



**Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference
of the Journal Scuola Democratica
REINVENTING EDUCATION**

VOLUME II

**Learning with New Technologies,
Equality and Inclusion**

ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"

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**Learning with New Technologies,
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ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"
Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

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***Title* Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” – Reinventing Education VOLUME II Learning with New Technologies, Equality and Inclusion**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of “education” in a “post-democracy” era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners’ mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Gender Issues as a Political Resource: Reflections about the Representation of Women, Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence

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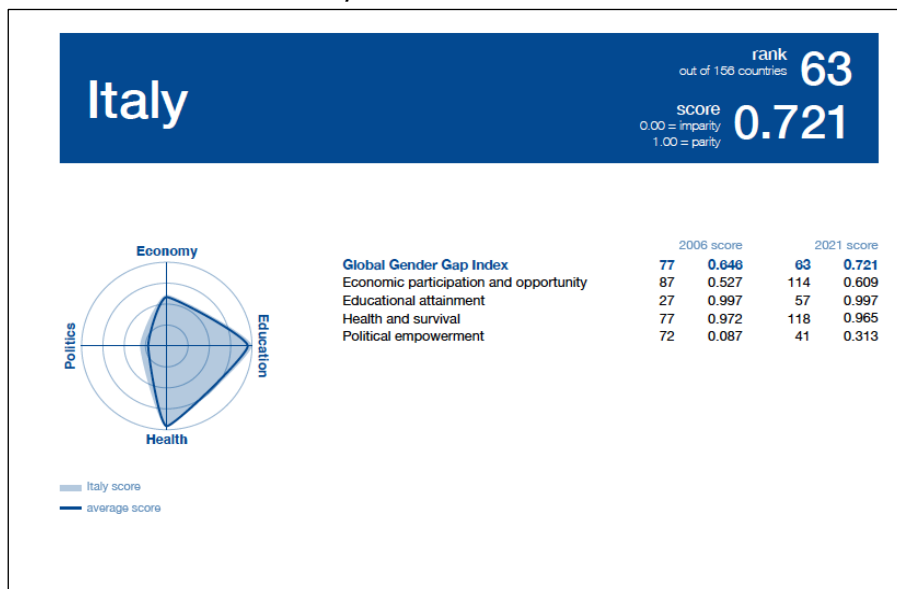
ABSTRACT: *According to the World Economic Forums Global Gender Gap Index on gender equity issues, Italy gained 13 positions in 2020, rising from 76th to 63rd place out of 156 countries. This important improvement was most likely due to Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who during his second government reached an historical record with 34% of Women represented within his governments staff. But as happens in other fields, such as the economic sector, Women leaders who hold top positions in institutions or establish themselves as party leaders are still a minority. In Europe, for example, there are only six countries with women at the head of Government. Among them, the Finnish Prime Minister, Sanna Marin, who is one of the youngest premieres in the World, and who has made gender equity a tool to aggregate consensus, conveying new rhetoric and imaginaries that challenge gender expectations. In Italy, one of the few examples of a Woman in a senior political position is represented by the right-wing party leader Giorgia Meloni. This unusual prominent position opens up many questions: What happens when a political leader is a woman? Does identity recognition become political good practice? Are these leadership models capable of deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices therefore triggering a new culture of gender equity? This paper has carried out an analysis of the relationship between politics and gender representations through a specific case study. The research focuses on the Italian populist leader, Giorgia Meloni's use of public communication to reconstruct gender representations through the way that she uses the topic of gender-based violence. The content analysis methodology will include the contents of tweets published by Meloni throughout 2020, her public statements and her official speeches relating to gender-based violence issues. The results of the research show how gender issues become a resource to rearticulate the more traditional political dynamics typical of populism as well as other traditionalist and xenophobic parties without deconstructing consolidated social stereotypes and helping their reproduction.*

KEYWORDS: *Representation of women, Stereotypes, Gender-based Violence*

Introduction

According to the Global Gender Gap Index on gender equity issues, Italy gained 13 positions in 2020, rising from 76th to 63rd place among 156 countries (see Fig. 1). This important improvement was most likely due to Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who during his second government reached an historical record of 34% of Women represented within his governments staff. But as it happens in other fields, such as the economic sector, Women leaders who hold top positions in institutions or establish themselves as party leaders are still a minority. In Europe, for example, only six countries have women serving as heads of Government.

