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Women from Apulia Gender Inequality (and Religious Influences) in the South of Italy

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Department of Political Science

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science

Women from Apulia

Gender Inequality (and Religious Influences) in the South of Italy

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Abstract

Gender inequality in Italy is a concept that has stirred the attention of the European community for a long time now. In terms of gender equality data, Italy is ranked among the lowest globally. Despite numerous models presented by human rights organizations as well as forums at the global level concerning the need for gender equality, Italy trails the list of nations that respect of women in all facets of the economy. This research paper takes the form of literature review so that it can document the milestones that have been taken to achieve gender equality in the contemporary Apulia. The paper aims to achieve this goal through a review of efforts of women to elevate their societal position and elaborates the gender inequality situation in the south Italy (Apulia is the region I come from) and gender equality policies, including the influence of religions on gender-based decisions in the country. While Chapter one will be focused on the political and historical background of the women of Apulia that have often been forced to face different discriminations and challenges compared to the rest of Italy, chapter 2 will review the historical relationship occurred between Italy and the Vatican -and the influence that the Catholic Church has often exercised on the life, customs, and behaviors of these ancient agricultural societies. Whereas chapter 3 will try to discuss the significance of religion on gender equality, especially in the south of Italy, the Fourth chapter will take us back to Apulia, to see how these historical factors have affected the socio-political conditions of the Women of Apulia today.

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List of Abbreviations

ART	Assisted Reproduction Technology
MARL	Medically Assisted Reproduction Law
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
WEF	World Economic Forum

Chapter One: Women from the South: Apulia.

1.1 Historical reference: Women during the era of Mussolini

In order to understand the role of women in Italy today is important to focus on how women were considered in the past and the role they played in society, especially in areas of the south of Italy where women had very low recognitions of rights and were mostly exploited. During the dictatorship of Mussolini from 1922 when he first marched on Rome in October, until his death in 1943, Italy was already unified but was still divided by socio-cultural factors and by the diverse regions development. The south and the north of Italy represented two different realities of the Italian Peninsula. The north was more developed than the south; industrialization in the north was enabling Italians to have better job opportunities and life styles while in the south there was mainly an agrarian society. (Beattie, T, 1945) Mussolini enacted different agrarian programs to give jobs to southern people but unfortunately, southern provinces were way far from the original project of development wanted by Mussolini. Beattie T. describes in the book *Observations on Southern Italy* the products typically cultivated in the Apulia region, like for example: cereal crops, fruit vegetables, fig trees and vineyards.

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In the same book he illustrates a typical Apulian landscape where “Wooden water wheels, powered by donkey treadmills, provide irrigation where necessary, and mattocks and hoes serve for cultivation. Here there is a strong attachment of farmers to nearby towns, so that early in the morning and again at dusk long caravans of two-wheeled carts and bi- cycles congest the hard-topped roads as the farm workers make their way from village homes to and from the fields” (Beattie, T, 122)

This description perfectly defines the southern workforce with determination and strength in the hard process of cultivation. During the war period, this hard and challenging work needed to be continued and courageous women started working on the fields, and selling their products to stabilize the family income. If so much has been said about what happened on the war front, little has been written so far of the experiences and stories of those in the south, mostly women, that remained at home with the fear of not seeing the return of their beloved husbands, children and brothers. The situation in the south was backwards in comparison to the rest of Italy during the beginning of the nineteenth century and “Even in the larger cities of Apulia, women and girls can be seen washing, combing, carding, and spinning wool into yarn. Women still winnow grain and mill it into flour for their bread.”(Beattie, T, 123) the role of women during the First World War was only linked to the household and very small domestic chores and they had to accomplish their duties by using simple and outdated means. Salvatore Coppola, the author of the book *“PANE! ...PACE! Il grido di protesta delle donne salentine negli anni della Grande Guerra”*, analyzes in his book the daily life in Salento of those years but highlighting women who with their role started, the long path of female emancipation. The women of the peasant proletariat are protagonists of revolts

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against all that was linked to the war like for example the lack of food, and support from the government.

