ЛЕТИЦИЯ РОССЕТТИ   УДК 314/316
магистрант, Университет «Рома-3», Италия,
letizia.rossetti@outlook.it

СООТНОШЕНИЕ МЕЖДУ ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЕЙ И ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЬСТВОМ: НА ПУТИ К БОЛЕЕ ИНКЛЮЗИВНОМУ ОБЩЕСТВУ

Аннотация: Равенство — это слово, которое часто используется в политических дебатах, и оно лежит в основе многих философских убеждений. Кроме того, оно часто идет рука об руку с такими темами, как свобода и справедливость, и все они связаны с тем, как распределяется и осуществляется власть. Хотя современные западные общества построены вокруг либеральной модели — с ее одержимостью свободой и автономией, все же можно выявить несколько дисбалансов в способе обмена властью. Из этих примеров неравенства рождается несчастье. Когда сегменты сообщества отвергаются и вынуждены жить на задворках общества, они часто в конечном итоге пользуются меньшей свободой, чем доминирующие группы. И более того, происходит это из-за (иногда преднамеренного) неправильного использования языка, политического представительства и культурных элементов. Это становится болезненно очевидным, когда смотришь на мир через гендерную призму, поскольку путаница, возникающая вокруг множественных, изменчивых идентичностей в среде, которая сильно поляризована, может привести к той самой потере свободы, которую она стремится сохранить. За последние три десятилетия появились новые лейблы, которые оказали давление на феминистское движение в его традиционном понимании. Более того, некоторые ученые подчеркивают шизофрению идентичностей, которая возникла с конца 20-го века, явление, которое, как утверждают некоторые авторы, подорвет саму идею о том, что значит быть человеком. В такой хаотичной ситуации некоторые предлагают полную ликвидацию идентичностей, в то время как другие выступают за кристаллизацию определенных позиций, особенно в мире политики. Многие из решений, предлагаемых для обеспечения равенства в западных обществах перед лицом множества точек зрения, часто игнорируют фундаментальные компоненты человеческой природы — и идентичности, —

которые являются как естественными, так и искусственными. Комплексный подход должен оценивать все стороны человечества. Раздробленные идентичности, которые, по-видимому, характеризуют новое тысячелетие, также выявили случаи неравенства во многих аспектах повседневной жизни: от языка до политики. Эти культурные и социальные предубеждения мешают группам, находящимся в неблагоприятном положении, в полной мере пользоваться своей автономией среди своих сверстников. Кроме того, они также препятствуют принятию законов, которые устранили бы юридические барьеры на пути к равенству. Как только признается существование несбалансированной системы власти, системы, которая дает власть большинству над горсткой меньшинств, важно добиться признания помимо терпимости, чтобы каждый гражданин чувствовал себя желанным гостем в своем собственном обществе.

Ключевые слова: равенство; власть; гендер; автономия; идентичность; феминизм; квир; справедливость; представительство; язык; инклюзивность; дискриминация; речь.

LETIZIA ROSSETTI
master student, University "Roma-3", Italy,
letizia.rossetti@outlook.it

POWER BETWEEN DISCRIMINATION AND REPRESENTATION: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Abstract: Equality is a word that gets thrown around often in political debates and it is at the core of many philosophical beliefs. Additionally, it often goes hand in hand with themes such as freedom and justice, which are all related to the way power is distributed and exercised. Although modern Western societies are built around the liberal model — with its obsession over freedom and autonomy — it is possible to still identify several imbalances in the way power is exchanged. From these instances of inequality, unhappiness is born. When segments of a community are cast away and forced to live in the margins of society, they often end up enjoying less

freedom than the dominant groups. Moreover, through the (sometimes intentional) misuse of language, political representation and cultural elements. This becomes painfully evident when looking at the world through a gendered lens, for the confusion that arises around multiple, fluid identities in an environment that is heavily polarised can create the very loss of freedom that it aims to defeat. New labels have emerged in the last three decades, labels which have put a strain on the feminist movement as it was traditionally conceived. Moreover, several scholars have underlined the schizophrenia of identities that have emerged ever since the end of the 20th century, a phenomenon that, as some authors claim, will undermine the very idea of what it means to be human. In such a chaotic situation, some suggest a complete elimination of identities, while others advocate for the crystallisation of certain positions, especially in the world of politics. Many of the solutions proposed to ensure equality in Western societies in the face of a multitude of points of view often disregard the fundamental components of human nature — and of identity — which are both natural and artificial. A comprehensive approach must evaluate all sides of humanity. The fractured identities that seem to characterise the new millennium have also uncovered instances of inequality in many aspects of everyday life, from language to politics. These cultural and social biases prevent disadvantaged groups from fully enjoying their autonomy among their peers. Furthermore, they also hinder the adoption of laws that would eliminate the legal barriers to equality. Once the existence of an unbalanced power system is acknowledged, a system that gives power to a majority over a handful of minorities, it is important to generate acceptance besides tolerance, to make every citizen feel welcome in their own society.

Introduction

The world we must navigate becomes come and more interconnected, the definitions of deceptively easy terms are put into question. Identity, gender, power, patriarchy are all words that

might easily acquire different meanings according to the context in which they are used, making it difficult to present a unified front in the struggle for equality. Many aspects determine the way we interact with each other and just as many ways to create inequality. With language, law and culture, power is accumulated by some groups and taken away from others. Even liberalism — the doctrine of freedom — does not always protect the very rights it claims to be interested in. Power flows through every human interaction. It is what creates and maintains authority; it is what gives us an edge over someone else; it is what casts someone to the periphery of society while others rise to the top. Arguably, the fact that societies are structured around a fixed system of power exchanges is what allows them not to fall into anarchy. A leaderless system is difficult to achieve when too many interests are to be represented and when many identities coexist in the same space. Therefore, one may argue, it is only natural that a hierarchy is established, one that will allow some individuals to be the mouthpieces of the whole community. It is only to be expected, then, that when these individuals are chosen, they will strive to retain their status, thus relegating other people to a lower position. Many systems of beliefs (both religious and political) accommodated the idea that those who are at the top, somehow deserve to be there for several reasons: their God might have gifted them superior abilities or maybe they are being rewarded for something they did in their past lives or the mandate they received from the people conveniently does not have an expiration date. Whatever the reason, equality is a mere utopia, for if we consider these beliefs and the makeup of humanity, we can see that it is impossible to reach it. That is, unless we give something up. Whether it is our identities, free will, nature — rising above the human condition as we know it seems to be one sure way to abolish inequality. Eliminating identities and personalities can prove difficult and perhaps it is not the right way to look at the situation. And yet the issue remains: how do we achieve equality if we are all different from each other? Sometimes, holding hands

is not enough: we simply seem to be incompatible. And although the Christian doctrine teaches us that we should forgive those who have wronged us, from time to time this divine gesture eludes us as we are incapable of looking upon our tormentors with compassion in our eyes. This is not to say that every human interaction involves torment, but when there is some sort of imbalance, it is often possible to find unhappiness. Equality might not bring forth true happiness, yet we should not forsake our mission. It is not easy to foster change. Ideally, the first step to take would be to set up a legal framework that would compensate wherever citizens were unwilling or unable to be inclusive. This would mean reforming many national legal systems to include provisions on marriage, adoption, and family life in general. It would be necessary to address common issues within the workplace, to ensure equal access to disadvantaged categories, with a minimum wage and the possibility to further one's education. It would also be important to change some parts of the administrative system to make sure that discrimination does not take place, even without the intention to be hurtful. This would mean, for instance, making sure that foreigners have their names and nationalities spelt correctly or that transgender individuals are not addressed with their deadname and are not misgendered. To summarise, many small steps could be taken towards integration — or better, understanding and acceptance. However, legal and administrative systems are part of a society's core; therefore, changing some parts to accommodate marginalised groups is not as easy as it seems. Separating action from the context where it is taken leads to a divide between those who advocate for change and those who do not see why there is a need for change. By enforcing pervasive laws on matters concerning gender, authorities might set themselves up for a fall, not only because they might be seen as a top-down imposition, but because there is no social bedrock upon which to build the premises for inclusion. This does not mean that citizens' minds are forever made up, with no possibility of change; it just means that the process will be long and painful.

Sadly, some reforms are long overdue, which means that victim-ised groups are (understandably) no longer willing to wait and

accept a gradual revolution. Nonetheless, there are a few things that can be done, besides adopting a legalistic approach. These steps may not seem much in the grand scheme of things, yet they could achieve two important results. First, they will get the domi-nant group used to minorities and other marginalised groups, painting them as valuable members of the community and be-nevolently advocating for equality. Second, they will somewhat appease the love-starved people who have lived on the edge of toleration for decades. Of course, this is not a noble thing to say (or even think); however, one cannot deny that sudden action, if not carefully coordinated and widely supported, might backfire painfully. Therefore, while we recognise that a general overhaul of both the legal and cultural systems are sometimes needed, we also face the need for stability in times of crisis. Through the analysis of some instances of unbalanced power dynamics that arise from both violence and mere ignorance, it is possible to devise a future in which these dynamics have been shed in favour of inclusivity, without sacrificing what makes every individual unique. This may be true if some instances of inequality are addressed while keeping in mind that shaping a society around a single model may not be what is best for the people living in it. Instead, it is important to ar-gue for a more inclusive form of justice, one that does not make assimilation its strong suit, but which fights for a leap in the way we understand diversity. In a world where discourses on gender and identities are full of confusion, where tradition and innova-tion seem to be at the opposing sides of the arena, taking a less polarised stance on things might seem like a cowardly move. And yet, taking a step back and finding a more diplomatic — but not inefficient — way to handle human differences might be the respite the discourse needs.

I. What are little girls made of?[1]

In her Cyborg Manifesto, Donna Haraway argued that identities are fractured, broken, and, most importantly, created only to sew discontent. What is considered natural does not exist either, at least not in the way we usually think about nature. The divide between nature and culture may be growing bigger, uncovering the many fictions that were created and maintained as biological facts of life, immutable in time. However, Ann Scott remarks that nature cannot be named out of existence, but neither can it be conceptualized as unchanging foundation for social/cultural projects [1. P. 377]. What scholars can do is find a new feminist space in which culture and nature can coexist again in the second and third millennia. This is what Donna Haraway attempted to do when she created the figure of the cyborg to subvert the pre-established natural/cultural order. The reason why the fiction of a common, shared experience was created rested on the necessity to fuel the women's liberation movement, but it comes from a world imbued with the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other [2. P. 150]. The boundaries between what is flesh and what is machine are blurred, so much so that she argues in favour of a new form of humanity, one that is the union of the organic and the inorganic. In other words, a cyborg. In Haraway's view, machines have gained some sort of sentience, while human beings are becoming more and more static. In this context, a human-machine hybrid — a cyborg — might obtain the best of both worlds despite its being an aberration. Haraway writes:

[1] *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966), S01E07: *What are little girls made of?*; original release date: October 20, 1966 (United States); Paramount Studios.

> By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation [2. P. 150].

Haraway wrote the manifesto in 1985 as a response to Reagan's re-election in the US. One of the aims of the piece is to analyse the role of human beings in the 20th century and the future: what is becoming of humanity now that machines are revolutionising the way we interact with the world? In an environment in which interactions can be between living creatures as well as among machines that are becoming more integrated with biological life, what is left of the old hierarchies governing us? It is important to keep in mind that Haraway was writing during a rather tense historical period: torn between Reagan and Thatcher on the other side of the Pond, shaken by the last remnants of the space race and living the final notes of the Cold War. It is only understandable that leaving human beings and their dichotomies behind was then seen as the way out of the grave humanity had dug for itself. As a biologist with an interest both in philosophy and cybernetics, Haraway describes the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender [2. P. 181]. This is a very controversial claim, as she acknowledged years later in an interview with Nicholas Gane [3]. She says she did not mean to describe a world without earthly desires, but rather a world without the painful divisions that hurt people and need to be transcended. This is something that cyborgs can do; although by the way she describes them, they do appear as beings with little in common with humanity, especially in the way of sexual desire. Perhaps her ungendered world was painted as a provocation, as she told Gane, but it does broadcast a bleak and uninspiring view of the near future. Moreover, in the Manifesto, Haraway acknowledges that the cyborg is born from the militaristic and capitalistic society she despises, but since they are beyond

human, they do not share the same characteristic as the hands that created them. They are a hybrid, uninterested in what drives human beings, rising above gendered divisions. They are monsters. As Anne Scott says:

> Cyborg imagery undermines these taken-for-granted divisions — polluting boundaries, mixing the human and bestial, and embodying its creations with simultaneous singularity and multiplicity. The feminist cyborg is a monster, it is abject. And that is the point [1. P. 370].

