Italian Sociological Review
ISSN 2239-8589
DOI: 10.13136/isr.v13.i3.669 2023, 13(3), pp. 469 – 482

Body and Sexuality in the Struggle for Recognition: The Nature-Nurture Debate in a New Social Imaginary

Paola Di Nicola[a]

Abstract

The claims made by all social groups who do not identify with the dominant model of heteronormativity can be framed within the broader context of struggles for the recognition of cultural and identity rights pertaining to their sexuality. Such demands conform to Hegel's classic pattern of recognition, later reworked by Honneth, with identity struggles that are variously private (construction of the self, self-confidence), public (self-worth, legal recognition) and community-based (respect for cultures epitomising a certain way of life). With their aim of enabling a just life to coexist with a good life, these claims enter the realm of communitarian theories. Indeed, despite the strong emphasis on safeguarding individual and subjective rights, a communitarian element is apparent inasmuch as these movements demand "different" laws to protect "different" subjects. Recognition and respect for diversity are embedded in the new narrative championed by neo-communitarians, which requires fragmentation of the legal system in order to take consistent shape.

This article highlights the techniques which many of these groups have adopted in an attempt to avoid this drift towards communitarianism. In so doing, they have transcended the debate on nature (biology) and nurture (cultural norms) by creating a new narrative of body and sexuality which rejects the idea of biological difference and transforms their cultural diversity into a new normative order.

Throughout history, narratives, social imaginaries, myths, traditions, and institutions have been built around the transformative process of male and female babies becoming men and women. These have shaped interpersonal relations between the sexes at every level of social reality. One essential element of the challenge posed by those fighting for the recognition of sexual rights is the creation of new narratives and a new social reality. However, such rights

[a] University of Verona, Italy.

Corresponding author:
Paola Di Nicola
E-mail: paola.dinicola@univr.it

Received: 14 March 2023
Accepted: 30 May 2023
Published: 30 September 2023

and, for that matter, the new reality are both nothing more than cultural constructs characterised by self-evident platitudes.

Keywords: recognition, gender, sexuality.

1. Introduction

The claims made by all social groups who do not identify with the dominant model of heteronormativity can be framed within the broader context of struggles for the recognition of cultural and identity rights pertaining to their sexuality. Such demands conform to Hegel's classic pattern of recognition, later reworked by Honneth, with identity struggles that are variously private (construction of the self, *self-confidence*), public (*self-worth*, legal recognition) and community-based (respect for cultures epitomising a certain way of life; *social esteem*) (Honneth, 2002). Drawing on Hegel's early-nineteenth-century considerations, Axel Honneth focused on the development of adults, defined as self-aware subjects fully integrated into their communities. He claimed that adults are formed through a series of identity struggles beginning at a tender age. Children acquire self-awareness by individualising themselves from their parents through relationships of love (as Hegel said) with important attachment figures. They also develop *self-confidence* by learning to move independently, control their bodies, and acquire autonomy. As they grow up, they engage with other social circles (school, peers, sports and leisure clubs, formal relations with others) and increasingly exert their independence by forming opinions and making decisions. Moreover, they expand their mental and emotional faculties, which are legally recognised when they reach the age of majority. This phase of the identity struggle develops *self-worth*, which is completed by social *respect* (*esteem*) within the relevant community. Conversely, unsuccessful identity struggles are characterised by physical and psychological violence, denial of rights (civil, political, and social), and disrespect in society, which often affects marginalised social groups that are subject to stigma and discrimination. Never smooth processes at the best of times, identity struggles become even more onerous when the 'natural'[1] ultimate failure of certain individuals and social