Apulian Women wanted peace; they wanted the war to end because they wanted their families to be reunited again. This socio-political phenomenon in the South of Italy especially in the Salento area (southern part of Apulia region) saw rebellious women participating also in protests to assert their rights of women and workers. In fact, in those years of war, they were the ones who led real guerilla actions in many squares of Salento, as documented in so many procedural acts of the time, protesting against late payments of subsidies for family members enrolled in the military, against food shortage and against abuses of any kind. Therefore a good number of women were introduced into the workforce, having to work in fields or under extreme conditions in farms, but still they were excluded from the political scenario and mostly exploited.

The twentieth century was for women the period in which they had fought for the recognition of their rights with more determination. Mussolini's manifesto included the right to vote for women that took place for the first time in 1945. The women, born and raised during the fascist twenty years, felt prepared to face more demanding tests, and many of them suffered from this non-equality with men. During the Second World War in Italy, the patriotic and nationalistic sentiments were so intense that even women took part in the so-called "Servizio Ausiliario Femminile", a sort of military for women. In the formation of these groups, young or elderly women, took part of military training in order to protect their country. This form of women militarization is one in a kind

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compared to the rest of the world. This example shows the courage and willpower of Italian women during the 40's in defending their countries and their equality right. (Berta P., n.d.)

“Le Tabacchine”

The culture of southern Italy differs from region to region, from the big city to the nearest province. These realities are so different but so similar at the same time in southern Italy, where men, women and children live back in time compared to the rest of Italy. Nowadays these differences exist in a limited way but only up to twenty years ago southern Italy had strong cultural and social divisions among its people. In 1947, 1800 hectares of tobacco were cultivated in 400 factories by fifty thousand tobaccoists in the province of Lecce.

The workers were wives, sisters, and mothers that for a very small amount of money left their children home and went to work. These women were known as the “tabacchine”, strong and courageous women who with incredible strength went to work in the tobacco fields and factories. In fact, Puglia was a region that produced the highest number of tobacco in Italy thanks to the efforts of the women of Salento who, from the mid-1940s, dedicated themselves to the work of tobacco in order to maintain their families, often underpaid and exploited. At 3 o'clock they began their shift work to collect tobacco in the countryside and many of them were exhausted by the unending working hours. In order to reach the fields most of the time women had to walk for kilometers in the dark of the night, but that was the only job available for the women of Salento at that time. The food was forbidden in the factory and women had to eat pieces of bread hidden in their aprons. They

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were not allowed to talk to each other and were often offended and mistreated. They were verbally abused and underpaid, locked in large rooms close to each other with the presence of unkind "Maestra" (women in higher positions that checked on the work of the tabacchine) who were always on their toes to check their actions. Even drinking water was almost impossible, women had specific hours to go to the bathroom or drink water.

"The woman became more and more a slave due to the need of work," says one of the tabacchine. These conditions soon led to revolts by the tabacchine, exhausted by the conditions of their work, they protested in town squares. In Lecce, the strike of September 24, 1944 remained in history because three demonstrators were killed by police officers. At the head of these uprisings movements there were women like Cristina Conchiglia, a trade unionist who was also imprisoned for defending the rights of women and the tabacchine workers of the 40's. Many of the rights acquired today by women such as allowance, maternity leave are a product of the many struggles of the women of the past, the struggles of the tabacchine as well. (Del Prete, L. 2003)

Unfortunately, even today in Apulia, as in every small village of the south of Italy, there are realities of complete: cultural, social, and economic backwardness. From the documentary called *Tabacchine*, a woman interviewed stated: "The Salento woman sees emancipation in the acquisition of material goods, luxury cars, furs and designer clothing, but the real emancipation in Salento today does not yet exist." (Del Prete, L. 2003)