FIG. 1. *Italian Gender Gap Index*



Source: World Economic Forum (2021, 229)

In Italy, one of the few examples of a Woman in a senior political position is represented by the right-wing party leader Giorgia Meloni (Arfini et al., 2017). This unusual prominent position opens up many questions: What happens when a political leader is a woman? Does identity recognition become political good practice? Are these leadership models able of deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices therefore of triggering a new culture of gender equity?

Methodology

To answer these questions, we analyzed the website www.giorgiameloni.it, a real container where is possible to find contents produced on other platforms, a sort of archive of Giorgia Meloni's political life with a collection of news on her activities carried out, press releases, party programs, official speeches, interviews (88 items, examined from 11 April 2020 to 11 May 2021) ordered day by day and made available to network users. Moreover, we have chosen to analyze her political communication by reading a corpus of her tweets collected

from 4 December 2020 to the 1 May 2021 (n. 848). We considered this as being the most interesting channel due to its characteristics as a news media (Kwak et al., 2010), it has the capability to spread news and content produced becoming a sounding board. Giorgia Meloni uses Twitter widely in her daily political communication. In the perfect populist communication – which is well suited to the platform that forces one to synthesize thought in 140 characters, thus an evident reduction in the complexity of thought – she and Matteo Salvini appear such as the most active on Twitter among all politicians in Italy.

Giorgia Meloni posts a lot of content every day (an average of 4) and obtains excellent engagement results (i.e. the ability to get attention regarding the number of likes, retweets and replies in proportion to the number of followers). During the last two years she has increased her importance in social media and from the first week of 2018 to the end of September 2020, her followers have grown by 527,451 units.

Despite the potential related to interaction, Meloni uses this medium as a megaphone: she does not reply to anybody, comments anything even if it is possible to record marked variation in the last year (September, 2019, 9 answers out of 205 interactions; September 2020 12 answers out of 120). Almost all her tweets have an informative nature, referring to news items and mainly to Italian political news and she often uses wider textual resources (because they benefit of more characters or because they are multimedia).

1. The Gender Perspective

In the light of these materials, we have collected and analyzed, we can try to do some general considerations in a gender perspective. Using this approach looking at Giorgia Meloni's political communication can tell us a lot about the stereotypes transmitted and reproduced by the leader of Fratelli d'Italia, but we can also understand a lot about the typical representation of women in Italy. In fact, as well underlined by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2005, 2)

the relationship between populism and gender politics is highly dependent on the cultural context in which populist actors operate. Given that they are normally interested in winning votes (like most political actors), it is not surprising that populists are inclined to take mainstream positions on aspects that are not central to their own agenda. However, populism never appears in a pure form, but rather in combination with other sets of ideas, which also influence the overall agenda that populist forces end up defending. In short, in practice the gender politics of populist actors are influenced by a combination of the national culture and accompanying ideology rather than by populist ideology itself.

1.1 *The language*

The androcentric setting which characterizes the Italian language, as well as other European languages, reflects power systems crystallized in stereotypes, which refers to an over-representation of male as an active gender and an under-representation of female relegated to family roles (of wife and mother) and reduced to a passive sexual object. Gender is not just a grammatical category but rather a semantic category that shows a deep symbolism within the language (Violi, 1986, 41). The language can act as a reinforcement on the same imaginary or can weaken stereotypes and produces new representations. The language of Giorgia Meloni political communication misses this opportunity and, concealing the presence of women or diminishing their absence where it could be emphasized through language, does not promote the deconstruction of gender prejudices and avoids producing change and innovation in equity direction.

2. What kind of the feminine representation does Meloni transmit and reproduce?

First, Meloni transmits a feminine that is never mentioned. Apart from her affirmation of belonging to her gender, whenever she refers to herself or to other women, she does not mention them as feminine, preferring choosing linguistically to use a generic masculine imagined as neutral. So she is, for example, «the first Italian politician to lead a large European party» (Giorgia Meloni's acceptance speech when she was elected President of the European conservatives – ECR Party). Or again, Meloni said she is «Discriminated for ideas, not because she is a woman. I am a soldier who is not afraid of anything or anyone¹».