[1] The concept of "nature" developed through the ages by different social groups is also a social construct. In our cultural tradition, nature is seen as something which is given and objectified, beyond human manipulation; the word "natural" has thus become synonymous with that which cannot be modified, that which is biologically inscribed and determined. On the basis of this mechanism, even in the relatively recent past, the

groups becomes institutionalised in a society. Human history is peppered with examples of such forms of marginalisation, and it is indisputable that social coherence and cohesion were guaranteed in past societies by cultural, political, and legal systems which placed individuals in specific categories by birthright. Levels of coercion varied in intensity according to the individual or collective ability to absorb the relevant social reference values and to develop ways of being and living different from the institutionalised norm (initially on a personal basis and then in increasingly large groups), thereby generating fresh identity struggles. Ultimately, social change has always relied on this capacity to internalise values and norms, which is never an absolute or passive process, as well as on broader social and economic movements. Since the birth of modernity and the development of individual rights, democratic systems, and secularisation, this Western model of society has gradually been demolished with industrialisation and the increasing penetration of affective individualism into the realm of private life. The new model of society with its new social imaginaries has been radically influenced by processes of economic, political, and cultural globalisation over the last few decades[2]. As Taylor maintains, whereas identity and social recognition used to be rewards conferred by the system, they must now be earned; there is no guarantee that identity struggles will have a happy ending (Taylor, 2007). Until a few years ago, fights for recognition took place within the context of class struggle, inasmuch as all demands fell within the category of appeals for better living or working conditions. Now, though, the focus is on other issues and parties (Habermas, 2007; Honneth, 2010). Until a few decades ago, democratic societies responded to claims for recognition by expanding rights on a universal basis. Now, however, as Taylor and communitarians assert, a new inclusive strategy is required to appreciate diversity and culturally ingrained identities. In their view, the form of liberalism that is blind to difference needs to be replaced by one that promotes and defends cultural otherness. It is now necessary to foster multicultural policies as different ethnic-cultural entities share the same social space. These strategies should focus on diversity rather than assimilation, even if this leads to the fragmentation of a national legal system. Indeed, this is required to guarantee everyone not only a just life but also a good life, led in accordance with values and models with which ethnic-cultural groups identify and which form the basis of individual and social identities (Di Nicola, 2015). For Taylor, the state cannot remain neutral; collective claims for the right to

discrimination and marginalisation of certain social groups – clear forms of racism – was justified through their perceived natural, biological inferiority.

[2] On these matters see Appadurai (2001; Baumann (2003); Beck (2003); Benhabib (2005); Cesareo (2000); Melucci (1999); Rampazi (2009), and Sennett (2004).

lead a good life affect policies about which good life or lives should be supported and protected. With its renewed ethical status, the state cannot remain indifferent to (cultural) difference[3]. This view is dismissed by Habermas (2007) on the basis that it is pointless to implement political measures which obsequiously list all victims of prejudice if we acknowledge the universal right to avoid discrimination on grounds of sex, age, political views, religious orientation and so on. The problem faced by all Western democracies is the fight to transform *de jure* rights enshrined in constitutions into *de facto* rights (Habermas, 2007). This is the strategy adopted by feminist movements; although men and women enjoy equal opportunities in formal legal terms, the struggle for substantive gender equality is still in progress.

The struggles for recognition waged by all groups who do not identify with normative heterosexuality are part of the broader framework of cultural and identity struggles, insofar as they demand an end to marginalisation and stigmatisation for their sexual orientation in the private, public, and social spheres. These movements are extremely active, operating in the legal and legislative fields as well as at a purely cultural level. They are strongly committed to altering sexual stereotypes for educational purposes, championing political correctness, and finding terms to define themselves, even though their language still features the gender binary: male and female, masculine and feminine, man and woman, he and she. Nevertheless, their dedicated efforts have already borne fruit. For example, almost every film or TV series now features a homosexual (most often lesbian) couple to convey the message that same-sex relationships are totally normal and natural, even if the setting is an age when the lives of gays and lesbians were anything but easy. This is an attempt to rewrite history[4], as if cancelling the memory of past discrimination could ever bring justice to those who suffered or even died as a result of such behaviour. The danger of rewriting history, and indeed of cancel culture in general, is that struggles for recognition by groups whose identities were denied might be forgotten. Rather than revising and censoring history, it might be preferable to supplement and enhance our knowledge of events, episodes, and social

[3] The relationship between individual and collective rights and the general political and philosophical implications of communitarian thought are outside the scope of this article. For an introduction to the issue see Bendor and Mukherjee (2008), Brint (2001), Esposito (1998), Lehman (2002), Qizilbash (2009), and Seligman (2002).

