate if social change in the gender relations can be originated from this paradox.

There is also the female version of the paradox. Recalling *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, Bourdieu describes the awareness of women in playing the game of gendered dominance. Women are not involved in the trials of strength of manliness but it is this exclusion that allows a very special point of view, detached from the *illusio* of power. While man is deeply embedded in this game because this makes a man a real man (with proper and taken for granted beliefs, values and dispositions), women can observe and judge at distance the same game.

Women have the privilege (absolutely negative) of being excluded from the games, where privileges are in dispute, and not engaged, at least directly, at first hand [...].

But this distance is an effect of dominion, and very often they are doomed to participate by proxy, through an effective solidarity with the players. That doesn't imply a real intellectual and affective involvement in the game and often makes them unconditionally supporters though misinformed about the real games and what is at stake (Bourdieu 1990, 24, *translation of the authors*).

What seems clear is that in Bourdieu the exclusion of women works differently from social exclusion intended in general terms. Indeed women play an *active* but dominated role in the market of the symbolic goods (Bourdieu 1971). This role is played within a shirking space of possibilities (Bourdieu 1983) because of an objective structure of domination embodied by agents in terms of binary opposition of the sexual distinction. Of course there is a relevant difference between people in the social spaces, and this is true also for women. Women coming from the higher strata of the social hierarchy manage their own reflexivity in a different way from women from lower social classes. Indeed Bourdieu puts in evidence the increasing gap between subjective dispositions, aspirations and expectations and the objective space of possibilities considering the continuum from dominants to those that perform marginal position. Women endowed with high qualified forms of capitals can be considered a sort the elite of the marginal social positions, these agents are for example those *feminae academicae* (Giannini forthcoming/a, Spanò 2015) that overcome the boundaries enacted by the objective relations structuring the illustrious university field intended as one of the most relevant (intellectual) fields of power. Also in this case we retrace the same paradox accounted for Mrs. Ramsay. Female academics are marginally touched by that *libido académica* that performs and is performed by their male colleagues. This variation of the *libido dominandi* affects the field of intellectual work and is accounted as follow:

There is a *libido académica* which is this type of very specific desire or impulse which arises out of the relation between a certain habitus, socially constituted-we [...]. The relation between a specific habitus and a specific field produces a specific *libido*, a *libido académica*, which can, under certain conditions, sublimate itself into a *libido scientifica* capable in addition of producing science (Wacquant 1989, 20).

Is it possible to betray this *amor fati*¹⁴ that constantly reconciles the habitus to the game of objective relations displayed in the fields of everyday life? Again, this is a matter of power that works through relations, it is not a matter of relation between sexes and within sexes. In *Homo Academicus* it seems that another man is possible, a man that can overcome the misrecognition caused by the reification of those objective relations that connect habitus to the structured rules of the field. This *miracle*¹⁵ can happen if the agent is partially redeemed from the game of symbolic domination, if he will be able to enact an *epistemic reflexivity* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) that unveils the *illusio* of the game. This is one of the most explicit arguments about how counter-hegemony would be developed through the actualization a very special *weapon* that is reflexivity (Maton 2003, 54; Lynch 2000, Giannini forthcoming/b). Actually this argument seems poorly connected with the gender issue, and leads us far from our aims to another thorny affaire that is the exceptionalism of scientific knowledge. Of course we can't face this additional complication here.

Bourdieu faces more explicitly the issue of a potential change in gender relations when he deals with those structural changes increasing access of women to higher level of education and to the labor market. But this change doesn't put in discussion the *relative* positions in the field observed, indeed «Men continue to dominate the public space and the field of power (especially economic power over production) whereas women remain (predominantly) assigned to the private space (domestic space, the site of reproduction) [...]» (Bourdieu 2001[1998], 93-94). Once more, the hierarchical division of roles, positions and dispositions is reproduced in time by the game of symbolic embodiment that connects individual trajectories with the structures of the social field. At the same time the «constructivist structuralism» (2000)¹⁶ of Bourdieu

¹⁴ This is the way Bourdieu (1990) named the process that allows agents to accept and make sense of something that otherwise will be perceived as unavoidable.

¹⁵ «Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) [...]. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. It is what makes the games of society - not least, the economic game - something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle.» (Bourdieu 1986, 241).

