

COMMUNICATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN THE HISTORY OF WOMEN: FEMALE CONTRIBUTIONS AS A SIGN OF EMANCIPATION

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Abstract: *Since ancient times, except in rare cases, women have never had social, political or economical relevant roles. They gradually started to improve their self-awareness by taking actively part in public life, till to the feminist movement in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and then finally to all gender studies called "women's studies". After these first studies, new researches proliferate as they were a communication source about both private and public women history. This branch has been fully improved: in England this topic has been rapidly spread since it has been heavily influenced by a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach; in France the historiography school of the "Annales" magazine gave a great contribution, in Germany and Austria Gisela Bock started many researches cooperating with "Man" magazine. This is the origin of gender history, the history of both genders which identify themselves by relating each other. Through contemporary historiography it has been possible to start new studies and think about the communication-relationship in combination with the diversity of genders. My research is focused in Italy, where there were many lines of collection research. We talk about collection such as: "History of Women" conducted by Antonella Cagnolati, "Social history of education" directed by Carmela Hatched and Simonetta Ulivieri. These publications offer pedagogical insights about women's stories in the field of Social History, the History of Pedagogy and the History of Education. These researches didn't show any more a static image of women, but highlight a great improvement: women are active both in private and in public life. Furthermore they acknowledge evident historical changes in the status of women and in the relationship between women and men. These issues - in ancient time as well as medieval, modern and contemporary era - are significant indicators of more general changes in "culture" from a figurative and anthropology point of view and about concept and value systems.*

Keywords: *women, identity, change, education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Let's consider some deliberations about the concept of "awareness" by women of their ability to act and learn. These deep considerations do not have to overlook the value of the difference, although them have to be enhanced, not dejected. As an example: woman education was once really basic, so different if compared with man education; it mainly consisted in a sort of training. Hereinafter teaching institutions had a key role in conveying the lifestyles of boys and girls, by different methods and social destinies. As for the history of women and about the educational models to them conveyed, this cognitive process has had a particularly deep meaning because it gave back them freedom of speech and expression. This re-appropriation of the "word" had a redemption result by allowing women being thinking subject starting from themselves (Ulivieri, Biemmi, 2011:34-35). At this point, the knowledge of women are no longer based only on learning the

"womanly arts" (Covato, 2007:54). It can therefore be gather that the contrast between an education based on silence and the desire to give back to the woman a voice, or the opportunity to achieve a place in history and to communicate in a different ways. Women assert themselves by their political activism, with the educational practice and finally expressing themselves in literature; they have introduced new subject of analysis by the purpose to establish themselves in different fields of society.

In all ages we have examples of women able to give their word evocative and substantial power. The study examines the following interpretive aspect: first, Fenelon theory about a moral education important for education and training for the new generations. In *The education of young girls* Fenelon introduced the theory about a imitated education of women to avoid all dangerous intellectual curiosity. In the age of Enlightenment, women were just allowed to "muted lights and supervised knowledge" (Duby,

Perrot, 1991:119-153); on the contrary, Jean Antoine Caritat de Condorcet already denounced in the “Journal de la société de 1789” habits and prejudices against woman’s rights. Condorcet, in fact, became the defender of women as jurist by introducing the matter of women political rights. On the other side, Jean Jacques Rousseau, invited everyone not to confuse the genres. According to the Genevan philosopher “the woman is mainly cut out to please man” and “is the order of nature that the woman obey the man”. Oppositely, Condorcet expressed a different view of women aimed to be very important in history of the feminist movement, both during the French Revolution and in XIX century, when the women's movement improved and women had new legal and institutional autonomy.

Founded in USA at the end of XIX century, the feminists movement branched in 1903 “The National Council of Italian Women” and followed by “The Alliance Pro Female Suffrage” both established in Rome. The conscious emancipation was the result of the new concept of women personality and the opening of the communication and gender identity. According to Carmela Covato, the “women achievement of new right of the word” is a phenomenon concerning the anthropological and cultural differences regarding the last 1900s decades (Covato, 2007:45-48).

2. THE CONQUEST OF THE WORD

Women “conquer the word” when, during the demonstrations on women empowerment, they demand their freedom, equality and equal rights in relation to men. In England, Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* claimed that to get to equal rights “a cultural change involving an equal education for men and women” was needed (Wollstonecraft, 1792:7). Wollstonecraft argued that it was necessary to convince women to “gain strength, both physical and mental” and that the first goal of an admirable ambition was to “acquire the character of human being regardless of gender distinctions” (M. Wollstonecraft, 1792:17-18). In the United States, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott are leading figures in the social defence who drew up the so-called *Declaration of Sentiments*, which stated that, since men and women are created equal, they had some inalienable rights including that of life, of liberty and of word. This *Statement of sentiments* denounced a state of subjugation of women to man in society, including the right to vote (Stanton, Mott, 2013:9).