[4] On these matters (politically correct, cancel culture), see VV.AA. (2022), *Non si può più dire niente?*, Turin, Utet. In this volume, journalists, art critics, linguists, and communication experts (14 in total) compare their points of view, providing an interesting overview of the political, cultural, economic, and moral issues that are generated by and in turn drive political correctness.

processes; all the more so, considering that sources transmitting historical facts have already been censored by those powerful enough to document the present and the past.

2. Identity struggles: identity as closure and openness to the other

The identity struggles of those who do not identify with normative heterosexuality feature the language of individual rights. These are emphasised far more than collective rights, which are seen as the battleground of communitarians (Cesareo, 2000). To avoid a communitarian stance and safeguard individual rights, the concept of sexual identity forms the cornerstone of their demands. 'After the original acronym LGB, a T, an I, and an A were added over time. Someone then had the brilliant idea of adding a "+" to show that the abbreviation could potentially go on forever. Clearly, though, this was not enough, and we have now generated linguistic monstrosities like 2SLGBTQIA+, an abbreviation (so to speak) that stands for: "Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the plus reflects the countless affirmative ways in which people choose to self-identify". How many letters would we need to express the countless affirmative ways in which people choose to self-identify? If we acknowledge the idea that everyone has a unique, unrepeatable identity (also in terms of sexuality and gender), the answer is equal to the number of humans on the planet, or perhaps even more, given that our identity – or identities – are in constant flux and never remain static. Therefore, not even one letter per person would be enough"[5]. By broadening the range of subjects that do not identify with normative heterosexuality and demanding increasingly severe penalties for anyone that offends them in word or deed, there is a paradoxical risk of suggesting that it is less serious (and somehow more acceptable) to insult or belittle those not included in the various acronyms. Although this probable effect is to a large extent unintended, it illustrates that the negative potential of the concept of identity can outweigh its positive influence, highlighting the ambivalence of a notion constantly shifting between inclusion and exclusion, we and you, the self and others, and closure and openness to the other.

The concept of identity plays a mediating role between individuals and society by allowing the former to position themselves in a social system and in

[5] Quotation from Cinzia Sciuto, *Il vicolo cieco dell'identità. Identity politics and cancel culture*, in VV.AA. *Non si può più dire niente?*, Turin, Utet, 2022, p. 169. For definitions of the acronyms, the author referred to the website of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies [tinyurl.com/dzx93k5b].

turn be socially identified; it is the central element of self-awareness, a representation and acknowledgement of the specific nature of individual and social being (Di Nicola, 2013, p. 298).

The idea that self-identity has continuity over time and is distinct from other individuals was a central tenet of English empiricism, initially set forth in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Indeed, Locke (1632-1704) was the first to define identity as a property of the person rather than only of things. As a product of modernity, this concept is closely linked to the development of individualism, with increasing awareness of the importance of individuals as the architects of their lives and as gauges of everything that exists in the world, starting from the religious dimension, which played a pivotal role in the construction and development of individual and social identities integrated (however knowingly) into different societies (Di Nicola, 2013, p. 299). From an individual perspective, modernity marks the start of the process of de-traditionalising personal life paths; as Hegel would have put it, each individual identity process is conducted as a struggle rather than a procedure embraced through consolidated standards, values, traditions, habits, and customs transmitted from one generation to another. With modernity, 'Ascribed constraints become less binding (think of the changes in gender roles), with identity the result of a slow construction process that occurs through contact/inclusion in an increasing number of social circles, none of which completely satisfies the subject's relational needs, totally absorbs their identity, or indeed requires exclusive and absolute commitment on an indefinite basis' (Di Nicola, 2013, p. 300). Identities thus become multiple, flexible, negotiable, and fluid; more than just a process, they become problematic in an increasingly global society whose distinctive cultural trademarks are risk and uncertainty (Di Nicola, 1998, 2002, 2008). This has generated a new longing for community in which identity once again plays a prominent role[6].