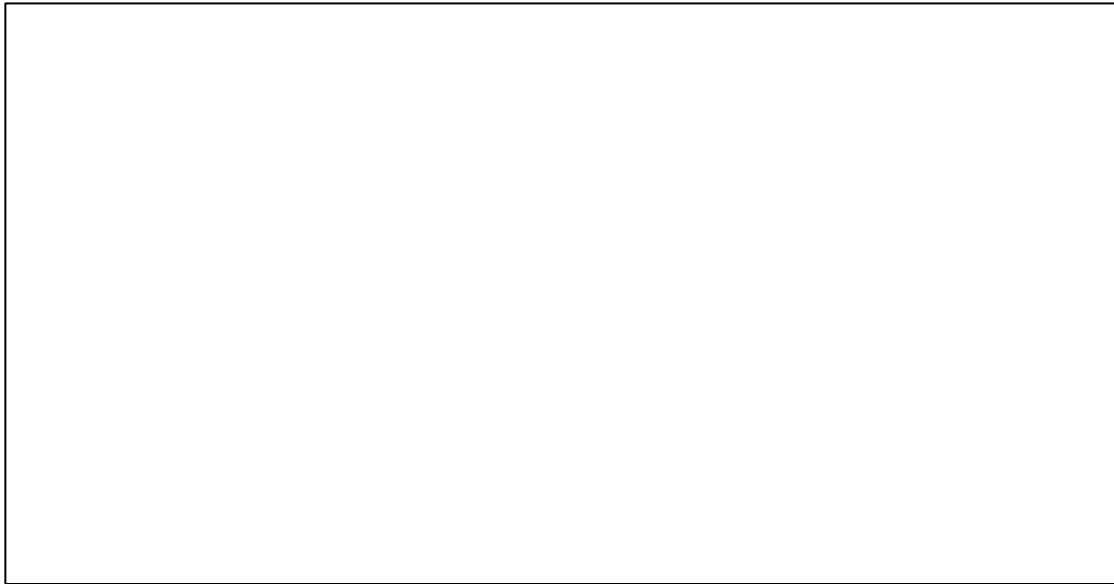
It is interesting to note that within Meloni's communication her gender affiliation becomes so relevant during presentation discourses in which she claims to be the first of all women and mother and then Italian and Christian.

In this framework, the woman, swallowed up in this masculine pretending to be neutral, is made worthy of being named only in two cases, as evidenced by the analysis of the collected materials.

When it comes to security forces: soldiers, police, financial police, etc. in this case, they are all men and women who «defend our nation». As in a family, men and women together «honor the state uniform» «the men and women who pride themselves wear this uniform» and protect us (see Fig. 2).

¹ Interview to Antonello Piroso in «La verità», May 12, 2021 <https://www.giorgiameloni.it/2021/05/12/giorgia-meloni-a-la-verita-discriminata-per-le-idee-non-perche-donna-sono-un-soldato-che-non-ha-paura-di-niente-e-nessuno/> (last access July 10, 2021).

FIG. 2. *Tweets from Giorgia Meloni*



Source: Giorgia Meloni Twitter account

3. Woman as mother

This worldview is reflected in her government program. As already highlighted (Saccà, Masidda, 2018), about gender issues, populism represents a traditional and conservative ideology. Within the populist parties' agenda there is no attention for women and political debates reveal a traditional representation of woman as a wife and a mother (Saccà, Masidda, 2018a; Saccà, Masidda, 2018b). In the Fratelli d'Italia platform, for instance, there is no mention of policies to combat gender-based violence.

The program wants to be the most impressive support plan for families and birth rates in the history of Italy and provides some support for women, as mothers such as free nurseries, the extension of parental leaves (just for women), increased protections for female autonomous workers, incentives for companies employing new mothers and women of childbearing age. All of that within the «Defense of the natural family, the fight against gender ideology and support for life»².

The coincidence between female gender and motherhood is rhetoric widely used in Meloni communication: all women are mothers by definition. They even are before giving birth «Why for someone a womb for rent, an abomination, is fine, but supporting a woman during her

² https://www.giorgiameloni.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PROGRAMMA_A4_REV2.pdf.

pregnancy is not? I believe it is time to fight against this ideological frenzy³».

In her representation, women as able of being workers and mothers must be supported. In 2021, Mother's Day becomes an opportunity to reaffirm this concept and the close relationship that binds the woman (mother) to the nation. «Best wishes to all mothers, tender and relentless fighters, in this Italy that does not defend them, forgetting it owes them a lot» (see Fig. 3).

FIG. 3. *Tweet from Giorgia Meloni*



Source: Giorgia Meloni Twitter account

The representation of the woman is always connected to her family context and her primary function, the maternal one. Meloni often represents herself as a mother and, when she refers to other women, this is the aspect that she values, regardless of their professional role. An example above all, on the occasion of the death of the worker Luana D'Orazio, who died on May 3 while working in a textile company in Montemurlo (Prato), Meloni writes: «A dramatic news. Luana, a 22-year-old mother, was crushed by a machine in the workplace».