However, while the organic is a key instrument in the construction of walls (Scott takes as an example Barbara Creed's monstrous vision of the mother — host of a newly-created alien body — and her role in the development of a child's revulsion towards the unclean), the cybernetic hybrid has no use for division, it overcomes the individual in favour of the collective. In this regard, it appears that cyborgs can reach a stable way of life, yet they lack the capacity for mutual recognition. There is nothing to recognise if there are no more differences, no more opinions, no more divisions. Haraway's analysis is also deeply indebted to fiction, especially science-fiction. She claims that you also can't think species without being inside science fiction. Some of the most interesting species stuff is done through both literary and non-literary science fiction projects — art projects of various kinds [3. P. 140]. If one thinks of fiction as made-up facts, then she admits that the division does not make much sense; however, if one sees fiction as a work-in-progress towards something that might conceivably exist, then cyborgs are the product of imagination rooted in reality. Nonetheless, the cyborg proposed by Haraway is not the romantic one we might find in some cheesy sci-fi novel. Indeed, in modern times, it is often hard to separate what is organic from what is man-made (and even man-made objects are arguably machine-made with the frontier of mass production expanding every day). Medicine often uses something similar to cybernetic parts to improve people's lives through implants, prosthetics and other

wonders of medical technology. Warfare is becoming increasingly reliant on many technological advances to prepare surgical strikes with a minimal loss of human lives. Machine learning is no longer a utopia and AIs soon will become our faithful life companions. The quantum leaps in technology that modernity has brought with it seem to give credit to Haraway's description of a cybernetic world; however, the monstrous hybrid she has created is far from being a desirable outcome for humanity. The issue is not that cyborgs are renegades, completely detached from their own creators, monsters with no desire for salvation. The issue is that becoming a society of hybrids entails a loss of identity that is unbearable for the human mind. In simple terms, cyborgs are scary — terrifying even. Although the difference between robots, cyborgs and androids is not always clear (and it becomes even less so if one adds clones and replicants to the mix), the lack of emotions and compassion is what drives human beings away from these machines that look like people but do not act humanely. And being turned from flesh and blood to machine, even just partly and even just metaphorically, is not as appealing as it might sound. Apathy is often associated with machines, their utter disinterest in what makes human beings tick renders them scary (although many would swear that computers seem to know when it is the least ideal moment to break). Plus, is technology really that equalitarian? Do we not witness first-hand the rapid progress made by research and development that creates obsolescence in a matter of weeks? Without curing the need for some classes to create a power imbalance, even converting all of humanity into cyborgs (metaphorically speaking) will not prevent them to create, in the long term, even more unjust power dynamics. It is admirable of Haraway to want to break down the boundaries that define human beings and as it brings some much-needed humility when one is reminded of their animalistic origins. Nonetheless, if human empathy and capacity for love and inclusion are not nurtured along with the technological advancements, sooner or later the situation will go back to the way it was before

computers became our everyday companions. Finally, in the cyborg discourse, the problem of obsolescence is also tied to the possibility that there might be some defective units, as Lynda Birke suggests in her Feminism and the Biological Body. She claims that deviation from the norm has a negative connotation in an organic-inorganic setup may be seen as a failure of the body to maintain all its functions of control. Being different will lose its positive meaning, thus plunging the cybernetic body into another unbalanced power dynamic.

Even science-fiction has not always been kind to cyborgs, painting them as mindless monsters with a single purpose in life: to assimilate other living creatures, to elevate them to their level against their wishes. Let us think, for instance about the race of the Borgs in the Star Trek franchise, whit their hive mind hell-bent on harvesting technology from other worlds with little regard for human (or alien) life. They are both flesh and machine, but in becoming more, they become less. They are incomplete, lost, incapable of generating knowledge — quite different from, for example, the character of Data, who is an android. He is fully machine; therefore, he lives in a condition of perfection unattainable from a human point of view, but not too dissimilar to the one his organic colleagues experience. And again, one of the most recognisable species in the Doctor Who universe are the Cybermen: they were once living and breathing creatures, torn apart and reassembled as hybrids, with no emotions, no compassion, no spark behind their eyes. When their victims scream to be set free and cry in agony as they are cut to pieces, the Cybermen do not even flinch. Finally, in Hiromu Arakawa's Fullmetal Alchemist, the loss of one's body is the right punishment for having tried to defy God, the pain that comes with it a reminder that Man cannot restore what the Divine has destroyed.

A disclaimer is in order: the fictional examples listed above do not come from authorial sources or academic pieces of literature. They come from entertainment products meant for the masses. Nonetheless, they seem to display the authors' fear regarding

the destruction of what defines humanity. This does not mean that human beings should not strive to better themselves through technological development and it would be useless to deny the role that technology is playing in modern societies. It is important not to discriminate against those who need to use it as a crutch, for some forms of disability can only be tackled through extensive use of prosthetics, surgery and other forms of artificial aid. Haraway seems to suggest that, since research has brought us a step closer to a fully realised relationship with machines, we are no longer human, but have already become hybrids. In a physical sense, this might be true: we are the embodiment of our forefathers' dreams, we are the realisation of a promise that could once only be found in fiction. Sadly, when it comes to using technology to achieve equality, the promise seems to have been kept only in part. The recent pandemic has shown how access to the Internet is invaluable and how limiting it affects people, especially those with a lower income [4]. In this case, the differences, both economical and geographical, between segments of the population have been exacerbated to the point of becoming another source of anxiety, along with the health crisis and the looming economic downturn. The quality of education has surely suffered as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak as both students and teachers struggled to function normally while locked up at home and with limited access to technology. Some were luckier than others, but other problems came along such as the loss of those in-person social interactions that for many made getting an education even bearable at all.

Going back to the problem of gender equality, Haraway theorises a world in which the search for equality seems to have become pointless. Once cyborgs take over — these monstrosities that do not need gendered outlooks on their existence — hierarchies are immediately dismantled. In a reality dominated by male-centric laws, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence, about the final

appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war [2. P. 154]. By giving up one's body to the cold embrace of technology, it is possible to enter the complex mechanism that produces both power and control. Technology is apparently a rather gendered domain, a kingdom ruled by men; therefore, if women enter it, they will be able to change the system from within. As Esperanza Miyake says:

> I believe that it is of utmost political, physical and cultural importance for us women to place our bodies into the cybernetic domain. It is only then when we can claim a space within this infinite landscape that we shall have the power to create a cyborgian culture, to really enter the 'grid of control' that confronts the 'masculinist orgy'. Only then can we anticipate real change, only then can we anticipate real liberation [5. P. 54].

Walking into the forbidden forest only to open the gates for other people to stroll through it is indeed a rather interesting approach to equality. Early feminist movements did adopt a similar strategy by advocating for equal rights in a time period in which simply voting or owning property was seen as a man's prerogative. Through their struggles women nowadays enjoy a much more engaging life than simply sitting at home, looking after the children and the servants (although this is a perfectly innocent aspiration if one has such an inclination). Miyake seems to be very attached to one's identity: her effort to enter the technological domain is more centred towards the recognition of other identities that differ from the binary and the dominant one — namely, men. While Haraway seems to be advocating for the deletion of identities in the long term, Miyake holds on tight to them and wants to reaffirm them through online activism. The written word becomes the means through which a physical entity can interact with cyberspace, to create safe spaces for those who do not fit with the cis/straight community. By typing words (with)in the grid of the internet, we are in effect placing our bodies in the network of power and placing the network of power into our bodies [5. P. 54]. In this way,

at least the universe behind our computer screens will get one step closer to equality. Moreover, since 2004 the Internet has only become more prominent in our lives; therefore, the act of using it to teach and spread knowledge about different identities will have an impact on the real world. Miyake recognises that gender is a construct, and it is fluid; therefore, the queer cyborg can be anything they want online.

When it comes to gender identity, there is great controversy. It is easier and perhaps more correct to think about gender in its purest form as something only partly constructed by society. Indeed, the socialisation process plays an important role in the creation of one's identity, including a person's gender. However, as with many other sides of the human equation, it is also part of an individual's personality from the start. Simone de Beauvoir wrote:

> on ne naît pas femme: on le devient. Aucun destin biologique, psychique, économique ne définit la figure que revêt au sein de la société la femelle humaine; c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit intermédiaire entre le mâle et le castrat qu'on qualifie de féminin [6].

However, it appears that while gender roles and stereotypes are indeed a social construct, individual self-perception relating to gender pre-exists the socialisation process and is developed almost autonomously. Socialisation may at times help or hinder the development of one's pre-existent gender identity, especially if gender and assigned sex do not match. gender is partially constructed through action and speech; therefore, it has a definite artificial component that is likely to change in time. However, it is also possible to see that as part of an individual's identity it has a more natural side of it (and by natural we mean that it is formed at birth or soon thereafter with little to no interference from the rest of the world), one that deserves attention as well. To get a step closer to a more just and inclusive society, one must consider that these two sides of humanity, the natural and the artificial — although

the division seems to give more weight to the natural one — are equally fundamental in the development of a normal personality.

Going back to the matter of hybrids and technology, the Internet has revealed a realm of possibilities, so one can hop from one identity to the other with little to no effort. It can be considered a good way to experiment with one's identity, even beyond gender, for it takes little time to create an online profile that will represent what a person feels inside. Cyberspace is indeed the possibility that has opened up to us; on/off-line queer cyborgs are (re)creating unconfined and unrelated genders challenging the preconceived ideas about man/woman, masculine/feminine [5. P. 56]. Miyake's enthusiasm is endearing, especially because when the essay was written, back in 2004, the Internet as we know it today was just beginning to shape itself. In a world where you could be anything you wanted, shifting identities became a viable option for the first time in history. However, fracturing one's personality into a million interchangeable pieces is the gateway to insanity. This is not to say that gender identity cannot be fluid; on the contrary, the fact that people can identify with more than one gender is somewhat accepted nowadays in academic circles. However, what Miyake seems to propose is a deconstruction of gender that will lead to perfect fluidity. She seems to anchor her reasoning outside of the traditional gender binary, but she also considers gender as something totally artificial (as Haraway does). While some aspects of people's identities and personalities are the results of socialisation and cultural influences, there is some side of human nature that comes with the mere fact of being born. Gender is one of them, which does not mean that one cannot have a fluid gender identity. Yet, this is not everyone's reality. The identity of cyborgs is either everything or nothing. Can human beings keep up with an ever-changing panorama of identities better than they can with a genderless void? Does it have to be one or the other? Contrary to Haraway's claim that cyborgs do not concern themselves with bisexuality (and gender issues in general), Miyake identifies as an on/off-line queer

cyborg who enjoys looking at the world through pink-tinted cyberspectacles [5. P. 57] and does not forsake bisexuality to gain admittance to the online world. She glorifies fluidity without thinking that even fluidity, if unchecked, can lead to polarisation and madness. One can then surmise that if no gender is forever, then there can be no inequality. But if gender is only partially constructed, ignoring those individuals who do not identify with fluidity would create a new hierarchy, a new power imbalance or worse — it could seed the very seed of its own destruction. Let us think about the fearmongering that conservative parties and movements like to broadcast both on- and offline; let us imagine a world in which even individuals who value inclusivity feel discriminated because they now find themselves on the other side of the barricade.

Thanks to the Internet, many people have encounter different cultures and have learnt that the world is not always so neatly divided into two sides. As Lisa Diamond put it:

> Around the world, the Internet and social media have allowed youth from diverse backgrounds to discover fluid, complex notions of gender and question whether these notions reflect their own experiences. In light of these historical changes in the availability of information about gender diversity, younger individuals are more likely than youth of previous time periods to adopt nonbinary rather than binary gender identities, and parents, educators, and clinicians need to understand this growing population [7. P. 2].

Physical and intellectual cyborgs may be considered a reality, but this reality does not have to entail the loss of identity that Haraway seems to suggest; nor does it have to become a schizophrenic representation of every identity on the spectrum. Equality and justice cannot be achieved through extremes. The technological environment in which we find ourselves today has indeed become part of the feminist struggle and has done a lot to further inclusivity and to hold the dominant classes accountable. When it comes to deconstructing gender, Miyake's cyborg has a similar approach

to Judith Butler's theory of performativity: both want to make a mockery of gendered practices. According to Miyake:

> The queer cyborg loves noise, pollution, excessive cyber-synthetic make-up, walking and teleporting itself down the catwalks of society. The invincible, hybrid, queer cyborg dances in front of the nation, challenges authority [5. P. 57].

Butler's pastiche, albeit rooted in the traditional conception of gender norms and representation as Susan Hekman remarks, is the steppingstone upon which Miyake builds a queer cyborg identity. However, there is something that worries her: it is the fear of history repeating itself, the possibility that women and queer folks will build their identities online only to be re-appropriated by the dominant class, thus perpetuating the imbalanced power dynamic that has made them flee to the Internet in the first place. Miyake's conclusive remarks bring to light the fear of the complete erasure of certain identities:

> Physically changing bodies and identities is all fine in a postmodernist way, but what happens if we fall into the same trap? What happens when women start to alter their identities, only to become more appealing for the male gaze? Would we not by intensifying our old problems? And in addition, what about the identities that we strove hard to create? [5. P. 58–59]

Miyake speaks of the lesbian identity, hoping that every woman in the digital age will still be able to experience a 'lesbian continuum' [8], as Adrienne Rich envisioned it. The issue of identity deletion in a world of cyborgs is not an impossible occurrence. As we might consider identities (including gender in its multiple expressions) only partially artificial, creating a hybrid society where differences are no longer acknowledged does not seem like the most ideal outcome of the feminist struggle, or any struggle for that matter. This is not to say that one must embrace sexual difference feminism in toto because such a path might stress the existing divisions past the point in which they become acceptable, tolerable

and in the end, completely integrated. As stated before, the struggle for equality is polarising and costly; yet it should not be solved through extremes. Realising that one's gender is not necessarily fixed in time brings individuals closer to a freer self-discovery, but this does not make them aberrations, hybrids. This very rhetoric could also be dangerous. As we will see in previous sections, the way people refer to other individuals plays an important role in these individuals' abilities to view themselves as autonomous beings. Speech and language can facilitate inclusion and even comedy can be a means to spread awareness; yet hatred can be shared in the same exact way. It would not be the first time that slurs were reclaimed by minorities as empowering words: it happened with the term queer, which is widely used in the activist and academic contexts. However, the issue is that reclaiming the definition of aberration or hybrid in the context of gender studies might endorse the view that gender-non-conforming and queer people are either monsters at worst, or undecided at best. Playing on one's fluidity with irony and self-consciousness can be empowering but portraying a whole category of individuals as abnormal can be harmful, feeding the very hierarchy that the feminist movement in all its iterations has strived to tear down. However, language cannot always be manipulated, as Leslie Feinberg remarks:

> When we all first heard the word "gay," some of my friends vehemently opposed the word on the grounds that it made us sound happy. "No one will ever use 'gay'," my friends assured me, each offering an alternative word, none of which took root. I learned that language can't be ordered individually, as if from a Sears catalog. It is forged collectively, in the fiery heat of struggle [9. P. IX].