Two interesting articles by Francesco Remotti (1996, 2010) analysed identity from an anthropological perspective. 'In short, identity has a "constructive" nature. Identity is a construct but also involves an attempt to differentiate that is exercised vis-à-vis the two previous levels: indeed, identity is constructed (level C) by distinguishing itself or standing in contrast to both alterity (B) and alterations (level A). Precisely because it is a construct, identity (C) takes shape as a drastic reduction in potential connections (B) and a major brake on the inevitability of flux (A). Given that it is the product of an attempt to differentiate, it also involves energy, power, and in some respects violence: ties are broken to bring about the construction of identities, through which

[6] See Taylor (1993) for a comprehensive discussion of the subject of identity from a communitarian perspective.

subjects display their strength and empowerment. Establishing identity involves severing connections that would otherwise exert a restraining influence (…) The establishment of identity is therefore violence against the tangle of connections; as well as a sometimes heroic (and indispensable) attempt to stem inexorable flux and change' (Remotti, 1996, pp. 9-10).

While Remotti admits that identities are in some way required (Remotti, 2010), his analysis of identity construction processes in the long quotation above pre-empts the key elements (highlighted by many authors) of the ethnic revival currently underway in almost all human societies (Cesareo, 2000). The widespread and deep-rooted processes of globalisation, which have proclaimed winners and losers in the battle for a good life, have led to an increase in cultural, political, and legal identity struggles for recognition by groups demanding not only the right to self-determination but also the right to establish boundaries (thereby severing connections) between other co-existing groups. As Remotti would put it, these struggles involve processes of establishment and severance that often generate violence (Appadurai, 2005; Sen, 2008). This, in turn, increases the level of conflict between social groups who are also subject to discrimination and disdain by the dominant culture (Malik, 2016), manifestations of what Castells (2004) defined as the power of identity (political-ethnic and territorial identities whose boundaries are often defined arbitrarily and artificially). To put it another way, identity struggles have often been seriously detrimental to feminist battles by allowing individual rights to be denied to women in ethnic groups in Western societies who are victims of discrimination, if not actual physical or psychological violence, at the hands of members of their communities (to this end, see Benhabib, 2005). In the interests of defending cultural identity and respecting diversity, many feminists have resigned themselves to accepting violence, mutilation, and general disrespect against women from other cultures even if they live in Western societies (Moller Okin, 2007).

Identity struggles have two shortcomings which are often overlooked. In societies where a key role is played by individual rights and the fight against all forms of discrimination and violence, recognition and respect for all forms of alterity and diversity (in terms of gender, religion, politics, socio-economic status, lifestyle, standards, and values) have entered common parlance and the reality of everyday life. This does not mean that all forms of difference are appreciated (indeed, much is yet to be accomplished on this front), but there is a strong impetus in this direction. So strong, in fact, that it has even generated a counter trend of movements (such as white supremacists) which deny the value of diversity and use their identities as the cornerstone of a close-knit, well-integrated society of subjects that establish and sever relations with different forms of otherness. Identity struggles spread strong sensitivity to the issue, as