But, also on other occasions: «A story that tightens the heart. In Turin, a mother doctor donates part of her liver to her 3-year-old daughter suffering from a serious illness, saving her life.» (see Fig. 4). And so on.

³ Interview to Luca Telese, in «La verità», October 5, 2020. <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/2020/10/05/giorgia-meloni-a-la-verita-vorrei-portare-orban-nei-conservatori-europei/> (last access July 10, 2021).

FIG. 4. Tweets from Giorgia Meloni



Source: Giorgia Meloni Twitter account

3.1 «Women's participation in the democratic growth of our societies»

The main task for a woman as a mother is to educate and protect the offspring ensuring the growth of the family. Children education is a woman's responsibility as well as taking care of them. This a priori emerges clearly in her programmatic statements. In this framework, her speech at the Eurasian Women's Forum in St. Petersburg is really interesting: «Women's participation in the democratic growth of our societies» (September 24, 2015), a document full of elements useful for our analysis and to which I will make a brief reference. For instance, the woman/family apparatus is repeated several times, and in this context, the woman becomes the guardian of conservative values, and her role is to reproduce them by becoming responsible for their transmission: «The essential role of women in society, and I think I express an opinion shared by many delegations in this room, begins with the value of the family. I have always been critical of a post-feminist individualism that tends to isolate the woman from her socio-family context. [...] Of course, there is not only this, but also the need to ensure women every possible support in children education and their identity development, meant as the transmission of cultural heritage that distinguishes people and enriches them⁴».

4. Islamophobia and Femonationalism

Giorgia Meloni never uses the word femicide in her speeches, interviews and tweets. When she mentions gender-based violence, she often

⁴ <https://www.giorgiameloni.it/2015/09/24/il-mio-intervento-al-forum-euroasiatico-delle-donne-a-san-pietroburgo/>

connects it with Islamophobia and Femonationalism (Farris, 2017; Giorgi, 2021): «I support the young woman raped in Rome in a public parking in Via della Pineta Sacchetti. These abuses are always intolerable, but what happened on March 30 would take on a very serious significance if it were confirmed that the crime was committed by a Nigerian non-EU citizen who had already tried to abuse a 7-year-old girl in 2009. We demand an exemplary punishment, certainty of punishment, and expulsion of immigrants who commit crimes in Italy. Stop putting citizens' life at risk, security is a right.

Therefore, fighting against immigrants (often Islamic) «becomes essential for the «defense of women's rights », all considered equal because they are assimilated according to the only possible identity of mother, important part of the natural family.» (see Fig. 5).

FIG. 5. *Giorgia Meloni notice*

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Vicinanza alla giovane donna violentata a Roma a Pineta Sacchetti. Ora condanne esemplari e pene certe



Esprimo tutta la mia vicinanza alla giovane donna violentata a Roma in un parcheggio pubblico di via della Pineta Sacchetti. Questi abusi sono intollerabili, sempre, ma quanto accaduto il 30 marzo assumerebbe un significato gravissimo se venisse confermato che il reato è stato commesso da un extracomunitario nigeriano che già nel 2009 aveva tentato di abusare di una bambina di 7 anni. Il lavoro svolto quotidianamente dalle nostre Forze dell'Ordine non va vanificato ed è intollerabile l'idea che degli stupratori possano essere rimessi in libertà a cuor leggero a scapito della sicurezza personale della gente comune. Un ringraziamento particolare va al carabiniere che, pur non essendo in servizio, è intervenuto per arrestare il sospettato. Pretendiamo condanne esemplari, pene certe e l'espulsione degli immigrati che commettono reati in Italia. Basta giocare sulla pelle dei cittadini: la

Source: <https://www.giorgiameloni.it>

5. Conclusion

Giorgia Meloni proposes a woman representation who is affected by her right-wings ideology. As a populist female leader, she transmits neither a new gender imaginary nor an innovation in traditional and stereotyped figure of the female. Only when exalting her role as a family member and a Mother do Women become the subject of rights. The gender fracture is not relevant in the construction of the populist political discourse and thus remains undetected, contributing to reproduce and to reinforce the oldest and most ancient gender stereotypes.

Gender and its representations become an important political resource to aggregate consensus and generate positions which have nothing to do

with the rights and the self-determination of women nor they contribute to the recognition of plural and complex rights and identities that gender issues represent. This representation of the Woman, therefore, does not seem to promote alternative leadership models able to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices and to trigger some form of social change towards a culture of gender equity.

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