Feinberg also noted that language can be used to make someone feel better. This is a generalisation, of course, for some people prefer to remain unlabelled or do not go out of their way to define themselves. However, despite her best intentions, Haraway's discourse may bring forth harmful results where it only wanted

to foster self-acceptance and equality. As Simon Szreter writes when examining Putnam's Bowling Alone:

> The fact that language is usually the medium for exchange means that even many apparently merely "dyadic" exchanges are in fact locked into a wider network of assumptions, values, and social relations [10. P. 574].

Simply put, behind every word there is a whole system of implied meanings that speakers might not even consciously applying to their discourse. Indeed, ever since Haraway wrote the Cyborg Manifesto languages have evolved, yet the negative connotation that has remained around the figure of the monster remains. And even if science-fiction has nobilitated the figure of the cyborg once again, they remain terrible antagonists for human self-determination and identity discovery.

II. The road to equality

The first step to make to understand what might be done to create a better, more inclusive society is to look at the predominant relational system in which many of us operate daily. Our societies, at least in the privileged West, are more or less built upon liberal premises. Some take it a step further by advocating for a limited governmental influence on people's lives; others, on the contrary, would prefer the State to take care of its citizens in a more complete way. The traditional liberal notion of autonomy, as it was developed in Europe ever since the early modern period, closely links autonomy with independence from others. Therefore, individuals can be truly free to fulfil their needs only when the ties that link them to other members of society (including governing authorities) are left as loose as possible. This idea can be summarised by a passage from Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan:

> By Liberty, is understood, according to the proper significa-tion of the word, the absence of external Impediments: which

Impediments, may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would [11. P. 86].

Of course, it is important to understand that Thomas Hobbes was not a liberal, but his ideas did inspire contribute to the creation of some of the premises of liberalism. Moreover, saying that our societies are built on the liberal heritage means getting away with a great deal of generalisation. Within the liberal community, some push for a more aggressively individualistic society (usually those who have enough privilege not to need benefits of safety nets) and some who allow for a small intervention from a public authority to help those who do not have the means to make it on their own. Furthermore, the importance given to interpersonal relationships fluctuates with the changes in the socio-political landscape. For instance, it can be safely said that the Covid-19 pandemic has put something as simple as physical contact under a new light. The same happens in times of economic crisis: when things go well, citizens prefer the government to stay out of their business; when things do not go well, some lament the lack of government-issue contingency plans. Individualism, then, is often associated with liberal and neo-liberal structures. If one wishes to look at the liberal make-up of Western societies through a gendered lens, it is possible to see that individualism is often considered a male characteristic. In the traditional sense, women are caretakers; therefore, they need to form bonds with children, the elderly and other women to function. Queer people too can be categorised as social animals for two reasons: first, they are often believed to be closer to the feminine side of the behavioural spectrum than straight men are; second, they band together to survive and to find other individuals who will validate their identities. However, saying that men do not need to interact with other human beings is reductive and offensive. Yet, individualism is still considered a (desirable) male characteristic — so much so that the image of the self-made man, the boss in the high-backed leather armchair, is still presented as the epitome of power and control. In a society that

sees interpersonal relationships as a hindrance, there is no chance for true equality. Moreover, with the rise of individualism, the focus has shifted away from the notion of oppression. As McLeod and Sherwin argued:

> Oppression may itself involve a dimension of coercion, compulsion, and ignorance, but it functions in complex and often largely invisible ways, affecting whole social groups rather than simply disrupting isolated individuals; as a result, its effects tend to be ignored within the traditional autonomy framework that focuses solely on individuals [12. P. 259].

An interesting counter-theory was introduced by Axel Honneth in the article titled Autonomy, vulnerability, recognition and justice. Contrary to traditional liberal views, Honneth recognises that the human condition is one of neediness and vulnerability. A healthy society should not isolate its own members but should be focused on creating the conditions that will allow them to live a life that they deem worth living. Therefore, according to Honneth, autonomy does not mean total independence from others, but it is a concept that realises itself only in the context of a community [13]. Similarly, McLeod and Sherwin speak of relational autonomy, since autonomy is both defined and pursued in a social context and that social context significantly influences the opportunities an agent has to develop or express autonomy skills [12. P. 259–260]. Relational autonomy has to be studied while taking into account the person's position in the social context and the impact of external structures (political, moral, social), for they play an important role in the agent's ability to enjoy their full autonomy. An analogous idea has been brought forth by several scholars who have envisioned a politics of trust and care in order to challenge the rampant individualism typical of liberal societies.

> Trust enthusiasts, in the main, express concern about excessive individualization, identified as a threat to stable, effective government, while those who talk about care, including feminist and

postmodern theorists, focus on the need to develop humane, tolerant human relations [14. P. 281].

Scholars like Francis Fukuyama and Robert D. Putnam push for trust to be recognised as a desirable quality to be taught to citizens since it might be the means to ensure that people are on their best behaviour and society does not suffer from the discrimination that is born from lack of trust. The tendency that scares trust/care advocates is that of atomisation — i.e., the creation of a multitude of communities and groups that in turn foster individualism. When these divisions spiral out of control, citizens prefer to hide in their bubble, perhaps stressed out by competitive jobs and alienated by demanding social interactions. The individuals that emerge from this picture shy away from social contacts and do not develop a trusting personality. The solution, therefore, seems to be a de-evolution of sorts, a return to a more traditional societal setup in which (trusting) citizens will engage in bonding activities. Beasley and Bacchi wrote:

> An effective norm of generalized reciprocity is bolstered by dense networks of social exchange. If two would-be collaborators are members of a tightly knit community, they are likely to encounter one another in the future — or to hear about one another through the grapevine. Thus they have reputations at stake that are almost surely worth more than gains from momentary treachery. In that sense, honesty is encouraged by dense social networks [15].

A different approach to trust, however, also takes into account that close interpersonal relationships can and do produce conflict, not co-operation, at higher political levels [14. P. 282]. The solutions to mitigate these conflicts change according to the scholar involved: some prefer to focus on the role of citizens, with a minimal intrusion on the part of the government; others advocate for a more prominent involvement of the State. Beasley and Bacchi point out that this last current is more focused on understanding and mitigating the conditions of disadvantaged categories, while

Fukuyama and Putnam seemed to be more critical of untrusting individuals. For instance, Putnam writes that the civically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves [15]. Indeed, to foster a more trusting way of connecting with other people — which in turn is the first step to create a more equal society — the role of the government cannot be ignored or minimised. Simon Szreter, quoting Michael Woolcock's 1998 article titled The State of Social Capital: Bringing Back in Power, Politics, and History, states that relationships among citizens, institutions and external actors (i.e. those agencies that are not part of the State such as NGOs or supranational authorities) must be characterised by a certain level of embeddedness and autonomy [16]. Szreter suggests that respectfulness of one's free will on the part of governments and higher authorities is what creates mutual understanding, and

> this mutual understanding — embeddedness — should be of such a respectful kind, however, that it does not compromise each party's independence in the negotiated exchange that occurs between them — so that their autonomy is preserved [10. P. 586].

The idea is that when trust flows both ways — from top to bottom and vice versa — democracy will benefit from it — and we might argue that equality can emerge from such an environment. People will be less tempted to be antisocial and untrustworthy. It can also be said that if trust (which rests on a presumption of honesty) becomes the norm, being untrustworthy will be seen as an undesirable deviation from the norm. This does not mean that individuals who do not engage in socially accepted behaviours should be shunned and cast away; otherwise, the problem of unbalanced power dynamics will come back to haunt those who build walls. Moreover, the issue of what is considered trustworthy and what is not remains. By locking away segments of society, one cannot hope to reach equality. This is where the role of a central authority comes into play: by promoting desirable moral qualities while also trying to include those who, for a reason or another,

have been left out of the social circle, it can gain traction to create a more inclusive — and just — society. The emphasis on trust that is put forth by Putnam and several other scholars is not dissimilar to Honneth's theory of mutual recognition, although his definition of autonomy is different from those provided by the liberal tradition. As Jennifer Nedelsky wrote:

> To be autonomous a person must feel a sense of her own power (which does not mean power over others), and that feeling is only possible within a structure of relationships conducive to autonomy. But it is also the case that if we lose our feeling of being autonomous, we lose our capacity to be so. Autonomy is a capacity that exists only in the context of social relations that support it and only in conjunction with the internal sense of being autonomous [17. P. 24–25].

The liberal approach, with its focus on individualism and atomisation, fails to protect those more vulnerable, Moreover, by underestimating the importance of relationships, it does not encourage a constructive dialogue within society. In this respect, Honneth goes a step further and claims that relationships should be based on a principle of mutual recognition. Only when an individual's characteristics, desires and fears are recognised as valid by other members of society, they can be autonomous and live their life to its full extent. Mutual recognition is essential to develop a healthy practical relation with the self. This relation is acquired and shaped through constant interaction with other people, with their relationships with themselves and the need for recognition. One's attitude towards their value is made of three concepts: self-trust, self-respect and self-esteem. These are closely linked to a person's ability to be autonomous. In a society in which certain individuals are mistreated, their self-esteem will be shattered, making it harder for said individuals to think of themselves as worthy of attention. In turn, they might give up pursuing their own happiness because they do not trust their judgement and do not believe they should work towards reaching their goals. It is easy to see how

an unaccepting society leads to a person's agency being diminished, therefore taking away their autonomy. For instance, members of the LGBTQ+ community are often the victims of discrimination, including microaggressions and general alienation. These acts of violence cause, in turn, a higher rate of suicides, depression and self-harm in certain individuals [7]. The same could be said of women who hold positions of power: it is easy to joke at their expenses, wondering which services they had to provide to get there. Seeing one's abilities and autonomy denied might push a person to give in to their internalised hatred, thus creating a vicious spiral. Once they are incapable of accepting themselves as worthy individuals, they will be likely to criticise people around them too, especially those who display traits similar to those which got them alienated in the first place. Even safe spaces become unsafe once their members turn on each other. If there are not any institutions (both formal and informal) ready to rescue the outcast, then the positive pattern of trust and mutual recognition might be disrupted. In her book, titled Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing, Miranda Fricker also warns about what she calls residual internalization [18. P. 37]. This happens when a member of a subordinated group continues as host to a sort of half-life for the oppressive ideology, even when her beliefs have genuinely moved on [18. P. 37]. To be clear, Honneth admits that some people do have the psychological strength to be autonomous even when they are not recognised, but he does not believe this to be fair, for it requires a terrible effort on the part of the disadvantaged category. Indeed, only relying on the resilience of certain individuals blinds others to the plight of the weakest sides of society. Moreover, it puts enormous pressure on a group, which will have to struggle more in order to reach the same results as their fellow citizens, possibly rendering them bitter in the process. As said before, Honneth describes three spheres of relationships that affect one's attitude towards oneself: self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem. Since human beings do not exist in a vacuum and socialisation plays a big role

in the creation of a healthy personality, the different social levels in which a person's identity is formed are very important: from small groups to the entire societal system:

> Legally institutionalized relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons; close relations of love and friendship; networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of members of a community can be acknowledged [13. P. 131].

Self-respect can be defined, according to Honneth, as the affectively laden self-conception that underwrites a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reasons for acting [13. P. 132]. An individual is truly autonomous when they believe in their capacity to make decisions regarding their own lives. Indeed

> Self-respect implies that one values oneself for those things that make one a person: one's consciousness, will, ability to choose, capacities, and abilities. A person with self-respect has a sense that he or she is a human being whose interests and ends are valuable and that, as a human being, he or she has dignity and worth [19. P. 110].