Chapter Two: Gender inequality in the South of Italy

2.1 Factors Influencing Gender Inequality in Italy

Socio-economic development and the process of modernization has eroded cultural attitudes towards gender equality and increased women's political mobilization. The twentieth century saw a change in segregated sex roles assigned to women as they gained in the paid labor force, educational opportunities and in public life. Gender equality varies substantially across agrarian, industrial and post-industrial nations, even between countries with the same development capacity the level of gender equality still differs for instance between the United States and the UK, South Africa and India or Sweden and Japan (Norris, 2008). The same difference occurs also between Italian regions of the south, center and north. The lives of men

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and women have been altered through modernization, which is the shift from agrarian system to industrialized societies and the move from an industrial system to a post-industrial system generating gender equality in the public sphere and workplace (Khulmann, 2010). However, this type of modernization shift is not yet present in many southern regions in Italy and therefore gender equality is slowly approaching compared to other Italian big cities or center-north areas. Moreover, economic factors have been at the forefront in influencing instances of inequality in many nations across the globe.

Despite the strides that Italy has made in terms of industrial development, the attitudes towards gender equality seems to be partly conditioned because of a strong and deeply rooted religious *component* that still affects the South of Italy where Catholicism has always played an important role in the daily life of the people.

Italy is a very culturally diverse country, but homogenous both linguistically and religiously since 90% of Italian population align with the Roman Catholic faith. The northern part of Italy is now considered industrialized hence considered more affluent while the Southern part is mostly agrarian and faces challenges of unemployment, social insecurity, and corruption (Bardos, 2013). These factors somehow determine how women are viewed in Italy. Historically speaking, gender inequality in Italy and in the southern regions has often been seen as a cultural and political issue profoundly "influenced" by the Vatican. For instance, in as much as the Catholic Church respects women in the society and especially in the church, the common belief that men are conventionally placed to offer direction in society is still a prevalent principle, especially in the South. This includes having greater influence over the women who are supposed to exercise higher levels of respect. Although in the South. Apulia included- this may not be seen

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as wrong, it appears to curtail the chances and opportunities that women have towards achieving their potentials. Unfortunately, this strong attachment to religious beliefs, take a bigger impact in southern regions like Campania, Calabria, Sicily, and Apulia.

Cultural attitudes also shape people's attitudes towards gender equality. Gender aspects are relevant in the ways culture is defined as a social construction and the way in which cultural policies are designed and implemented. As a social construction, culture defines the ways in which members are supposed to behave or carry out themselves towards each other.

There are those cultures that advocate for respect between both sexes pointing out that such is required for the sustained existence of the community. However, some aspect of dominance accompanies this over women citing that men are the heads of homes and families. Cultural rights are also human rights, hence rights of both men and women. Those in the community who hold the power to define its collective identity must also understand cultural rights. The roles of men and women are culturally determined and can differ across space and time.

Power relations between men and women and the norms and values regarding feminine and masculine roles and behavior define cultural and social constructions. Moreover, typical male and typical female roles might create stereotypes that have the capacity to limit opportunities for women. Basing this argument in the contemporary society, such stereotypes have since formed the basic beliefs of the society in terms of how they treat women. Most of these have not been helpful; instead, they have elevated the men at the expense of women. In addition, tradition and social media play a significant role in shaping gender roles in societies; most women do not have access to the creation of media products and decision-making in the media and cultural industry.

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Most media content that ends up being released is usually stereotypic and biased against women (Gender Mainstreaming Policy Areas: Culture, 2017). Such biases have led to the creation the current situation in Italy although other factors may be evident as well. They remind the society of the conventional beliefs and that women are naturally subject to societal norms.

2.2 Recent Gender Equality Policies in Italy

The progress of gender equality policies in Italy was motivated by the need to adapt to European policies and to use European funds in the late 1990s and 2000s. Having been at the center of ridicule for not promoting gender equality, Italy sought to rectify in accordance with the European acceptable standards. In 2006, the Italian legislative framework come up with the National Code for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women which aimed at regulating the promotion of gender equality in society. This step motivated women all over the world since it was an indication of Italy's commitment towards a better future for both men and women.