well as, aptly, steadfast defence of the rights of others. However, as Benhabib claims (2005), not all identity claims can be accepted simply because they defend a specific form of identity. Indeed, in practice, groups engaging in such struggles often protect collective rights that deny individual rights to their community members (in most cases women and children, but also homosexuals and dissidents). The second shortcoming is that the key elements highlighted in identity struggles are often only part of the complete set of actions guiding social actors. Indeed, individuals are always influenced by multiple affiliation groups, which may be in the realms of religion, sexuality, family, kinship, work, politics, friendship and so on; there is no reason to think that any one sphere has absolute dominance over the others (Baumann, 2003). In fact, with these areas overlapping and interpenetrating to a high degree, the lives of those who move between them are typically marked by misconceptions, marginalisation, and poverty. This is the lesson of intersectionality. Many multicultural policies have failed as they have not improved the inclusion of the culturally diverse and have instead developed forms of inter-group conflict (Malik, 2016). This occurs when a single area of affiliation (often ethnic and/or religious) is absolutized as a priority to safeguard. In short, it is an ineffective strategy to make an identity such as gender the sole focal point of a struggle for recognition. Not only does this reduce unequal treatment to a single aspect, but it also excludes (or ignores) those who experience other forms of stigmatisation and penalisation alongside discrimination on the basis of gender diversity – and these might be even more extreme.

3. Gender and sexuality between nature and nurture

Struggles for the recognition of groups who do not identify with the dominant heteronormativity have taken centre stage in recent decades; as we will see, they have repeated the same mistakes made by essentialist and radical multicultural movements (by foregrounding the collective rights of their community over the individual rights of their members, or even by denying potential differences between collective and individual rights) (Cesareo, 2000). These new movements also focus on a single aspect of identity (in this case regarding gender), which is thus essentialised. As a result, distinctions, if not real fractures, are created between different groups – the same movements fighting to overcome gender stereotypes.

To avoid the communitarian approach, which downplays their constructivist element by underlining difference, thereby essentialising them, movements fighting to recognise the rights of groups who do not identify with heteronormativity break down the concept of gender and develop theories that

are not empirically verified. According to these positions, there is no such thing as the biologically determined gender binary: the "natural" condition is sexual polymorphism, which is said to have been reduced to two dimensions for political, cultural, and ideological reasons related to specific power dynamics. With regard to the view that we are born male or female and become men and women through deep-set cultural processes which are inherently modifiable constructs, it is claimed that babies are born gender-neutral and become male and female as a result of cultural imposition or homosexual, transgender, queer and so on through personal choice[7]. There is now a tendency to emphasise this element of individual decision-making, stressing that it must be respected for what it is, namely an exercise of freedom based on the "biological" fact of sexual polymorphism. Even though intersex people are very much in the minority, their condition has – erroneously – been transformed into an ideological question of gender orientation. The ease of this shift derives from the fact that most writers in the field have first-hand experience of issues in the far broader area of bisexuality and often refrain from discussions with experts whose opinions differ from theirs. Sexual orientation is confused with biological gender, which in any case has a degree of polarity[8] that has been accepted by almost all human societies through the creation of myths, rites, and symbols. "After being born male or female, we become men or women. Narratives, social imaginaries, myths, customs, and social institutions have been built around this transformative process in every historical period and across all cultures. These constructs have influenced and enabled both practices and relationships

[7] The term intersex is used to refer to people whose innate biological traits do not correspond to the accepted definitions of male and female. According to experts, between 0.05% and 1.7% of the population are born with intersex characteristics. Intersex is not a sexual orientation, illness, or gender identity. Intersex people can be cisgender (with a gender identity that matches the sex assigned at birth) or transgender, with a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth (source: https://www.intersexesiste.com, accessed 23/01/2023).

[8] With the definite rising scale in male-female biological polarity, it is common to find males with female traits that are more pronounced and vice versa. Might it be claimed that most of these cases are hermaphroditism – new-borns with uncertain sexual traits – and that sexual orientation determines gender? Does everything boil down to a form of sexual polymorphism which cultural norms frame within the boundaries of the polarity accepted as normal? Can culture create a uterus, vagina, or penis in a sexless polymorphous body? No, it can only construct gender; thus far, culture has developed a binary model of sexual relations between a man and a woman. This, per se, does not preclude the creation of a new social imaginary – currently emerging – in which the traditional binary model, still in the majority, is accompanied by a polymorphic model. Yet, it remains a social construct.