Without it, there can be no autonomy; therefore, societies need to target those elements that create subordination, marginalisation and exclusion, because they hinder the ability of people to see themselves as legitimate decision-makers. Generally speaking, in modern societies, self-respect is closely linked to the mere fact of having rights. This is why many activists (even in Western societies) campaign for the right to marry, adopt, seek employment, vote, travel and have control of their own bodies. Let us think of the recent Texas abortion ban and its many negative implications. Even though one can agree or not on the notion that abortion is morally acceptable under certain conditions, the fact that women are denied the right to even choose it if they feel like they need it means that they might, in the long term, not see themselves as valuable enough to deserve care. Without self-respect, people will

not see their own interests as worthy enough to fight for. Worthiness, of course, does not mean that our interests should prevail over those of our neighbours — as that would create an imbalance and take us far from equality. Rather, it means that opinions must be equally heard before they are either accepted or discarded. According to liberalism, protecting basic human rights is the byproduct of its commitment to protecting individual autonomy. However, this is not Honneth's approach: the theory of recognition supports autonomy via the support of self-respect, which comes when a person's rights are ensured. Honneth defines self-trust as the agent's affectively mediated perceptual capacities by which what is subjectively felt becomes material for deliberation in the first place [13. P. 133]. To better understand such a definition, it is useful to look at the behaviour of people who have been victims of serious physical and psychological abuse. In these sad cases, the survivors do not trust their feelings, which have been belittled by their abusers; therefore, they do not believe their desires to have originated from them. A small study conducted in 1982 by Doris Brothers [20], a psychologist, found out that women victims of rape and incest had a hard time rebuilding their self-trust. They de-valued themselves to retain some semblance of control after the violence. By blaming themselves, they believed that a simple change in their behaviour would protect them from further assaults. Generally speaking, victims of abuse will not be incentivised to live the life they wish to live, either because they are not sure it is really them who want it, or because it is too painful to believe in themselves. This is to say that self-trust is important for the creation of a healthy personality. As Keith Lehrer states:

> The first step in the life of reason is self-trust. I trust myself in what I accept and prefer, and I consider myself worthy of my trust in what I accept or prefer. Acceptance and preference are, after all, my best efforts to obtain truth and merit, and if they are not worthy of my trust, then I am not worthy of my trust, and reason is impotent. The sceptical path is sterile. Let us try the other path, the path of self-trust [21. P. 5].

If we do not believe ourselves to be able to discern what we reasonably want from what has been imposed or is the result of a whimsical personality, then we cannot act to the full extent of our autonomy. This happens because self-trust is developed in a more intimate sphere, the sphere of love and friendship. In a fully functional relationship, people open up and engage with their deepest feelings critically. From this, it emerges that personal openness and the openness of the social context are closely related. Another issue with self-trust is the interpretative work that goes into describing one's feelings. Inside every individual, there is a polyvocality of voices that need to be taken into account when relating to the dimensions of intersubjectivity. Creativity and uncontrolled urges should not take over the self. Again, Lehrer argues:

> Beliefs and desires often arise capriciously, and sometimes perversely, contrary to my better judgment. I am not in a position to say that all my beliefs and desires are worthy of my trust. But what makes me worthy of my trust is my capacity to evaluate my beliefs and desires, and that is the role of metamental ascent [21. P. 3].

Therefore, an agent should be flexible enough to adjust to life-changing events and should have the capacity (or the humility) to recognise that not every thought is worth voicing in every context. The picture that emerges from this inner conflict is one of an individual ready to embrace yet-unknown desires, but free from any form of compulsive behaviour. A healthy society should not only protect people from physical and psychological trauma, but it should also safeguard the intimate sphere in which self-trust can be safely developed. For instance, higher authorities should provide guidance and help for families (of any kind) against discrimination and unnecessary torment to make sure that they can function adequately in their socialisation role. Self-esteem can be defined as one's sense of one's worth and value. In speaking of self-esteem we are speaking mainly of a person's own internal sense of who he or she is [19. P. 113]. It can be damaged by recurring

patterns of humiliation and degradation. The meaning of one's actions depends on the semantic framework in which the action occurs. Therefore, if an action takes place in a context that has expressed itself in a negative way towards said action, the agent will have a hard time considering it worthwhile. This might prove particularly hard for people who have a marginalised lifestyle and who might need a lot of support from the subculture they feel they belong to. Sometimes, these groups that live on the edge of society are all that minorities have. Let us take the example written by Leslie Feinberg on their experience as a transgender person in the 1960s:

> as a teenager, I found the gay bars in Niagara Falls, Buffalo, and Toronto. Inside those smoke-filled taverns I discovered a community of drag queens, butches, and femmes. This was a world in which I fit; I was no longer alone. It meant the world to me to find other people who faced many of the same problems I did. Continual violence stalked me on the streets, leaving me weary, so of course I wanted to be with friends and loved ones in the bars [9. P. 7–8].

Even though not even those dingy bars were truly safe spaces, one can immediately see how finding a community of like-minded people helped young Leslie in their quest to find their identity. Feinberg also explains how these small communities of outcasts and rejects made it possible for them to get an (informal) education and grow as a scholar, an activist and as a person in general. When the semantic field is limited, so are the lifestyle options available to individuals. Moreover, self-esteem is linked to a person's belief that what they are doing is meaningful. Individuals are not only vulnerable to a negative context, but they can also fall victim to behaviours that have the aim of humiliating them. It is a task for society to protect vulnerable individuals from threats of denigration. A rights-based approach might be insufficient to address the vulnerabilities exposed in the previous paragraphs. Such an approach, which has been championed by many thinkers across time and space, such as John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith

and Robert Nozick, is based on the idea that rights are something that must be gained, either through hard work or the display of certain skills. This sort of secular Prosperity Gospel presents two main problems which take us further away from society. On one hand, one of the main issues with this approach is the problem of free-riding: some people might enjoy rights that they do not deserve. On the other hand, people who are most in need of some protection might be excluded from it because they have not done enough to access it. Minorities often have to go through years of struggle before being recognised as entitled to the same rights as the rest of society. Let us think, for instance, about the Civil Rights and the Black Lives Matter movements and their decades-long struggle to put an end to systemic racism in the United States. This is where it is possible to see the failure of the liberal tradition, in thinking of rights as possession, as a thing that needs to be kept away from other people. Truth be told, the issue of free-riding also becomes prominent when rights are recognised rather than bestowed because there is always a small part of society that will most likely never exercise them or will try to shy away from the duties connected with those rights. However, the fact that someone might take advantage of something they do not deserve should not prevent the collective from having them. When rights are connected to someone's ability to obtain them, the fact that some individuals might not work hard enough towards this goal might discourage lawmakers from granting more freedom to the entire group. Also, if one's worth is determined based on some standard that person has to meet, the power placed in the hands of those deciding the standard is terrible. What is to stop them from declaring that a certain category does not meet the requirements just because they live what is considered a marginalised lifestyle? Basic human rights are something that every person must enjoy, no matter their background. Being safeguarded from violence, humiliation, discrimination; being given the possibility to work, play, marry, live, die in the way they most see fit: these are all benefits

that come with the mere fact of being born. Of course, higher authorities have to set a moral path, in line with the historical and social context of society; yet nothing prevents this context from changing. And someone who pursuits their interests to the detriment of other's people autonomy (even considering the most liberal definition) has to face the consequences of their actions. As John Stuart Mill wrote:

> the liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people [22. P. 94].

The pure rights-based approach, however, has somehow missed its mark, at least according to Honneth. It is perhaps time to abandon it in favour of a more inclusive way of bringing problems under public scrutiny, something based on mutual recognition instead of the construction of walls. This does not mean erasing the importance of human nature and identities. It is more a step towards an idea of politics that embraces differences without fearing them. Indeed, it is better to be accepted rather than simply tolerated, but toleration is surely a big step away from open hostility. However, one cannot fail to recognise that rights are intersubjective in nature. They can be fully enjoyed only when the bearers of these rights are accepted as legitimate by other members of society. The theory of recognition seems to suggest that rights are inherent in being a person, but they are tied with the opinion individuals have of themselves and others. Partly, this is true. After all, when rights are denied and the oppressed group does not see itself as worthy of those rights, it is not likely that it will fight to ameliorate its position. It takes time and effort before emancipation can come out of oppression when both liberal and relational autonomies are impaired. And when one thinks that the subject cannot possibly become any more intricate, the issue of identities comes to the surface. They are another wall between us and mutual recognition, between discrimination and equality. What should we make of them, then? How should the feminist movement and

activism, in general, be changed to face these new threats to people's autonomy? Or is it better to fall back to the liberal tradition, where no one has the right to pry into their neighbour's business unless that business is harmful? The hard focus on individualism and the rise of the lonely survivor takes us out of the fight for equality; however, it should not be discarded completely. It has its shortcomings, but it can be used as a steppingstone to build a society based on mutual recognition. The emphasis on freedom (albeit individual) is the perfect platform from which to launch a more comprehensive view of autonomy as a balanced power dynamic. The aim is to create a society in which togetherness is no longer seen as an effort, but as something that must be. Yet, between this dream and the harsh reality, lies a bottomless pit of fear, self-interest and confusion.

III. Speech and discrimination

Language is a vital part of every human interaction. It not only determines how we communicate with other people, but it shapes how we perceive the world. It gives meaning to actions and colour to ideas. It is sacred, in a way. Therefore, everything that disrupts the holiness of language is not always understood. Let us think, for example, about the absurdity of La Comédie du Langage by Jean Tardieu, a compilation of the author's most famous plays. On one hand, the eight pieces stress the importance of language; on the other hand, they make fun of the spoken word. The scenes are outside of time and space, the characters lack all that makes them recognisable as human beings, they are just people who talk — often without making much sense. With the loss of language, there is a loss of identity. Language and recognition go hand in hand, for once we have the words to address our peers, we see them as worthy of our attention. It is often the case that language is used to dehumanise minorities, by painting them as incapable of understanding civilised conversations or speaking correctly.

For instance, in the past, women were thought to be less smart than men, incapable of grasping the same intricacies of life that their male counterparts could. Sometimes, derogatory terms are employed to refer to people who fall outside the societal standard. All these are examples of language used to foster discrimination. However, it can also be a passive means of inequality. As Miranda Fricker says, power can be both active (in the sense that every action corresponds to a reaction) and passive (meaning that the awareness of power influences people's behaviour). She contests Michel Foucault's claim that power exists only when it is exercised, for she defines power as a capacity. Therefore, even if one is not using it, it still exists. Since we use language to interact with other people, to influence the way they behave and to convince them of the righteousness of our ideas, we can say that language is a form of power. Let us think of the capacities that it gives us when we know how to wield it in the best way and how, on the other hand, it renders us impotent when we do not understand its subtleties. Moreover, speech acts — and therefore language — are not only a matter of what is said out loud, but it creates extra-linguistic and incidental consequences [23]. This is part of John L. Austin's classification of speech acts, according to which discourses had three components: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary [24]. What is meant by perlocutionary acts is that in a regime of reciprocity (i.e., what the speaker says is understood by the hearer), words produce behaviours. Therefore, hate speech is such a powerful tool to foster inequality. Let us, as a first step, find a definition of hate speech. It can be a term of art, referring to the particular expressions of hatred against particular (groups of) people in particular contexts [25]. In this regard, it appears that hate speech has a collective nature, meaning that the speaker and the hearer can be single subjects, but the intended victims are always part of a larger community. Therefore, hate speech is not an injurious utterance thrown at an individual for a characteristic that has no social relevance in general (e.g., insulting someone because they are wearing

a green jumper: perhaps the speaker does not like the colour, but there is no clearly defined group that makes wearing green jumpers a staple of its identity). Parekh defines hate speech as follows:

> Hate speech expresses, encourages, stirs up, or incites hatred against a group of individuals distinguished by a particular feature or set of features such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation [26].

According to Parekh, there is a difference between several types of obnoxious speech, from those acts that display dislike or disrespect, to those who seem threatening and incite violence. He points out that hatred is an extreme emotion — and one might surmise that it is not a feeling that can be evoked easily — so that grouping every form of insulting language under a single umbrella term is reductive.

> Hatred is not the same as lack of respect or even positive disrespect, dislike, disapproval, or a demeaning view of others. It implies hostility, ill will, severe contempt, rejection, a wish to harm or destroy the target group, a silent or vocal and a passive or active declaration of war against it [26].

He does not advocate in favour of abusive speech, for it hurts people too. Besides, if speech can produce behaviours, one does not need to ferociously hate their intended victims to create hatred in others, which in turn will undertake more direct actions. Parekh, therefore, does not define hate speech simply as an offensive discourse that incites violence, although that can happen even in the long term. It can be loud, but also more subtle and it might rely on apparently innocuous sentences. We can see how, by relying on microaggressions rather than attention-grabbing gestures, the speaker undermines the target group's autonomy. In this way, its members might not even realise they are being targeted and instead internalise the notion that they somewhat deserve what they are getting. According to Parekh, hate speech has three distinct features: it is directed towards a specific group of individuals;

it targets the groups' qualities by claiming they are undesirable, and it causes the victims to be seen as unworthy members of society. The problem with hate speech, apart from the fact that it is hurtful, is that it is hard to regulate. For instance, prohibiting it might be seen as an act limiting personal freedom. What if I want to hate women? Should I not be free to do so? In general, one is free to hate whatever they want to hate in the privacy of their own mind and there is nothing the community can really do to prevent it. However, broadcasting such hatred to the whole world is a different thing. And yet, not everyone agrees. According to Jennifer Hornsby, libertarians often say that banning hate speech means putting correctness before a person's fundamental freedom of speech. They also tend to shift the blame from the speaker towards the hearer (i.e., it is the hearer's fault if they found a certain remark offensive) and to claim that every wrongdoing can be addressed by simply answering back. Indeed, free speech is an important part of human interactions, it allows us to express a multitude of thoughts, of growing as individuals and sharing our experiences with our peers. It is also the key to express dissent, which is the basis to construct a healthy and working democracy. Parekh points out that it is not what we might define as a natural right, but it implies the existence of a community based on reciprocity, where all members place the same value on freedom. In any case, preventing someone from speaking their minds does nothing but a disservice to society. This idea was exhaustively expressed by John Stuart Mill:

> the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error [22. P. 29–30].