The Directive Prodi- Finocchiaro first discussed the main goal of gender mainstreaming in 1997. It was reinforced two years later using the first gender-mainstreaming tool which was fully developed during the 2000- 2006 planning period. From 2000, gender-mainstreaming activities were coordinated by European Regional Development Fund (ERDP) and European social fund. The mandate of the Equal Opportunities Department is to be responsible for gender policy in structural fund planning, to coordinate and manage the complex framework at national and local levels to support equal opportunity policies. This was a positive step since it formulated a framework that would be used later to ensure that women were no longer deprived of opportunities that men previously enjoyed. In Apulia, in the field of equality policies, a big step has been made in the

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reinforcement of the Law No 7/2007 that occurred in 2008. The latter established social inclusion by supporting equal opportunities between men and women and by promoting the quality of life, through the reconciliation of working time, of relationship, and parental care. (Regione Puglia, 2007)

Health and reproductive rights policies

Another major gender-related policy in Italy is the Law 194 of 1978, which supported abortion within the first 90 days of pregnancy. It became a requirement for the Health ministry to report on the applicability of the law annually. In the past, this was unheard of and there were instances of illegal abortions as well as deaths of many women who attempted the procedure. The policy revolutionized the health sector ensuring that women had fair reproductive rights. Abortion rates have since decreased from 1982, 7.8 per a thousand in 2012, 8.0 per a thousand in 2011 and 17.8 per a thousand in 1982 (Marchesi, 2018).

Abortion is much higher among immigrant women than Italian women because of the marginal conditions they live in (Sansone, 2012). Unfortunately in the south the number of objectors against the practice of abortion is still very high and the process becomes harder. In fact, in the southern regions 83,5% is the number of gynecologist against abortion, a big number that slow down the procedure and assistance that should be by law dedicated to women. Other policies that touch on the reproductive health of women are Law 40/2004, which touches on Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART). This law came after intensive legislative work since 1998 from when it was first presented in parliament. The current regulation of the law provides that there is no limited number of embryos that can be created including no dictation on the on

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the transfer of those products into the uterus of another woman (Zanini, 2011). In terms of maternal care, Italy is one of the best-performing nations; it has a maternal mortality ratio of more than 3 for every 90,000 live births (WHO, 2010). The maternal care means that despite the various pitfalls, Italy has made great strides in taking care of the welfare of women in the society. Italy is determined to sustain these practices so that women can also have fulfilled lives.

The major concern in Italy is the high number of Caesarean sections as compared to other developed countries in Europe. Italy also has policies concerning the reconciliation of private and professional life, through policies in maternity, paternal and parental leave, formal childcare services, services for the elderly and flexible working times (Rosseli, 2014). These policies ensure that women can be able to work and at the same time take care of their families. This is different from what other nations do in terms of allowing for enough time for maternity and paternity leave. This borrows from its strong belief in the family as the foundation of the state.

Gender equality in the labor market

Barriers inhibiting women from accessing high-income careers ended in 1999 and policies were made to ensure equal opportunities were given to both men and women in accessing the labor market. For the first time ever in 1999, women were allowed to join military careers. Law, according to Law 198/2006, condemns discrimination both direct and indirect. Maternity leaves are also protected, in Italy maternity leave go for 22 weeks, recording amongst the longest statutory maternity leaves in the world. Most employers who have businesses with 10 employees or less fear giving maternity leaves to women. They, therefore, opt to make young women sign undated resignation letters so that they can justify the reason for their resignation.

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Approximately, there are 800,000 mothers who have gone through this requirement at some point in their lives (ISTAT, 2011). A law to fight this abuse was introduced in 2007, Law 188/2007, however, the law currently under discussion. Gender equality in Italy continues to be asserted in principle but gender gaps continue to exist. Moreover, the long-time taken in deliberations has been worsening the situation of women in the society.