between men and women at all levels of social reality. The founding myths of the world, evolution, birth, and death all feature the male-female dyad with opposing and/or complementary principles rooted in biological difference, which is seen as a demonstrable fact" (Di Nicola, 2022, p. 23). There is no doubt that the male-female dyad directly generated rules, stereotypes, and behavioural patterns, as well as traditions and myths, which established the subordination of women to men and marginalised those who do not identify with the mainstream models. However, the just struggles against all forms of misconception and hatred targeting those with a different sexual orientation must be fought in cultural and legal terms without bringing biology and nature into the equation. If sexual polymorphism is taken as the biological and natural norm, it is absolutized and essentialised, becoming the foundation of sexual identity. Such reasoning is typical of communitarian thought in an increasingly global and cosmopolitan society where the identity of a social actor lies at the point of intersection between many different social groups or affiliation networks, none of which completely captures or completes their identity (Di Nicola, 1998, 2002, 2013). In addition to essentialising any form of affiliation (whether it be religion, ethnicity, traditions of the past, language – often dead or kept alive with great effort – family, sexual preferences and so on), this way of thinking assumes that all problems related to hatred and social exclusion suffered by certain social groups will be solved by safeguarding diversity. As Fraser claims (Fraser and Honneth, 2007), every society has two types of hierarchy: one of status and the other of class. Each level of these two hierarchies is attributed with different degrees of social esteem (respect), power, and money (social class). These interrelated and intertwined hierarchies still exist in society, even though they are now less evident (mostly due to the emergence of large middle and lower-middle classes with similar lifestyle and consumption models, currently in great financial difficulty). In terms of struggles for recognition of sexual identity, it is therefore impossible to equate a transgender in the fashion industry with a transgender Amazon employee or unemployed transgender. Similarly, black transgenders cannot be grouped together with their white counterparts, just as transgender males cannot be compared with transgender females[9]. The same applies to all struggles for the recognition of cultural rights. As Fraser puts it (Fraser and Honneth, 2007), there can be no recognition without redistribution.

[9] To this end, reference can be made to the concept of intersectionality, which conveys the varying influence of multiple groups of affiliation (age, community of life, religion, work, sexual orientation and so on, each of which is affected separately by the hierarchies of status and social class) on the lives of men and, above all, women in terms of restrictions and resources for self-determination and self-fulfilment.

4. New social imaginary, new sexual normativity

Despite the focus on human and social rights, which are closely linked to the concept of universalism in Western culture, social groups who do not identify with heteronormativity inevitably adopt a communitarian approach. They thus deny any difference between the sexes, prompted by a strong emphasis on the social construction processes of gender. Indeed, as Butler explains (2006, 2013), sexual diversity is not always considered a primary difference;[10] it is placed on the same footing as racial or ethnic difference in terms of identity processes. This view rejects the claim that it is vital for every human to be begotten by a father and a mother. Furthermore, "Those feminists who oppose technological innovations [author's note: in the reproductive field] because they threaten to efface the primacy of sexual difference risk naturalising heterosexual reproduction. The doctrine of sexual difference in this case comes to be in tension with antihomophobic struggles as well as with the intersex movement and the transgender movement's interest in securing rights to technologies that facilitate sex reassignment" (Butler, 2006, p. 11). The focus here is clearly on the micro scale. For example, the issue of guaranteeing gender reassignment treatment (a need not shared by all intersex people) does not affect the Queer community but is highly important for transgenders seeking corrective surgery. Rifts and boundaries form over the feminist concept of difference; despite the accusations of naturalising reproduction, it should not be forgotten that there is no childbirth without a woman, no birth without conception, and no conception without a male sperm fertilising a female egg. There is also a split over LGB movements which demand the right to express their sexual orientation freely even if their bodies are clearly male or female, groups also fighting to legitimise their affective ties and to be able to take on parental responsibility. Such movements have been accused of accepting a form of normative sexuality that is actually very similar to traditional heteronormativity. Finally, driven by a form of constructivism which accepts the total malleability of natural and biological facts, endeavours have been made to endorse the gender theory. This view claims that hormone development should be interrupted when a pre-teen entering puberty shows any uncertainty or doubt regarding their sexual identity, thereby allowing them to choose a gender attribution with total freedom. Could it not be said, though, that the