However, as we have seen in the previous section, Mill did not speak of unrestrained freedom, but he also contemplated the possibility (however remote) that the authority could step in to protect the community from the evil that one individual could do. On the contrary, those like Baker who advocate for complete freedom of speech argue that the speaker would suffer a violation of her rights:

> Law's purposeful restrictions on her racist or hate speech violate her formal autonomy, while her hate speech does not interfere with or contradict anyone else's formal autonomy even if her speech does cause injuries that sometimes include undermining others' substantive autonomy [27. P. 25].

In this claim, great focus is put on formal autonomy rather than substantive autonomy. The latter is defined as a person's actual capacity and opportunities to lead the best, most meaningful, self-directed life possible [27. P. 25]. Edwin Baker underlines that substantive autonomy is a tricky concept: by granting/recognising the rights of a group, sometimes the authority takes away another group's freedom. On the contrary, one person's formal autonomy does not create conflicts with other citizens' formal autonomy. Nonetheless, as we have seen in the previous section, undermining's someone's ability to live a life they consider worth living means taking away their self-trust, self-esteem and self-respect. When someone's actions impact negatively on other people, they must be regulated by the authority. There are other values besides free speech that drive communities, and which are held in high regard. There is a certain hierarchy of values, but realistically speaking, it is a fluctuating one. According to the environment and the context, certain rights might be sacrificed in favour of others (for instance, the right of free movement was severely curtailed during nationals and global lockdowns in the spring of 2020). Every value makes claims that limit those of others, and every right is limited in its content and scope by other rights. This is as true of the right to free speech as of others, which is why it is subject to limits in all

societies [26. P. 44], as Parekh reminds us. Hornsby then suggests that libertarians do not see the respect of these other values as sufficient ground to limit hate speech. Instead, they invoke what is known in the U.S. as mental intermediation, a doctrine that states that offence is created by the hearer's understanding of what the speaker said. Therefore, if your speech offends me, then the explanation is that your words work in my mind to lead me to feel offended. Between your speaking and my pain is my thought [23. P. 5]. Indeed, sometimes the hearer might misunderstand what the speaker wants to say, but such a doctrine does not take into account the context in which such discourse takes place. Although in every speech there is a degree of reciprocity and interpretation, the speaker is still in control of the speech. If they show non-verbal signs of aggression, the hearer might be led to believe that their words have been uttered with malice. After all, language does not travel only via words, but it is also made of gestures and postures. For example, when we exchange friendly jibes with our peers, we do not display signs that we want to offend them and they do not take our words as insults (otherwise, many friendships would be short-lived). In this context, it becomes clear that we do not have hateful intentions. On the other hand, if we walk up to a stranger and shout bad words at them, they have every right to be offended. First, there is not enough history between us for the hearer to think that we are only joking. Secondly, the words that we have used are commonly believed to be offensive, therefore there is no reason for them not to be at least slightly taken aback. When a speaker uses words which are commonly understood to convey direct and visceral hatred or contempt, there is no act of will on a hearer's part — no piece of mental intermediation — that will change that [23. P. 5]. The result of this analysis is that simply placing all the blame on the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's intentions does not rely on a correct interpretation of the premises of speech. The other characteristic of libertarianism that Hornsby points out is that libertarians believe in redressing hate speech

rather than reducing it. However, even if speech is bi-directional, there is vocabulary which enables a member of the second group to vilify a member of the first, and not conversely [23. P. 6]. She underlines the fact that there are derogatory terms for disadvantaged groups, but there are almost none to address the ruling class. Appropriating a derogatory term, even to change its meaning, can come at a high cost and only after years of stigmatisation. In any case, it is always nice to see people have fun at the expense of those who insulted them. Moreover, even if it is true that speech can always be redressed with more speech, this is not always the best solution, at least morally speaking. By fighting fire with fire — that is, by contrasting insults with other insults — both sides end up spreading more hatred. The advantaged groups can also exploit the exchange to point out how the targets of their hatred did not accept the offence graciously and reacted violently. Sometimes, prejudices about human nature are self-fulfilling, meaning that after enduring various forms of abusive behaviours, the victims end up behaving exactly as their tormentors wanted. Finally, there is no guarantee that the disadvantaged group has a platform to defend itself from hate speech. Perhaps this is a less pressing problem in the age of the Internet, where every single individual can potentially express their opinion online and react to comments, both positive and negative; yet one must not delude themselves into thinking that the online world is a free-for-all. Problems such as a growing digital divide and lack of education prevent those who were already at a disadvantage from taking their battles to social media. Censorship and community guidelines can also be used against them and can be manipulated to further the more dominant worldview[2].

---

[2] There are several cases of posts being taken down because they violated community guidelines even if the original creators claimed they did not. For instance, last year comic artist Adam Ellis saw one of his comics removed from Instagram as it expressed a decidedly negative opinion of Trump supporters and far-right political movements. Along these lines, there is also a debate on adding the possibility of showing naked breasts

As Parekh points out, hate speech can be much more covert than one might normally think, which is what makes it hard to detect in the first place. It can hide inside jokes, passing remarks and common sentences. In these cases, perhaps speaking of hate speech is a bit too much; yet all these instances play their part in furthering divisions and inequality. For example, microaggressions undermine a person's autonomy in their everyday life by endorsing the casual marginalisation of certain groups. As Wing Sue put it,

> in many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment [28. P. 3].

The phenomenon has often been studied in relation to racism, but it impacts many other themes, such as sexism and ableism. When it comes to gender, microaggressions include instances of sexual objectification and the presumption that women are weaker or less smart than men. Most of the time, the idea that traditional gender roles must be upheld also leads to microaggressions. Oftentimes, these microaggressions are the result of environmental conditioning so that some individuals, especially men, may feel authorized or supported in their objectifying and demeaning behaviors because they are reinforced by popular media [29. P. 208]. Individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community also face similar microaggressions, with the added stress of keeping their sexuality or gender identity hidden, especially in those environments that celebrate heterosexuality and/or toxic masculinity. Microaggressions can sometimes be involuntary: the speaker might be

---

in artistic and creative contexts, since there is not rule against blurring out male chests in portraits or drawings. Where there is no direct censorship, algorithms and AIs are often used to limit certain creators without outright expelling them from the platform.

well-intentioned or ignorant about the effects of their words. In this case, the offence does depend on the hearer's psychology, as a libertarian would possibly point out; yet it is also the product of a hostile environment or a biased cultural background. While hate speech might be at least frowned upon (if not banned or fined), microaggressions could be implicitly condoned by society. And even when they are not, it might be difficult to denounce them for they might be seen as less important than violence or other loud actions. Moreover, speakers, especially the well-intentioned ones, are often reluctant to admit their mistakes. Wing Sue, in fact, points out that

> they may engage in defensive maneuvers to deny their biases, to personally avoid talking about topics such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism, and to discourage others from bringing up such topics. On the one hand, these maneuvers serve to preserve the self-image of oppressors, but on the other, they silence the voices of the oppressed [28. P. 5].

Nonetheless, microaggressions do have an impact on the hearer's identity and their relationship with themselves. The power of microaggressions lies in their invisibility to perpetrators and oftentimes the recipients [28. P. 6]. For this reason, victims often do not have the time or the possibility of responding to the aggression, especially when it is embedded in a larger communicative context. Whatever they do might be seen as irrational, hysterical or simply as the product of a special snowflake mentality (i.e., the idea that those who get offended by inconsequential actions are too sensitive). Even pointing out that some form of covert discrimination took place might, in turn, elicit more open aggression on the speaker's part, which might be a further deterrent for the victim. Finally, microaggressions also influence the dominant group's ability to shape reality, along with more evident forms of discriminatory actions and language. By creating the definition of normalcy, the dominant group is then free to marginalise those who do not

conform, sometimes by acting within the legal framework that lies at the base of a working democracy. In this case, we can see how language becomes productive power, in a way similar to the one put forth by Michel Foucault: first, the speech is used to categorise identities and to put them in neat little boxes (denying the existence of fluidity of nature and personality); then it pushes individuals inside those boxes so that they are constructed as the category they are associated with. In this case, hate speech and microaggressions have an important role in maintaining the unequal status quo. In the long-term, it is also possible that these constructions will be seen as traditional — if not even natural — meaning that it will be even harder to resist their creation. Language, however, can also be used in non-violent ways to perpetuate the idea that some individuals are second-class citizens. Stereotypes, defined as widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes [18. P. 30], are used when we determine the credibility of the person talking to us. Sometimes, when faced with the immediate need to assess someone's credibility, using generalisations might prove useful, especially if we do not know anything about the individual (e.g., when we require the services of a doctor, we trust them because, generally speaking, doctors are experts in the medical field). Stereotypes often lead to prejudices. Fricker points out that prejudices can have both positive and negative connotations:

> prejudices are judgements, which may have a positive or a negative valence, and which display some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to some affective investments on the part of the subject [18. P. 35].

Forming an opinion of someone is not discriminatory per se, especially if we keep an open mind and are ready to change it as the evidence changes. When the displayed affective investment has a negative connotation, we have what Fricker calls a negative identity-prejudicial stereotype [18. P. 35]. Prejudices and stereotypes

sometimes lead to testimonial injustice. When this happens, the subject is wronged in her capacity as a knower [18. P. 44]. This goes beyond the problem of free speech, for the subject is not even allowed to become a true speaker. They are somewhat dehumanised, which in turn affects their ability to understand their worth. Again Fricker point out:

> The recipient of a one-off testimonial injustice may lose confidence in his belief, or in his justification for it, so that he ceases to satisfy the conditions for knowledge; or, alternatively, someone with a background experience of persistent testimonial injustice may lose confidence in her general intellectual abilities to such an extent that she is genuinely hindered in her educational or other intellectual development [18. P. 47].

Testimonial injustice may also have more practical consequences. For example, the belief that women are over-emotional might cause them not to be believed when they report cases of sexual harassment. This not only means that some women will most likely be categorised as silent victims, but they will start to see themselves under that light. Fricker also claims that epistemic injustice causes the loss of knowledge, especially when the victim is put down so many times, they are no longer able to fight for their convictions. Through internalisation, the person loses the ability to be a hearer (and a speaker), thus losing the capacity of gathering knowledge. Fricker concludes:

> No wonder, then, that being insulted, undermined, or otherwise wronged in one's capacity as a giver of knowledge is something that can cut deep. No wonder too that in contexts of oppression the powerful will be sure to undermine the powerless in just that capacity, for it provides a direct route to undermining them in their very humanity [18. P. 44].

Indeed, language can be used to spread inclusive discourses; however, we have seen how it can be corrupted by ignorance and hatred to further negative stereotypes and violence. This misuse

of language prevents the individual from experiencing their autonomy in full. Moreover, in the long-term, it may prevent marginalised groups from ever fighting back, by undermining their relationships with their identities. When a speaker's credibility is unjustly questioned because of a characteristic that is deemed undesirable and when hateful/abusive speech is not limited, all hope for a more inclusive society dies.

IV. The society of change

Almost every citizen will, sooner or later, access the job market. They will send their curricula left and right, hoping for a position that they enjoy and allows them to make ends meet. Although many steps have been taken in recent years to open up the workplace and make it more inclusive, certain fields remain rather gendered. There are still people who believe that some jobs, namely the ones that require strength, stamina and intelligence, are made for men; while those that have to do with care and patience are for women. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1762:

> Donnez à l'homme un métier qui convienne à son sexe, et au jeune homme un métier qui convienne à son âge : toute profession sédentaire et casanière, qui effémine et ramollit le corps, ne lui plaît ni ne lui convient. Jamais jeune garçon n'aspira de lui-même à être tailleur ; il faut de l'art pour porter à ce métier de femmes le sexe pour lequel il n'est pas fait [30. P. 154].

All those jobs that require a person to stay at home are unfit for men, who, according to Rousseau, are more energetic and need to develop their physical skills. For instance, designing and sewing clothes is not a profession a young boy should aspire to, because it will render his body weak and effeminate. On the contrary, women are made to be wives who mindlessly embroider, scold the servants and wait for their husbands to come home. Even the act of taking care of their kids is seen as an activity of less importance than, for example, managing a business. As if running after hyperactive

children were a sedentary activity. Segregation, however, does not only happen in the division between the private and the public. As several studies suggest, transgender individuals not only face more discrimination than their cis-gender colleagues, but they also have to learn how to navigate new circles once they socially (and sometimes medically) transition. Katina Sawyer, Christian Thoroughgood and Jessica Webster wrote:

> Transgendered people do not necessarily conform to the gender binary, and their gender role may not be static. Thus, as they change from one gender to another they experience a change in their social role as well. That is, they may move into a different social group that has different privileges and liabilities [31. P. 33].

Apart from risking exposure and discrimination, some experience the negative side effects of appearing more feminine. For instance, they might see their wages reduced because of a persistent gender pay gap. Even trans men, even though they might be more easily accepted by their peers, sometimes experience sexist remarks and questionable jokes, and have to reconcile their identity with their social roles. As a study by Levitt and Ippolito shows, trans men who identified as feminists felt like they were somewhat colluding with the imbalanced power dynamic that tends to put men in a stronger position. Some of the participants also thought that, by transitioning, they were turning their backs on a community of women that had nurtured them [32. P. 54]. This dissonance is useful to understand how gender equals power in certain environments, allowing the speaker to see his autonomy recognised and his identity validated, especially when he passes and/or is among strangers. Some academics, as Steven Pinker underlines, suggests that the gap will be narrower in the future and that the skills that are inherent to women will be recognised as indispensable for certain fields. Pinker says that the way human brains are set up (their nature, from an empirical point of view) makes men and women develop different abilities which can be in turn utilised in different

fields of study. Indeed, if one compares the number of women in STEM to the number of men, it is possible to recognise that the majority of scientists are male. For example, Abigail Powell, Barbara Bagilhole and Andrew Dainty point out how cultural bias has kept women away from the field of engineering:

> Engineering has a popular image of being tough, heavy and dirty, and from a student's point of view, hard sums and greasy metal. These powerful cultural images have helped to reproduce occupational segregation whereby engineering has been perceived as unsuitable for women [33. P. 47].