However, these gaps have been narrowing but the working conditions with men remain the same and the economic crisis being experienced does not make it easy for women in the labor market. Despite the fact the steps are being made to rectify the former ideals, the society still finds it difficult to conform to the new policies. As a result, women may still be mistreated in the labor market denying them an opportunity to achieve their best. The rates of employment for women are very low especially in parts of Southern Italy where economic status and education are equally low for women. As stated by the European commission on 2015, 23% of women in the Apulia region were unemployed, 45% of which were young female from 18 to 32 years old. The most employed are male from over 30 years. (European commission).

The economic crisis has had an impact in terms of reduced provision of childcare services hence making the elderly to strain between rigid work arrangements and family life. There are also higher female unemployment rates than men, the difficulty of career progress and women being over-represented in precarious careers. There has been a decrease in full-time jobs and an increase in part-time jobs. Most jobs that young women get are contractual hence; they are not reliable in times of pregnancy and maternal care (Villa,2013).

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Policies on eradicating gender-based violence in Italy

It was not until 1996 that sexual-based violence was considered a crime against a person (Law66/1996) and not the public. In 2006, a law was introduced to punish sexual exploitation of a child and of paedopornography. In 2009, the penalty and punishment for sexual violence were increased and stalking was introduced as an act of punishable offense. The European Council on prevention of violence against women and domestic violence and the 2013 Istanbul Convention became part of Italian law by approval of parliament (Rosseli, 2014).

Since then, the national Italian women movement has built up a network that fights against sexual-based violence. There are also centers to exchange experiences and they have given a platform for dialogue with national and local authorities, and it has become the national helpline for violence against women. The major challenge with this initiative is funding (Rosseli, 2014). In Lecce for example the center called “Centro antiviolenza Renata Fonte” has been a point of reference for many women in the past and still today that have faced violence and abuse.

Equal participation in decision making

In the public arena women, participation is very low and there are no gender quotas to support women in national politics. However, gender quotas are in force at the local levels. Such scenarios have been responsible for the slow implementation of policies and the longer time taken in deliberations on issues that affect women. Since women are poorly represented in such committees, it becomes, very difficult for their plight to be addressed. The minimal participation of women in political decision-making can be derived from the country’s history. It was not until 1972, thirty years after Italy has declared a republic that it appointed its first woman minister,

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(Rosseli, 2014). Tina Anselmi became the first female Minister for Labour setting a ground for female involvement in leadership. However, Italy has never had a female prime minister or president since its establishment. These formed the foundations for women discriminations and misrepresentation in politics. Another relevant fact as shown in the dossier from the “camera dei deputati” of 2016, is that female representation is generally greater in regions of the Center-North compared to those of the South.

The presences of women in the councils of the regions and of the autonomous provinces in Apulia are 10 %, in Calabria 3,3 %, and Sicily 16,9 %, while other regions form the North like in Emilia Romagna with the highest number of women involved in Politics 34,7 %, followed by Tuscany (27,5 %) and Piedmont (26 %). The only sanction presented in force at the national level is the Law 96/2012. The law curtails the public contributions to parties that do not conform to the 2/3 gender rule by almost 6%.

At the public administration, there is a National Directive whose aim is to ensure that the agreed measures of equality among men and women are effectively implemented. This was a directive instituted in 2007 that achieves its mandate by increasing the presence of women in management positions, creating good and vibrant practices for human resource management (HRM) in terms of equal opportunities. It also advocates for the promotion of awareness among citizens and actualization of the use of tools for gender mainstreaming in public administration. Despite these efforts to empower women in public administration, the number of women in top management is still lower than men. According to a survey done in 2011, among the women surveyed, only 6.7% were managers and 14.7% among men were managers, 3.6% of women were

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in middle management compared to 5.3% of men (Rosseli, 2014). In Apulia, 80% of women are involved in the services and trade sectors, 9% in industry, and 7.5% in agriculture. The most represented sectors are, in order, trade, agriculture, services and tourist-hotel activities. (Pariopportunita.regione.puglia.it, 2018) The position of women in the Italian society has been affected by socio-cultural changes since the 1970s. Italian courts were slow in catching up with this wave of cultural change, women were not even allowed to vote until 1946.