The same struggle toward equality of civil rights along with that of word was supported by the literate Virginia Woolf who, born in 1800 within a wealthy and educated family, proved actively engaged in the defence of these rights. The interesting work of Virginia Woolf emerges as a singular example, in fact, its progress came in gradually and almost naturally, due to the feeling in the air at that time. An air of independence and open-mindedness, as evidenced by her membership in the intellectual and snob “Bloomsbury group” club. She wrote many novels, essays and literary criticism. Her works communicate a new approach to process concepts: subjective voice, inner monologue to allow main characters talk to themselves and let the reader be part of their thinking, as virtually inserted into the thoughts and feelings of the characters. (Woolf, 2011).

Virginia Woolf’s literary production is a flagship of women brilliance. It is easily pointing out main features which show how the writer cared about woman self-expression, the improvement of her ideas and personality, highlighting, at the same time, the importance of women independence. In *A room of one's own*, published in 1929, the author described the importance to have her own writing space, while in one of her diaries Simone de Beauvoir complained lack of private area for reading and writing, separate from the family one. *A Room of one's own* was written on the occasion of a conference during which the writer discussed the topic “Women and novel”. She pointed out the differences between men and women education.

More than one writers have been involved in this literary current improving the self-education importance of women literature to share their experiences by writing.

3. COMMUNICATING IDEAS: THE MODERNITY OF ELLEN KEY

Thanks to the modern historiography, new studies about the subject of gender have been proceed. These are stories of dynamic women, both in private and in public sphere, stories related to communication skills of each woman.

Among a significant number of essays we mention the educational work of the Swedish writer Ellen Key: one of the most distinguished intellectual for works about feminism in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Cagnolati, 2010:41-42). She gave up her career in political journalism to study personal issues and relationship between natural and lawful families,

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the child and love. In her book entitled *The century of the child* she worked to awake the consciousness of the generation which had children, taking care of them and their education.

The educationalist had significant success with this work especially thanks to the Sibilla Aleramo's – journalist and successful writer - review on "The new anthology"; according to her, it was a work of great social value, a suggested reading for future mothers and young women (Cagnolati, 2010:43). Sibilla Aleramo is the point of connection with Ellen Key, as she introduced her to the Italian intellectuals in 1905. Mrs. Aleramo was involved in social work; she was also engaged for schools opening in the rural area of Milan, in order to help farmers and illiterates people and provided clinic assistance to mothers and children. Besides her commitment to social rights, she joined in 1899 the feminist movement of Milan. Mrs. Key and Mrs. Aleramo shared the commitment to woman rights. Mrs. Key had an unusual, innovative and unconventional approach, according to Mrs. Aleramo. At the beginning of 1900s, her work awoke people's conscience, as „it will transform our children, their birth, care and education, into the keystone of all social responsibility to which will depend laws, all habits and customs". She was beset with the eternal dilemma between mother's duty and women rule in society. She was very critical about law and organization of society at that time, considered as punitive conditions inflicted to mothers. These laws forced "woman choice between freedom and dignity and her children". According to her, the cause of liberating women had been supported by their personal social achievement not by reproducing men model behaviour. It was necessary, as said by Ellen Key, an "equivalence" and not an "equality", as men and women are different, neither above nor under each other, just persons it can not be compared.

At the beginning of last century, this theory became subject of discussion both in feminism and in educational areas. The point was try to join public and private sphere, motherhood and personal autonomy. Mrs. Key enhanced the relations between woman and maternity, pointing out its problematic issues. The solution was not locking them up inside four walls, but let them achieve their hard-won freedom also by looking for the right way to preserve the social purpose of motherhood (Cagnolati, 2010:57).

This position raised few polemics with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the American feminist

which supported women working outside the home to improve their independence, therefore the importance to plan collective services to help women in homework (central kitchens, infirmaries, nurseries schools). Maria Montessori was also of the opinion that only a job outside home would guarantee to women independence necessary for a relationship based on deep feeling instead of a functional partnership. However, as stated by Tiziana Pironi, Maria Montessori accepted the challenge of Ellen Key and her *children's house* founded in the district of San Lorenzo in 1907, as a project for "social house of future" to let every woman be free not only for herself, "but also to improve mankind in the future." (Pironi, 2010:9-10).

3. CONCLUSIONS

In this work it has been analysed the role of woman, the importance of a proper education to be given in order to communicate properly and succeed in career; making women voices heard to the world. It is a result of a research based on different studies about pedagogy and literature concerning female gender.

It has also stressed the evocative and education value of writing by the works of some twentieth century's writes such as: Ellen Key, Sibilla Aleramo and Wirginia Woolf. A writing itinerary about personal and social aspects. Write down their thoughts means for women to emerge from the silence and give voice to their existence after having been considered for a long, too long times, as lesser people. Also, describe their experience help the writer, as well as young readers, to have a non-stereotyped image of women life.

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