The reasons for these divisions are both cultural and pragmatic. On one hand, research has shown that male brains are more suited for object manipulation and abstract thinking, while women tend to be more interested in social sciences. On the other hand, these natural proclivities have been exacerbated to the point that STEM fields have been somewhat forbidden to women. Moreover, organisational culture — defined as the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organisation's history, and which tend to be manifested in its material arrangements and in the behaviour of its members [34] by Andrew Brown — is highly hierarchical and celebrates masculine characteristics. This, along with poor career counselling the association of ideas between men and technology, contributes to a lack of interest on the part of women in STEM subjects. Therefore, since socialization and discrimination contribute significantly to the observed gender differences in scientific domains [35. P. 159], the mere fact that women and minorities are aware of the existence of such stereotypes prevents them from actively fighting to break them. Language as well is then utilised to divide the workforce into neat categories that should never mingle, with women doing women's work and men doing men's work. Once the bias that characterises the job market (as well as some academic environments) is removed, there is nothing substantial

that prevents women and other marginalised groups from excelling. Pinker wrote:

> In today's world, of course, the gap favors men. Some of the gap is caused by discrimination. Employers may underestimate the skills of women, or assume that an all-male workplace is more efficient, or worry that their male employees will resent female supervisors, or fear resistance from prejudiced customers and clients [36. P. 355].

It is also worth noticing that non-scientific fields of study are somewhat considered less important than, for example, medicine or engineering: degrees in political sciences, communication, education or literature are often believed to be easier to obtain than technical ones and can open up fewer career paths than STEM subjects. There is a prevalence of women in these fields. When men join them, they are considered somewhat less masculine because of it. Academia can also further discrimination and segregation, although in recent times, more light has been shed on the subject of inclusivity and equality. For instance, in Italy, some universities have adopted what is known as the carriera alias, a way for transgender students who have not yet changed their legal documents to be addressed by their chosen names and pronouns. This temporary identity is only valid inside the university; thus, it is used when the students need to take an exam or when they need to use their student's card. Given the fact that all the documents issued by the university are official ones, the alias identity cannot be used instead of the legal one on all those acts that need to be presented outside of the university. On one hand, such a proposition is a good way to bypass the long administrative times that are required for a change of documents. It usually comes after a series of physical and psychological check-ups and permission granted by a judge. However, this admirable endeavour does not always work in the way it is meant to. For instance, university regulations are intentionally vague and do not list the documents that can be issued

using the alias identity. While students and professors are usually accepting of their trans colleagues, administrative personnel are not always so welcome. The need of having to explain one's identity all the time to people who might not react favourably to it undermines the students' personal and social autonomy: some might decide not to apply for an Erasmus or not to work in the university's library for fear of being outed[3]. In the long term, transgender individuals might develop a tendency to stay away from events and projects that might put them in uncomfortable situations in which their identities are constantly questioned. In this sense, the fear that some stereotypes end up being self-fulfilling becomes a harsh reality and it does nothing to help further the cause for equality.

Given the fact that changing laws requires time and votes, what can we do to foster inclusion? We must aspire to create is a society of change, of perfect fluidity; yet we must avoid the fragmentation of identities that creates chaos and fear. What does the term perfect fluidity mean? In this case the term fluidity applies to the idea that change will not only be understood, but it will be welcomed. Let us imagine a society in which differences are acknowledged but are not used as discriminatory tools. In this setup, unnecessarily gendered practices would fall into disuse: all individuals could have access to the same jobs according to their abilities and preferences; the same could be said about sports; items

---

[3] A friend of mine told me that when he applied for the Erasmus project, he had to explain himself to the host university; moreover, he was often misgendered on purpose by the university staff, who introduced him to his colleagues using his deadname and female pronouns. He also reported that, despite having changed his legal documents, the university still identifies him with his old name and gender marker when referring to everything he has done in the past. To quote a few sentences from the conversation we had: '[questa è una] cosa assurda perché tra l'altro io ho cambiato i documenti. E la Sapienza ha cambiato i miei dati su Infostud. Ma secondo l'amministrazione tutto ciò che ho fatto prima resta legato all'anagrafica passata'.

of clothing might be divided by colour, material or fit, and even simple things like driving a car would lose their gendered weight. For once, we will be rightfully insulted because we are terrible drivers and not because of our feminine appearance. What I am describing is both heaven and hell. While it is somewhat easier to change one's identity online, as Esperanza Miyake showed us in her essay, the real world works according to rules that are difficult to change. As we have already seen, the process to change one's legal documents is long and costly, especially in terms of emotional stress. Having more options to mark one's identity on websites is a huge step forward, yet when there is a discrepancy between what is declared and what is actually written on the person's documents, there might be some problems. Moreover, living in perfect fluidity might prove difficult already in the short term for people who are rather content with their sex as it was assigned at birth and with more traditional gender identities. Perhaps, they could feel shunned and marginalised due to a perceived failure on their part to appreciate gender freedom or they may fear that, by acting according to the gender binary, they might alienate their friends and colleagues. Indeed, the risk of creating another imbalanced power structure exists and there is no point in denying it. Yet, the current status quo is not the ideal position to be stuck on. Enforcing small, cultural changes might be a solution, albeit not definitive, to move away from inequality and towards inclusivity. For example, giving people the possibility to shop for clothes according to parameters that are separated from gender can allow them to express themselves better and to put themselves out. Currently, several brands do offer gender-neutral items of clothing, but they tend to be expensive garments which contribute to pushing them towards the niche. Instead, seeing big department stores and brands advocate for neutrality would slowly convince the common shopper that everyone is allowed to dress how they want. This is not to say that we should eliminate the need to wear clothes that are appropriate to the context, nor should we curb a designer's creativity.

The solution would simply make it easier for individuals to act and present themselves according to their sense of style, without enduring the curious stares of other people when paying for a shirt or a skirt. Of course, the matter of clothes is linked to other subjects, such as sustainability, accountability, slave labour and size inclusivity, all of which are likely to take time and money to be solved. In the meantime, allowing even low-income gender-non-conforming individuals to dress freely and without having to explain their choices is a step forward. Another example of inclusivity (at least on paper) can be found in several dating apps. Although they are not commonly considered as spaces in which a person's true worth is taken into account, much has been done to ensure that queer individuals can fully express themselves. For instance, Tinder allows users to describe their sexuality and gender identity with a number of terms, some of which are less known than the classic options (e.g., straight/gay; man/woman), which can also work towards the elimination of the sex/gender binary and the dichotomy between sexual and romantic attraction. Even more obscure apps, such as Grindr, which is generally catered towards gay men who are more interested in the physical aspects of dating, do offer multiple gender options and have a brief informative page in order to explain what gender identity is to their users. Indeed, when one logs in their dating app of choice, they probably are not all that concerned about inclusion, recognition, autonomy and equality; however, seeing different identities enter the pool of possible dating candidates might slowly ingrain in them the idea that these people are not freaks and that they are not unlovable. In the long run, it might create a more accepting online community, making queer individuals feel validated and worthy of consideration.

De-gendering certain practices will surely benefit society, at least in the long term. Although the world of sports is somewhat segregated, with men on one side and women on the other, it is important to spread the idea that there are no sports that cannot be played by everyone. When it comes to professional sports,

the problem becomes much more complex, since some feel that, for example, letting trans women compete in women's leagues will give them an advantage because biologically male bodies tend to be stronger than biologically female bodies. There are both merits and demerits in allowing trans individuals onto the teams that they feel represent them in the best way; however, the problem with sports is not only one of competitiveness and hormones. The issue here is that non-competitive activities are highly gendered from the get-go: girls who play rugby or football are considered unfeminine, butch and aggressive (which are all characteristics that would instead be desirable in a man); men who prefer gymnastics or even ballet are seen as effeminate, weak and their sexuality is often put into question. In a condition of perfect fluidity, sports would be sports and that would be it. Children would be grouped according to age and/or physical abilities, and they would be allowed to play whatever game they prefer without being considered abnormal for their choices. In the long term, the gender gap that characterises the world of sports would perhaps be reduced. There have been several attempts to start parallel professional sports leagues for women, although most do not gain the public support as men's leagues do. Moreover, female athletes tend to earn less than their male counterparts, partly due to a lack of interest in their side of the sport which pushes sponsors away. It is important to notice that marketing strategies are often catered to a male public, which further enlarges the gap, while women may be invited not to find sports attractive. However, if sports were to be considered as a gender-neutral way to keep in shape and maybe earn a living, starting from children's leagues, it would create a safe environment for women and queer folks to follow their inclinations. Even if given the possibility, many would probably still not find the appeal of watching twenty-two millionaires running after a single ball for more than an hour; and that number would maybe include several men who now feel compelled to show an interest only because their gender role says they should. Apart from documents, clothes

and hobbies, speech tends to be highly gendered too. The matter of neutral pronouns is deeply felt especially in those languages that do not possess a neutral declination, such as Romance languages. Even in English, which does not divide names according to their gender, the use of the pronoun they to indicate a single person of unknown or neutral gender has been widely discussed as a grammatical error. Nonetheless, the possibility of neutrality is contemplated by the language's grammar; yet the same thing cannot be said for Italian. Since learning Hungarian, which does not contemplate the dichotomy between masculine and feminine pronouns[4], seems to be a bit of an extreme measure to foster inclusivity, the solution would be to adapt the languages to the demand of time. However, we have seen in previous sections that language and speech cannot be forced. Sometimes, they do bend to the will of the masses, but in most cases, the changes need to happen with the flow of time. In any case, while the standard language cannot be so easily changed, it is possible to foster inclusivity in other contexts. When it comes to Italian, the Accademia della Crusca has specified in a recent article[5] that the use of gender-neutral pronouns and declinations is not contemplated in the current linguistical setup. In the world of the Internet, many users have begun to use an asterisk (*) or a schwa (ə). The asterisk has been inherited from several coding languages and is placed in lieu of missing characters;

---

[4] In that regard, the Hungarian language indeed does not have feminine or masculine declinations (which is a characteristic that can be found in other languages, for example English). It also only utilises a set of articles for definite (*a* or *az*) and indefinite nouns (*egy*). Moreover, the use of he/she is not present in Hungarian, where the pronoun *Ő* is used for both men and women (e.g. *She is a woman* becomes *Ő egy nő*; while *He is a man* becomes *Ő egy férfi*). The same goes for the plural (*Ők*) and the formal pronouns (*Ők/Önök*). I must thank my very good friend Viktória for the quick lesson she gave me while we were driving to Ostia.

[5] *Un asterisco sul genere*, URL: https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/un-asterisco-sul-genere/4018.

while the schwa is a phonetic sign that is often used when writing the pronunciation of a few dialects across the peninsula but is almost always omitted even when writing words in those same dialects. While the asterisk presents a series of issues coming from its origin (it is not, in fact, a proper character in the same what a letter could be); the schwa is even more problematic for it is difficult to write, especially in cursive, and it is not present on standard computer keyboards. Moreover, it can be hard to pronounce, and it can create confusion in people with dyslexia. In any case, despite the reservations that the Accademia has shown towards these ways of expressing gender neutrality, it is possible to still use them in more informal and/or personal messages. While they cannot be added to laws or official documents, there is nothing that prevents people from making extensive use of these two signs (along, perhaps, with others which will develop in the future) online, among friends and colleagues, and in other settings where one is sure they will not create confusion. Apart from finding new ways to express gender neutrality, which are all laudable, language can be used to further the divide between what is desirable and what is undesirable, with a particular emphasis on gender. For instance, it would be a good idea to teach children not to equate femininity with weakness. By dismissing someone's opinions because they appear more feminine than one might consider the norm, there is a loss of knowledge. Plus, the person's autonomy is undermined as they might think that their experience counts for nothing, and it is their appearances that determine their worth. Finally, by equating weakness, irrational decision-making processes, indecisiveness and over-emotional responses to femininity or sexual deviance, speech can be used to further marginalise a sizable segment of the population. In this way, we are making no steps towards eliminating unjust testimonial injustice, for we will pay no heed to someone's warnings if they do not conform to a pre-determined, masculine way of presenting themselves. All these efforts work towards the normalisation of fluidity, not in the sense of celebrating the fractured

identities both Heckman and Haraway were worried about; rather, the aim would be to change some cultural aspects that limit everyone. Unbalanced power dynamics do not hurt only those at the bottom, but they can be detrimental for the dominant group. In a condition of fluidity, changing one's preferences and acting outside of the traditional gender roles would allow the majority of the population to explore some side of their personality that right now, they might not have access to. Fluidity will possibly make it less painful for people to recognise themselves as worthy. A transgender individual might decide not to medically transition if they feel that they are accepted as the gender they identify with without the need for an operation; a feminine man might become more comfortable with himself so that he might walk around with no fear of being singled out and victimised. Through experimentation and acceptance, we will have cultural and personal growth, which will in turn make it easier for lawmakers to modify the legal system to reflect the changes that make societies move forward.