[10] It is probably not primary in terms of importance, but it certainly is in order of time: the difference between the male and female genital organs – though not always accurate, as shown by intersex people – is used to choose a name for a baby on the basis of its sex, marking the start of gender construction. Like it or not, this is a binary process for the vast majority of the population (Di Nicola, 2021, 2022).

prevention of hormonal development, which clearly follows its own essentially binary logic, is both implicit acknowledgement of the fact that nature has rules and an attempt to modify them?

Like all social groups that demand recognition of their specific identity, LGBTIA+ movements follow the logic of establishment and severance. On one hand, they decide exactly how sexual identity should be understood, while on the other hand they create a boundary, forming a split between "we" and the "others". But, like all communitarians, these groups believe that their good life is synonymous with a just life. In their fight against all forms of discrimination, they are now increasingly engaged on two major fronts both culturally and legally. Firstly, they aim to establish a name that they can identify with and that others can identify them by. Secondly, they strive to make radical modifications to language use by imposing a neutral form whenever possible for nouns, pronouns, adjectives, past participles, articles, and prepositions (variously indicated by an asterisk, plus sign, or now-obsolete letters like schwa). One fundamental problem with this strategy is that many such symbols do not have a designated sound. Therefore, they cannot be pronounced when spoken or read aloud, rendering the expression incomprehensible. Such groups zealously monitor political correctness and are actively involved in cancel culture but are also prone to violent verbal reactions against anyone who does not accept their ideas. While it is undoubtedly important to work on language as it shapes the ways in which we think and speak, imposing change is an act of power and violence that ignores the rights of those – in the majority – who do not wish to use artificially constructed gender-neutral forms, those who identify with a linguistic world where masculine and feminine exist alongside neuter. Living languages are modified through common usage and practice, not through ideological and political enforcement.

Initially set up and driven by the concept of diversity, these groups strive to create a new social imaginary where gender and sexuality are dominated by the principle of free choice and sexual polymorphism. Their new sexual normativity is thus a cultural construct which in practice erases sexual diversity. In this way, a level of uniformity is introduced into the spheres of gender and affectivity, thereby devaluing all differences and marginalising those who identify with heterosexuality, as if this were the mother of all sexual identity troubles.

It is undoubtedly true that there is a drift towards non-differentiation of the sexes in Western societies with the spread of lifestyles shared by men and women (the effect of the change in gender roles). It should be remembered, though, that the first form of diversity experienced by children relates precisely to gender, with the awareness that boys' and girls' bodies are different. This marks the first step in identity struggles, which are always based on

dialogue/conflict with an alter (whether a parent, brother, or sister) who is both similar and different.

References

Appadurai, A. (2001). *Modernità in polvere*, Rome, Meltemi.

Appadurai, A. (2005). S*icuri da morire*, Rome, Meltemi (Italian translation of conference papers, lectures, and articles published by Appadurai between 1998 and 2002).

Baumann, G. (2003). *L'enigma multiculturale. Stati, etnie, religioni*. Bologna, il Mulino.

Beck, U. (2003). *La società cosmopolita*. Bologna, il Mulino.

Bendor, J. A., & Mukherjee, D. B. (2008). Communitarian versus Universalistic Norms. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 3, n. 1, pp. 33-61.

Benhabib, S. (2005). *La rivendicazione dell'identità culturale*. Bologna, il Mulino.

Brint, S. (2001). Gemeinschaft Revisited: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Community Concept. *Sociological Theory*, XIX, n. 1, pp.1-23.

Butler, J. (2006). *La disfatta del genere*. Rome, Meltemi.