The constitution of Italy provides for gender equality but it was not until after 20 years that this principle was enforced. Italian legislators have however made strides in policy making that favor gender equality in Italy.

2.3 The influence of Christianity in Italy and in the south

Some scholars argue that influence of Christianity is the main issue leading to the equal rights for women. This is true because gender equality rights are more profound in countries that practice Christianity than in Islam nations of the Middle East and Saudi Arabia where women are viewed by society to solely fulfill their responsibilities as wives and mothers (Havlicek, 2015). The current status and discrimination of women is as a result of the interpretation of religious teachings as well as the set-up of culture and institutions of societies. Historically, most religions did not respect the voice of women. This was a result of various patriarchal dispositions of the societies of the time especially in the South. Such beliefs ultimately stifled so many attempts to change the socio-cultural conditions of women in society. For instance, though abortions are legal in Italy doctors still refuse to carry them out, this leads to women having to carry out the abortions in secret and with unregistered personnel. Most doctors fear to carry out abortions

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because of their Catholic faith, which sternly protects the right to life (Giuffrida, 2014). The same law that legalized abortion in 1978 is the same one that gives doctors the permission to refuse to carry out abortions on moral grounds, now women in Italy are subject to a fine of between 5,000 euros to 10,000 euros for illegal abortions (Browne, 2016) Over 70% of doctors and nurses are conscientious objectors; this figure rises to 90% in some provinces especially in Southern Italy.

Women are entitled to terminate a pregnancy within the first three months, but when medics slow down requests women are forced to have illegal abortions since they ran out of time. The Council, which is determined to uphold the rights of humans, the rule of law and democracy in Europe, reported that Italy was guilty of violating women's right to "protection of their health"(The Local, 2016) The Medically Assisted Reproduction Law (MARL) law40/2004 passed by a majority of the Senate because Catholics who sided with the government dominated the opposition. Most female politicians regardless of their political parties opposed the law.

This proved to be a public test of Vatican's influence in the political activities of the Vatican (Di Marco, 2008). The law is against various aspects of assisted reproduction and scientific research such as in vitro fertilization and embryonic stem cell research. It argues that only infertile, stable and heterosexual couples are allowed to undertake assisted reproduction techniques. Donor eggs and sperms are not allowed to be used and couples are not allowed to use a surrogate mother. The law adds that not more than three embryos can be created and all of them must be implanted in the womb at the same time. Other limitations include the prohibition on embryo freezing and genetic analysis on embryos before they are implanted. By legalizing this law, it will be isolating people who it feels have no right to reproduce if they have been curtailed by natural scenarios. The most direct attack was from Pope John Paul II in 1995. The pope

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illustrated various methods of artificial reproduction in the encyclical; *Evangelium Vitae* highlighting the negative impacts that are always ignored (Di Marco, 2008). The Vatican has since made efforts to influence the participation of Catholics in politics. In 2003, Vatican produced guidelines that stated how Catholics could participate and the things they were not expected to do.

The doctrine considered that anytime that political activity came up against the moral principles, the commitment of the Catholic Church becomes more laden with responsibilities. The doctrine also highlighted that there is need to protect the human life regardless of its stage. For this reason, the Vatican advocated for respect of the embryo.

This led to calls for reform of the MARL law. However, they were futile since the Roman Catholic church urged people not to vote on the referendum of the law, hammering the slogan "Life cannot be put to a vote, don't vote". Pope Benedict XVI personally supported the anti-vote campaign citing a commitment to ensure it did not meet the 50% threshold (Di Marco, 2008). The Italian people ultimately rejected the referendum on "MARL." Catholic doctrines, therefore, penetrated Italy since the referendum only attracted 26% of the population (Di Marco, 2008).