V. Interest, needs and political representation

According to Zillah Eisenstein, historically women have been relegated to domestic labour, meaning the care of children and the elderly, as well as the day-to-day management of the household. By perpetuating the doctrine of institutional motherhood, women have been locked out of the public sphere, where the social and political debate took place, and from the entirety of the job market. Even with the advent of capitalism and the institutionalisation of the State, women have kept their subordinate role for the state's purpose is to enforce the separation of public and private life and with it the distinctness of male and female existence [37. P. 26]. Eisenstein also suggests that liberalism has not replaced the feudal/patriarchal family, it has merely changed its appearance. Thomas Kuhn explains the necessity of political revolutions in a few, succinct sentences as he explains the parallel between science and society:

> Political revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, often restricted to a segment of the political community, that existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created [38. P. 101].

Although political change is not an easy task, we can still envision a theoretical framework that will ensure representation and recognition. Indeed, the traditional liberal view presents rights as something to be earned, which makes them look like finite goods. By giving them to someone, someone else must lose them. In this way, the world of politics promotes a competitive view of both representation and recognition by pushing various interest groups to fight against each other in the hope of coming out on top. Of course, governing a country (and presiding over a legal community in general) entails a degree of discrimination, for it is impossible to make everyone happy all the time. However, is it possible to create a more inclusive political system, one that will at least ensure that groups are not deliberately ignored out of prejudice and malice? In the previous section, we have seen that language is often a tool that contributes to the marginalisation of minorities. This happens in two ways: first, by denying their autonomy, the dominant group makes sure to exclude its victims from the political debate; secondly, by manipulating the very fabric of language, it prevents minorities from adopting some form of retaliating rhetoric. As a result, certain groups might not possess the right political vocabulary to participate in a society's democratic life. In the past, such a problem was caused, for example, by school segregation; although, even in present times, lack of recognition in education for women and/or minorities still plays an important role. A solution could be for marginalised groups to simply adapt to what is expected of them: on one hand, they should accept their status of inferiority and learn how to live with it; otherwise, they might conform to the norm and be absorbed into the dominant group. None of these two paths is feasible. The first is closely linked to the existence of self-fulfilling stereotypes and has a classist/

racist connotation. The second would entail a loss of diversity, knowledge and identity that would only benefit marginalised groups on the surface. They would have to give up their heritage and nature to (maybe) benefit from the same power dynamics that made them victims in the first place. Who will guarantee that what they leave behind is not more precious than what they hope to find? When it comes to feminist struggles, the divide between assimilation and independence is sometimes embodied by the conflict between gender difference and equality feminism. Squires wrote:

> Archetypally, those who approach democratic theory from an equality perspective firmly believe that gender ought to be politically irrelevant, or non-pertinent. <…> The idea that women 'are different' has been used to exclude women from valued and fulfilling social engagement [39. P. 9].

On the other hand, the gender difference approach entails the realisation that 'gender difference' is either a biological given or a result of social conditioning, but in either case needs to be recognized and valued [39. P. 10]. The doctrine of maternal thinking, after Sara Ruddick's book of the same name, also emphasises the role of motherhood not as something that ought to be abandoned or patronised, but as an integral part of women's identities. Women can and will contribute to the political debate, as they should, but not on the same ground as men. Their intervention must have the same weight, otherwise, we would not live in a democratic environment, but they have to draw on women's abilities to produce and care for children. This approach has been linked to the struggle for pacifism, as some theorists claim that women's natural tendencies towards love are incompatible with men's needs for violence. If women were allowed to enter the political realm as fully-fledged members of the community, they would contrast those aggressive urges that are partly responsible for the outbreak of wars. Maternal thinking has been criticised by equality theorists because it perpetuates dangerous stereotypes about women's ability to do

other activities besides child-rearing. Moreover, some are worried that maternal values do not belong in the political sphere. Indeed, by introducing motherhood as a sort of political flag, one runs the risk of politicising a set of values that are better left alone. We must also be careful not to generalise: not every woman has maternal instincts. Perhaps, the truth is in the middle, as it often is. When it comes to issues linked with family, education and care, maternal thinking can provide an interesting lens through which some problems can be redefined and tackled. Sexual difference feminism and equality theories also require different political approaches. They both see women's role in politics as somewhat limited under the status quo and envision a future where they can participate freely; however, they do not agree on what women should do to achieve their goals. Equality feminism claims that they should integrate themselves into the existing political order. This idea is unacceptable for sexual difference theorists:

> The individualistic, competitive, rational qualities of existing democratic structures are viewed with suspicion and hostility rather than admiration and longing. The aim is to lessen the power, not to join the ranks, of the male order. The political task here is the reversal of that proposed by the equality theorist [39. P. 10].

Such a clear division into two neat little boxes is surely necessary for academic purposes, in order to shape each approach's goals and desires. However, one can find merit in the equality approach and in its claim that gender should not be relevant in the political discourse. Nonetheless, simplifying matters by saying that women should integrate themselves into the existing political setup is somewhat reductive. Apart from the aforementioned loss of knowledge, there is also a certain degree of naiveté in reducing women's issues to the way they are included in the political system. Logically, if we take for granted that the status quo is unbalanced for what concerns gender, the same can be applied to other categories. After all, feminism should embrace its intersectional nature,

participating in the struggle against colonialism, racism, ableism, fascism and other despicable -isms. Therefore, even if women and genderqueer individuals were to adapt to a political system that excludes them, that would solve only part of the problem and would not, in reality, get us closer to equality. However, even emphasizing the differences between men and women can be problematic, especially if the conception of gender remains binary and indissolubly linked with biological sex. Moreover, there is always the risk of creating another, equally unjust balance of power by claiming that a group's characteristics are better than another's. Surely, fighting to see one's abilities recognised is important, as it is important to understand that certain people are better suited to fulfil certain roles. However, all communities should be very careful about the way they interact with their members and with other players.

Many theorists, including Donna Haraway and Judith Butler, have criticised the existence of a common narrative that includes all women. Apart from Janice Raymond, who used women's supposedly shared experience under the patriarchy to justify her exclusionary views, not many scholars nowadays would agree that such an all-encompassing identity exists. The same can be said about many minorities; however, one could reduce the reach of common identity to include smaller things, if not the life-changing experiences that not everyone can share. We have seen evidence of the existence of microaggressions, we can start from them in order to build an inclusive narrative. This narrative would not be stopped by the revelation that gender is (at least in part) fictional, nor would it depend so heavily on abstract thinking for it would be justified by the physical reality of things. It becomes evident that equality and sexual difference feminism are incompatible. Whether it is their relationship with womanhood or their ideas about political inclusion, they apparently cannot be reconciled. Given this unfillable void between these two approaches, scholars have begun seeking another option — that of diversity. Diversity theory is somewhat linked to sexual difference, for both seek to subvert

the unequal distribution of power within the political system. However, while sexual difference feminism considers the authority of men as its main enemy, diversity theorists question the need to gender the world as a whole. As Judith Squires says:

> rather than recentre political theory around a female as opposed to a male gendered perspective, the diversity approach seeks to decentre political theory with respect to gender altogether [39. P. 12].

Moreover, it can be argued that with the rise of identity politics in the 1970s and 80s, sexual difference feminism took another hit. Since identity politics was not only concerned about gender but was also preoccupied with a range of other issues relating to identity. It was then that scholars and activists became wary of the common female identity that was at the forefront of the sexual difference discourse. Since other aspects had to be taken into account, such as race and sexuality, the focus of identity politics shifted towards the demand for the recognition of the individual's experience. In any case, despite this change of approach, the issue of how to represent groups remains (and it is likely to become an unsolvable issue if the political debate is not preceded by a cultural adjustment). The role of gender in politics inflames the mand of many different theorists. The same can be said of the matter of group representation, with some claiming that granting group rights is the right way to make sure that all marginalised groups have access to the same platforms as the dominant ones. First, since the equality approach is based on the irrelevance of gender in the political discourse, seeing it put on display as the main identifier of certain groups and as grounds for legal recognition, might mean the creation of more divisions. According to the sexual difference approach, the obsessive focus on representation rather than participation may create an even more exclusive idea of politics. The diversity approach, instead, might suggest that group representation might stand in the way of the fluidity of identity. Susan

Heckman points out an interesting contradiction between the modern conception of identity as socially constructed and therefore highly changeable and the political need to pin it down for the sake of representation. When identities become fixed, they also eliminate all internal differences that are intrinsic to any human consortium:

> Once a political movement fixes on an identity, it becomes the foundation of the new political truth that the movement espouses. The identities of identity politics are not tailored to individual differences. Nor do they recognize identities as fluid and constructed. Rather, they fix identity in a new location [40. P. 295].

The fixing of identities creates otherness, for what I am is true and what you are is false. Indeed, the way identities are created within a social context entails the drawing of borders. After all, we cannot define ourselves independently from others, at least for what concerns the socially constructed side of identity. Moreover:

> In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications (…) Through the process of self-categorization or identification, an identity is formed [41. P. 224].

The problem here is not the fact that identities presuppose otherness; the issue is that there is an irreconcilable division between the self and the other, one that prevents the re-writing and the fluidification of self-perception. This takes us a step further away from inclusion because it does not consider that the other can change, as can we, nor does it contemplate the shifting of the borders of identity. Heckman is partially right in her warning since the fixing of identities does entail the loss of fluidity; however, it does not mean that they are no longer recognised as a construct. Rather, their artificial nature is stressed and bent out of shape, so much so that it virtually ends up producing the same result as if we eliminated them altogether. Another issue with

identity politics and group representation is that it might tend to underline those differences that have been created by society and politics themselves, perpetuating the stereotypical representation of marginalised groups. In the end, it means that the dominating group will still define what is acceptable and what is not so that its authority cannot be undermined. This does not only create an issue when it comes to the self-perception of a community, but it makes legal codification problematic too. For example, by leaning into the victimisation of certain groups, one risks forcing it to be a victim forever, which would only preserve the same unbalanced power dynamic as the status quo. Some might say that the fixing of identities will risk making laws very outdated very quickly. This is somewhat true; still, identities are only partially socially constructed and although they are fluid in nature, we can expect some things never to change. Moreover, most laws are not God-given. They must modify themselves to reflect the changing of the seasons, to incorporate the needs and wants of an ever-growing society, including the dominant group. We might see a trend here, in considering the advantaged community as a monolithic bloc that remains absolutely immobile throughout the centuries. The problems arise not when identities enter the political realm, but when the legal system refuses to depart from its established path. This is terrifying; yet, we also have to take into account that through the cultural normalisation of mutual recognition, what now seems like an impossibly fast change might become a more easily acceptable reality. Finally, although identity politics is a recent approach, we cannot forget that identities have always played a role in the shaping of a legal system. Perhaps lawmakers did not take into account gender and race as much as we do today; nonetheless, they have often entailed different treatments for different categories, and they were not always unjust. A legitimate complaint might be about the speed at which the change takes place, seeing as activism nowadays has shed some light on issues that have been ignored for too long. It now seems like laws cannot be implemented fast

enough, it seems like democracy can no longer keep up with the demands of marginalised groups. This is why cultural acceptance should come first: uncodified behaviours, praxis and moral obligations can be modified, influenced even, at a quicker rate, ignoring the long democratic processes required for the creation of new legal systems. The problem of group representation has led some theorists, such as Susan Moller Okin, to question group rights altogether. However, in the 1990s the issue of political inclusivity led feminists to begin arguing that women's interests should be represented by women, for they can better understand what it means to be at a disadvantage in an unbalanced power dynamic. Virginia Sapiro claims that political systems will not spontaneously start representing previously marginalised groups unless these groups make their voice heard. In order to make their voice heard, they first have to develop a sense of common identity — an idea of what it is they have come to reclaim. However, a number of scholars and writers claim that there are no common identities:

> Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as "us" in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called "us", and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? [2. P. 155]

And yet, if there are no common identities, how can marginalised groups finally be represented? The solution seems to come from Irene Diamond and Nancy Hartsock, as they say that the focus of political representation can be on women's shared experience:

> We hold that despite the real differences among women, there are commonalities which grow from women's life activity of producing and sustaining human beings. At the level of grand theory, it may be fruitful to proceed on the basis of the radical feminist hypothesis that all forms of oppression and domination are modelled on male/female oppression [42. P. 718].

This is not an original claim, and one may underline that in modern times it has lost some of its relevancy. Without considering the fact that women can have biologically male bodies and still identify and present themselves as women, it is also important to notice one last time that motherhood is not something all women get to experience. To be honest, not all women even desire it. Not all women are cut out for it either. In any case, what Diamond and Hartsock propose is to include the representation of women based on needs rather than interests (contrary to what Sapiro suggested). They are proponents of an in-depth analysis of the division of labour that fortifies women's exclusion from the political sphere. Both because of socialisation and because the female body has different functions, women tend to identify themselves thanks to the relations that they form. Femininity and masculinity are also constructed in two opposing ways.

> For men, "masculinity" can only be attained by means of opposition to the concrete world of daily life, by escaping from contact with the "female" world of the household into the "masculine" world of public life, and at least in the polis, politics. <…> In contrast, women's relationally defined existence, as constructed through the sexual division of labor, results in a social understanding in which dichotomies are less foreign, everyday life is more valued, and a sense of connectedness and continuity with other persons and the natural world is central [42. P. 718].