Butler, J. (2013). *Questione di genere. Il femminismo e la sovversione dell'identità*, Bari-Rome, Laterza.

Castells, M. (2004). *Il potere delle identità*, Milan, Egea Bocconi.

Cesareo, V. (2000). *Società multietniche e multiculturalismi*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero.

Di Nicola, P. (1998). *La rete: metafora dell'appartenenza. Analisi strutturale e paradigma di rete*. Milan, FrancoAngeli.

Di Nicola, P. (2002). *Amichevolmente parlando. La costruzione di relazioni sociali in una società di legami deboli*. Milan, FrancoAngeli.

Di Nicola, P. (2008). *Famiglia: sostantivo plurale. Amarsi, crescere e vivere nelle famiglie del terzo millennio*. Milan, FrancoAngeli.

Di Nicola, P. (2013). *Identità*, entry in Nuovo dizionario del servizio sociale, Rome, Carocci, pp. 298-304.

Di Nicola, P. (2015). Riconoscimento e rispetto: la dialettica ego-alter nella società della diversità. *Sociologia Italiana*, n. 6, pp.43-60.

Di Nicola, P. (2021). Woman, Body, Conception: Unveiling the Arcana, *Italian Sociological Review*, 11(2), pp. 531-550.

Di Nicola, P. (2022). Body and Sexuality Between Nature and Culture, in B.J. Gilley and G. Masullo (eds). *Non Binary Family Configurations: Intersections of Queerness and Homonormativity*, Cham (Switzerland) Springer, pp. 23-36.

Esposito, R. (1998). *Communitas*, Turin, Einaudi.

Fraser, N., & Honneth, A. (2007). *Redistribuzione o riconoscimento? Una controversia politico-culturale*, Roma, Meltemi.

Habermas, J. (2007). *Lotta di riconoscimento nello stato democratico di diritto*, in Habermas, J. e Taylor, C., *Multiculturalismo. Lotte per il riconoscimento*, Milan, Feltrinelli.

Honneth, A. (2002). *Lotta per il riconoscimento*. Milan, Il Saggiatore.

Honneth, A. (2010). *Capitalismo e riconoscimento*, Firenze University Press, Florence (selection of essays translated and published by permission of Surhkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M.).

Lehman, G. (2002). Globalisation and the authentic Self: Cosmopolitanism and Charles Taylor's Communitarianism. *Global Society*, 16, n. 4, pp. 419-437.

Malik, K. (2016). *Il multiculturalismo e i suoi critici*. Rome, Nessun Dogma.

Melucci, A. (1999). *Diventare persone. Nuove frontiere per l'identità e la cittadinanza in una società planetaria*, in Leccardi, C. (ed.), *Limiti della modernità. Trasformazioni del mondo e della conoscenza*, Rome, Carocci, pp. 123-145.

Moller Okin, S. (2007). *Diritti delle donne e multiculturalismo*. Cortina, Milan.

Qizilbash, M. (2009). Identity, Community, and Justice: Locating Amartya Sen's work on identity. *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, 8, n. 3, pp. 251-266.

Rampazi, M. (2009). *Storie di normale incertezza. Le sfide dell'identità nella società del rischio*. Milan, Led.

Remotti, F. (1996). *Contro l'identità*. Bari-Rome, Laterza.

Remotti, F. (2010). *L'ossessione identitaria*. Bari-Rome, Laterza.

Seligman, A. B. (2002). *L'autorità, il Sé e la trascendenza*. Rome, Meltemi.

Sen, A. (2008). *Identità e violenza*, Bari-Rome, Laterza.

Sennett, R. (2004). *Rispetto. La dignità umana in un mondo di diseguali*. Bologna, il Mulino.

Taylor, C. (1993). *Radici dell'Io. La costruzione dell'identità moderna*, Milan, Feltrinelli.

Taylor, C. (2007). *La politica del riconoscimento,* in Habermas, J. e Taylor, C., *Multiculturalismo. Lotte per il riconoscimento*, Milan, Feltrinelli.