¹⁶ Another definition of this theoretical/epistemological perspective was «critical and reflexive realism» (Bourdieu 2000).

allows to identify those agents potentially involved in a transformation of the status quo. Women aware enough of how they are constrained within objective relations to refuse the *amor fati*, which legitimates and hides the symbolic violence, female scholars that practice the epistemological vigilance on their own scientific practices, both of these agents can contribute to alter the invisible connection between the possibility of reality and the determinism of reification¹⁷ (Vandenberghe 1999c, 40; 2013). Nevertheless, relationality between sexes seems to remain on the background of the analysis while objective relations are the very focus in the explanation of the hegemonic culture.

6. From objectivification/objectivation to *relationality*, following Marianne Weber

Gender relations change in time and space and this happens also for the social construction of symmetries between sexes (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Both Simmel and Bourdieu pay attention to the issue of contextualization, the former explaining how gender is shaped by the intrinsic logic of its time (modernity), the latter building his general argument on masculine domination starting from a very specific culture (the Kabilian).

The reflections argued in the previous paragraphs allow us to put in evidence some pivotal points from both the theoretical frameworks especially with reference to two significant and strictly interconnected issues: relationality and relations between sexes, objectivification of culture / objectivation of relational structures. The first issue needs a fundamental premise: Simmel and Bourdieu show a significant difference in their approach to relationality. In the case of Simmel relationality from this point of view is quite different from the socialization process that is a normative view of how people interact (Costa 2013). This second dynamic is closer to what Bourdieu focuses on from an epistemological point of view: the objective relations.

For these reasons we have two different insights about the social construction of gender and the asymmetries concerning it. The Simmelian portrait of man is affected by

¹⁷ Also in this case, the argument about awareness and reflexivity seems to be the very same provided in the depiction of the relation of dominance between the *homo academicus* and the women that share the same field.

forms of human interactions performing a historical phase of the social evolution: modernity. Man is the abstract product of a collective work of objectification. At the same time his specific way of being allows (or condemns) him to be the actor of the public life (Simmel 1903 [2002]) in which individualization, specialization, rationalization enact the «tragedy» of the capitalistic society of the eighteenth century (van Vucht Tijssen 1991). We have seen how this view entails a metaphysical essentialism in the conceptualization of sexes and the gender order. Men and women are deeply and substantially different, are confined in different cultural realms, interact to perform that very relationality that is needed to support modernity and its functioning. Women are less socially constructed than men (Lichtblau 1989-1990, 93) and for this reason are not fragmented by the dramatic violence of the modern division of labor.

It was Marianne Weber that contributed to enhance the analysis on gender relations, in particular with the actualization of the analysis on the processes of legitimation of patriarchy (Gerhard 1994, 208). She explicitly criticised the ontologization of the relation between gender and modernity (Weber 1913) argued by Simmel. Indeed she underlined the overlapping between what is basically an empirical acknowledgment (the public man, the domestic woman) with a very normative judgment (the fragmented man, the holistic woman) (van Vucht Tijssen 1991). In addition, she provides for an argument on commonalities shared by men and women, that is to say expression of human kind, stressing how objective culture can be informed and can inform women as well. Far from the essentialistic/metaphysic point of Simmel, the great divide between sexes is considered by Marianne Weber in terms of a historical and practical exclusion of women from education and public arena because of the weight of domestic care load. What emerges from her proposal is a human nature that includes the male side as well as the female one, and people can develop either or both these sides (van Vucht Tijssen 1991). This, in our view, is an impressive argument to develop a theoretical reflection that focuses in the relation between sexes that is one of the main *loci* of social changes. Indeed we recall this point at the end of the paper.

Bourdieu develops an argument quite different from Simmel's one about objectification, indeed he paves the way to an epistemological posture that adopts relationality to enlighten how gender is structured through objective relations. This shift

from the metaphysical objectification of culture (and gender) to the social construction of the *truth* about male and female, allows us to unveil the reification of gendered roles in the labor market and, most of all, in the market of the symbolic goods. Here relationality becomes something that can be observed (because of its objectivity) but it is mainly a way to understand how power works through bodies, how habitus is connected with different forms of capital, situated in specific social positions. The relation between sexes in the mutual negotiation of duties and responsibilities appears underestimated and Bourdieu explicitly claims for the effort of the men in weakening those structures that inform their own dominance (Giannini forthcoming/b). Furthermore the asymmetries between sexes, as well as the social construction of the masculine domination, are accounted for in terms of power relations, in line with the Bourdieusian general theory of power.