While Sapiro seems to struggle for the inclusion of women in the existing political system, Diamond and Hartsock claim that the female experience will break the system, it will show how inadequate male values are. They envision a strategy of reversal instead. By analysing how the gendered division of labour came to be, it becomes possible to see how life-giving experiences were considered less important than life-taking ones (for instance, the act of dying in war is heroic, while giving birth is not something as valued by the phallocentric society). Including women's problems into the existing political system may break it, for it is not designed to take

into account anything besides the male experience. Ever since its inception, back in Ancient Greece, the Western political system relied on speech and aggression to distribute powers: two qualities from which women were excluded, being tied in the private sphere of the household. Although their contribution made the public sphere work as it was supposed to do, their effort always went unmentioned. Of course, Diamond and Hartsock do not deny that women can make their voices heard outside of the political system by pointing out issues that concern their lives. They argue that

> Men seem to be able in these circumstances, to represent and "act for" women. Our hypothesis, however, is that the ability of men to act for women varies considerably through the different phases of the policy process: only women can "act for" women in identifying "invisible" problems affecting the lives of large numbers of women. At the same time, women's ability to "act for" women must be understood in the context of the survival strategies women have created in response to their powerlessness [42. P. 720].

Given these premises, they suggest that only women can represent women. By extension, we can infer that only queer people can represent the queer community, that only immigrants can represent immigrants and so on. It appears that the solution to group representation in politics is to have groups represent themselves because only an insider can define what their peers' needs are and what interests are being ignored by the dominant group. However, if we still believe that common identities are fictional at best, this solution does not seem to be the most efficient one. Moreover, we have established that there is one big barrier that all these approaches seem to ignore. If women (and other groups as well) have traditionally been excluded from the public sphere, how can we make sure that they have access to it in the first place? Moreover, it is easier to talk about national systems, without taking into account the possibility of starting with smaller experiments, perhaps at a regional or local level, to gradually allow marginalised groups

to organise themselves into legitimate political players. Talking about needs and interests is important, but first, there seem to be more pressing matters.

Iris Marion Young claims that a truly representative system must include provisions for the participation of marginalised groups. She puts forward the following principle:

> a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged [43. P. 184].

Young also describes three steps that this all-inclusive democratic system should have: it should allow marginalised groups to organise themselves; it should include a mechanism to ensure that these groups' collective experiences are being evaluated by policymakers; and it should allow these groups to have the right to veto all those laws that directly concern them, as a sort of failsafe. When these three things are not implemented, policy issues are often defined by the assumptions and priorities of the privileged. Specific representation for oppressed groups interrupts this process, because it gives voice to the assumptions and priorities of other groups [43. P. 185]. Young seeks a synthesis between Sapiro's interests and Diamond and Hartsock's needs, and she also suggests that marginalised groups will require a different treatment compared to the dominant one. This means that allowing them to practice their traditions and culture will validate their identities, not as victims but as crucial parts of society. As we have said time and time again, assimilation creates a loss of knowledge, which is something that Young points out too:

> People in different groups often know about somewhat different institutions, events, practices, and social relations, and often have differing perceptions of the same institutions, relations, or events. <…> A public that makes use of all such social knowledge in its

differentiated plurality is most likely to make just and wise decisions [43. P. 186].

It is difficult to disagree with Young's claims, for a truly inclusive political system must take into account the experiences of every citizen, especially those that have not traditionally been represented by it. It is also important to recognise that inclusion, rather than exclusion and/or assimilation, generates knowledge. However, it is not advisable to simply grant different rights to different groups out of the blue. It might be seen as an imposition, as a dangerous deviation from the norm, by the dominant group. Although there is a need for faster change — there is no denying that — there should be a solid cultural basis to allow for this transition to happen as smoothly as possible. Depending on which rights are recognised to social groups that live on the edge of acceptability, one must always keep in mind that there might be the risk of creating more (unjust) hierarchies. It does not seem possible right now, and hopefully, this will not happen in the future either; yet, the mere theoretical possibility might act like a boomerang, justifying the dominant group's aversion to mutual recognition. It is important to underline the intersectionality of certain issues to avoid the stagnation of identities and to spread political know-how. If this principle were extended to the dominant group (i.e., the dominant group provides representation to the marginalised ones on matters that concern them too), it would make both the cultural and the legal inclusion of minorities even faster. The matter of group identification remains an open question. Perhaps the crystallisation of identities is a necessary evil, the first step towards inclusion. After all, although some say a common female experience does not exist in the real world, it did help first-wave feminists defy the male-dominated world to gain more rights. Nowadays, it might appear as a reductive approach, especially when activists and scholars are trying to eliminate identities altogether. Yet, is it possible to get rid of something that is ingrained in the fabric of human existence

without creating an unfixable fracture within our personalities? Maybe the political system we are seeking is something both revolutionary and stationary, taking its characteristics from what is already there and modifying them to be more inclusive. To create a balanced power dynamic, we should somewhat give up universality, for it might be our downfall. After all, it is foolish to think that everyone has the same relationship with their disadvantaged position. Secondly, such a system should also be adaptable to different situations. Every individual has a radius within which they can influence the actions and thoughts of people around them. Thus, our theoretical system has to stretch to encompass a whole nation; yet, it should also be able to shrink to work in smaller environments (e.g., municipalities, counties, regional governments, etc…). For this reason, it should also not be overly fixated on cultural and organisational details that conflict with the context in which it is deployed. Finally, it would rest on a solid cultural ground that is based on acceptance and normalisation of marginalised behaviours. The road is still long and perilous, as any crisis creates serious setbacks that take us even further away from equality. But there is hope for the future.

Conclusion

The complex world of power related to identities presents several problems which are not easy to quantify, let alone solve. On one hand, we have a pervasive need for stability and clarity which is (at least partially) satisfied by sticking to the status quo. On the other hand, the current unbalanced power dynamics between genders, including those outside the gender binary, is damaging to all parties involved, including the groups at the top of the hierarchy. Through the normalisation of divisions and toxic behaviours instead of the promotion of mutual recognition and social autonomy, individuals are pushed to compete against each other in an

endless power struggle. From this bleak picture, it becomes also evident that traditional approaches might no longer be adequate to tackle all the issues that modernity has brought forth. Imbalance and discrimination are conveyed through a multitude of channels, from language to stereotypes; from unnecessarily gendered practices to unfair expectations placed on marginalised groups. The burdens placed on women and the LGBTQ+ communities tend to drive them away from decisional centres and political debates, by taking away their ability to recognise the worthiness of their needs and interests. Although fostering acceptance through changes to the legal framework seems to be the surest and quickest way to reach a goal, subverting the system without ensuring the creation of a solid cultural base will lead to a discrepancy between theory and practice. Tolerance through imposition might be seen, in the short term at least, as an unjust imposition, feeding all the rhetoric of hatred that keeps minorities in a position of submission. By trying to create a fluid society and by fighting for positive representation, it will be possible to somewhat bridge such a discrepancy, by normalising behaviours and identities which are usually shunned and considered undesirable. Moreover, by opening up both the job market and the academic world to all minds no matter the gender, we will generate more knowledge and we will allow people to fully enjoy their autonomy within an accepting social environment. The human condition is one of suffering, both from within and from without; yet this does not mean that the struggle for equality is a useless one. When we can make someone's life a bit easier, do we not take it? After all, it is a matter of radius. Perhaps one nice gesture, one step, will not make much of a difference in the grand scheme of things, but it will be worth the effort. With time, policies will follow, perhaps demanded by the very citizens who now fear them.

References | Список литературы

1. Scott, A. "Trafficking in monstrosity", in *Feminist Theory*, 2001, 2(3), pp. 367–379.

2. Haraway, D. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

3. Gane, N. "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?: Interview with Donna Haraway", in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2006, 23(7–8), pp. 135–158.

4. Vogels, E., Perrin, A., Rainie, L., Anderson, M. *53% of Americans Say the Internet Has Been Essential During the COVID-19 Outbreak*, Pew Research Center, 30 April 2020, URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/04/30/53-of-americans-say-the-internet-has-been-essential-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/

5. Miyake, E. "My, is that Cyborg a little bit Queer?", in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2004, 5(2), pp. 53–61.

6. de Beauvoir, S. *Le deuxième sexe, tome II: L'expérience vécue*, Collection Blanche, Gallimard, 1949.

7. Diamond, L.M. "Gender Fluidity and Nonbinary Gender Identities Among Children and Adolescents", *Child Development Perspectives*, 2020, 14(2), pp. 110–115.

8. Rich, A. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", in *Signs*, 1980, Vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 631–660.

9. Feinberg, L. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*, Beacon Press, 1997.

10. Szreter, S. "The State of Social Capital: Bringing Back in Power, Politics and History", in *Theory and Society*, 2002, 31, pp. 573–621.

11. Hobbes, Th. *Leviathan*, ed. by J.C.A. Gaskin, Oxford University Press, 1998.

12. McLeod, C., Sherwin, S. *Relational Autonomy, Self-Trust, and Health Care for Patients Who Are Oppressed*, Philosophy Publications, 2000.

13. Honneth, A., Anderson, J. "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice", in Christman, J., Anderson, J. (Eds.) *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, Cambridge University Press; 2005, pp. 127–149.

14. Beasley, Ch., Bacchi, C. "Envisaging a new politics for an ethical future: Beyond trust, care and generosity towards an ethic of "social flesh"", *Feminist Theory*, 2007, 8(3), pp. 279–298.

15. Putnam, R.D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Touchstone Books (Simon & Schuster), 2001.
16. Woolcock, M. "*Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework*", in *Theory and Society*, 1998, 27, pp. 151–208.
17. Nedelsky, J. *Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts and Possibilities*, 1 Yale J.L. & Feminism, 1989.
18. Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press, 2007.
19. Govier, T. "Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem", *Hypatia*, 1993, 8(1), pp. 99–120.
20. Brothers, D. *Trust disturbances in rape and incest victims*: Ph.D. Diss., Yeshiva University, New York, 1982.
21. Lehrer, K. *Self-Trust: A Study of Reason, Knowledge and Autonomy*, Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1997.
22. Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*, Amazon Classics, 2017.
23. Hornsby, J. "Free speech and hate speech: Language and rights", in Egidi, R., Dell'Utri, M., De Caro, M. (eds.), *Normatività Fatti Valori*, Quodlibet, 2003.
24. Austin, J.L. *How to do things with words*, Oxford University Press, 1962.
25. Howard, J.W. "Free Speech and Hate Speech", in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2019, 22(1), pp. 93–109.
26. Parekh, Bhikhu. "Is there a case for banning hate speech?", in Herz, M., Molnar, P. (eds.) *The Content and Context of Hate Speech: Rethinking Regulation and Responses*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 37–56.
27. Baker, E.C. "Hate Speech", University of Pennsylvania Law School, Public Law Research Paper No. 08-09, in Hare, I., Weinstein, J. (eds.) *Extreme Speech and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
28. Sue, D.W. "Microaggressions, Marginality, and Oppression: An Introduction", in Sue D.W. (Ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2010, pp. 3–22.
29. Capodilupo, Ch.M., Nadal, K.L., Corman, L., Hamit, S., Lyons, O.B., Weinberg, A. "The manifestation of gender microaggressions", in Sue, D.W. (Ed.) *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2010, pp. 193–216.

30. Rousseau, J.-J. *Émile ou De l'éducation*, Flammarion, 2009. (PDF version)

31. Sawyer, K., Thoroughgood, Ch., Webster, J. "Queering the Gender Binary: Understanding Transgender Workplace Experiences", in Köllen, T. (Eds) *Sexual Orientation and Transgender Issues in Organizations*, Springer, Cham, 2006.

32. Levitt, H.M., Ippolito, M.R. "Being Transgender: Navigating Minority Stressors and Developing Authentic Self-Presentation", in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2014, 38(1), pp. 46–64.

33. Powell, A., Bagilhole, B., Dainty, A. "The good, the bad and the ugly: women engineering students' experiences of UK higher education", in Burke, R.J., Mattis, M.C. (Eds.) *Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Upping the Numbers*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007.

34. Brown, A. *Organisational Culture,* 2nd edition, Pearson, 1998.

35. Steele, J.R., Reisz, L., Williams, A., Kawakami, K. "Women in mathematics: examining the hidden barriers that gender stereotypes can impose", in Burke, R.J., Mattis, M.C. (Eds.) *Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Upping the Numbers*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007.

36. Pinker, S. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Penguin Books, 2003.

37. Eisenstein, Z.R. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, Longman, 1981.

38. Kuhn, Th.S. *The structure of scientific revolutions,* 50th anniversary edition, The University of Chicago Press, 2012. (PDF version)

39. Squires, J. "Representing groups, deconstructing identities", *Feminist Theory*, 2001, 2(1).

40. Hekman, S. "Beyond identity. Feminism, identity and identity politics", *Feminist Theory,* December 2000, 1, no. 3.

41. Stets, J.E., Burke, P.J. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Sep., 2000, Vol. 63, No. 3, pp. 224–237. (American Sociological Association)

42. Diamond, I., Hartsock, N. "Beyond Interests in Politics: A Comment on Virginia Sapiro's "When Are Interests Interesting? The Problem of Political Representation of Women", in *The American Political Science Review*, 1981, 75(3).

43. Young, I.M. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, 1990.