Both Simmel and Bourdieu are more concerned about how hegemony works in crystallizing gendered roles in society and less on how this changes or can change. Simmel describes how male is unavoidably the fragmented/alienated (but powerful) character of modernity that requires the faithful cooperation of its opposite, the female sublimates in her natural (but weak) subjectivity.

Bourdieu underlines how the spaces of possibilities are embedded in the game of symbolic violence and women that participate to the fields of power are different from the men because they are not involved in the «*libido dominandi*». This is a more sociological version of Simmel's metaphysical sublimation, even if it sounds quite as a sort of inadequacy to the game of power¹⁸.

¹⁸ Both Simmel and Bourdieu discuss the relations between man and woman in term of affectivity and feelings as well. Also in respect to this issue, gender relations seem intended more as dynamics of enduring male hegemony, than as spaces of possibilities (and innovation). Simmel highlights that the «holistic» care provided by women is quite a necessary ingredient of the modernity while love attains to the metaphysical domain. Bourdieu describes the affectivity of women towards men as a sort of necessary activity of maintenance of the *illusio* about power games. Simmel and Bourdieu seem to share the idea that women support directly the construction of masculine hegemony by way of their own feelings and emotions.

7. Conclusions

The starting point of our argument deals with the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and, in particular, with its objectivation. Both Simmel and Bourdieu developed a theoretical explanation of this process, describing how relational morphology of gender was performed and how dominant gendered character was established. However, for different theoretical and epistemological reasons, their relational schemes seem to be *locked* in a sense. We argue that social change about how *new* man and woman could perform the stage of everyday life is very hard to be sketched if relationality is theoretically intended in binary terms. Bourdieu, as already mentioned, conceptualizes the difference especially in a sort of sublime, detached, distant weakness of the woman. This seems clearly ineffective to advance in the comprehension of how masculine hegemonies become unstable, change or collapse¹⁹. Moreover, Simmel and Bourdieu seem to share a sort of pragmatic distrust towards men in putting themselves at stake in order to question the hegemonic masculinity. In particular Bourdieu, that experienced at first hand the difficulties to be radically different through a strict critical reflexivity (Giannini forthcoming/b), blames men while he urges women and non-heterosexual people to scatter the symbolic violence of the sexual binarism they both suffer and participate enacting it (Piccone Stella 2000, 103). The *separated* duality informing Simmel's and Bourdieu's efforts in understanding power in gender relations seems to be, in line with Marianne Weber's argument, the main obstacle that hides relations generative of social transformations.

Nowadays the symbolic negotiations between the pluralities of gender configurations require a focus on the relationality, because spaces of possibilities are directly connected with those biographical (trajectories in the words of Bourdieu) sexual paths. This matters in terms of how the hegemonic masculinity can improve our «understanding how gender inequalities are produced and reproduced, both in the long term and the quotidian» (R. Jewkes et al. 2015, 122). The emphasis on the relation

¹⁹ He puts in evidence that sometimes habitus and field can be incoherent and consequently in a state of disjunction because of a crisis that affects symbolic structures of the society. This is known as the argument of hysteresis (Bourdieu 2000) that is never clearly developed neither from the gender perspective nor in terms of gendered habitus.

between sexes, in our view, enhances the analytical perspective that feminist scholars named «engendering of the social» (Marshall and Witz 2004). At the same time relationality as focus of sociological inquiry seems to be coherent with a revamping of the cultural turn in gender studies (Mac an Ghail e Haywood 2007), that Connell contributed to strengthen so much.

Social changes in general, and of hegemonic masculinity in particular, are intelligible when the relational perspective overcomes classes, institutions as *objectified* status quo, and focuses on the generative relation between men and women. Therefore sociological epistemology is at the core of our argument and the recall to well established classical theorists, as Simmel, Bourdieu and Weber, actually allows and leads us to problematize current crucial issues, as the cultural change and the rise of new men and women.

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