Although the influence of the Vatican appears to be growing, indications show that the influence may reduce in the coming years. The low turnout may be assign of the great power that the Catholic Church has over Italy but the referendum proves that there is a wave of change sweeping across Italy in terms of policies and laws. The unfavorable instituting and laws will ultimately be overcome when the people realize the urgency of change. The expectation is that Italy will continue to modernize its image and step away from the ideals of the Vatican. Since the

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fall of Christian Democrats, the church has lost its power and political influence. As a result, no Catholic party has been advanced politically.

Moreover, when it lost its national place as the main religion including the government support for other religions, the Roman Catholic lost a bigger percentage of its influence. A time will come when the church will no longer have the respectable majority due to its rigidity. Italy will ultimately follow the direction of other states such as the United States to achieve a new wave of change. Italians will most likely find ways of controlling their reproductive rights. Scholars have documented that Italians are among the habitual users of contraception in the whole of Europe. The MARL law gives more rights to embryos but this may not lead to an overturn of the law permitting abortion. The law was upheld through a referendum in 1981 and it has never been challenged.

The law seems to be determined to overturn the steps that Italy has made towards being part of global development (Di Marco, 2008). Research shows that many Italians are more liberal than before.

Chapter Three: The *Apulian Response*, Taranta and the Church

The phenomenon known as “tarantismo”, is becoming more and more famous among tourists and Italians thanks to the “notte della taranta”(night of the tarantula) in which artists exhibit in dances and play the special melodies of the Tarantella music, typical from Apulia. A kind of music that brings together different generations, different social classes and different nationalities, trying to create moments of socialization that break down every barrier and every social prejudice. The music festival is held in Melpignano (a city near Lecce), since 1998 and increments the flows of curious tourists every year. The history of the tarantella is based on the belief that the tarantula, similar to a spider, can inject a poisonous liquid in the human body that

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can give feelings of sickness. The Tarantula is commonly found in the countryside of the Apulia region, and hides in the fields where they bite their victims. The data from De Martino's research shows how commonly the tarantula bites only women while they are working the harvest; in fact 86 per cent of the victims of tarantismo are female. After the bite women start dancing to be cured, invoking also the help of San Paolo, the saint of the people bitten by poisonous animals.

The city of Galatina plays an important role in the tradition of Taranta as the city Chapel established in honor of San Pietro and San Paolo, is believed to be under their protection. Legends also say that people from Galatina were immune from the animal poison and therefore they were never bitten because of the protection from the Saint.

The celebrations for the latter is on June 28th and many women who have been bitten by the tarantula go to Galatina to pay tribute to the saint who saved them. The dance is also performed privately or in public squares of other cities, and usually the tarantata, the woman bitten by the tarantuala, dances on a white sheet on the floor and she is followed by the melody played by musicians. During the therapeutic ritual, the tarantata remained in a state of complete unconsciousness, isolated from the surrounding world and could only pick up the sounds of musical instruments. The Tarantata, in fact, is hypnotized by the pressing rhythm of the pizzica (the music played during the dance) and starts to dance non-stop under the worried eyes of family and friends. Usually the tarantata, come from the poor social classes of Salento and their condition weighted heavily on the finances of the family, which was sometimes forced to ask for loans in order to pay the musicians. (Carroll, 1992)

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The ritual can be prolonged for different days until the tarantata feels better. Moreover, the cure of tarantism is never definitive. For example, there were those who recovered definitively in a couple of years and those who, however, suffered throughout their lives. Particular importance assumed some objects, among which the colored drapes stand out. In fact, the colors in tarantism assume the same importance of music. The dance can differ from woman to woman and it takes the personality of the different tarantulas, because it is believed that the spiders have different personalities. The dance is supposed to imitate the moves of the tarantula. Some tarantate were susceptible to strong colors, such as red or yellow at the point that she could not eat either the egg yolks or any food, whose color recalled that of his taranta, but in the rest of the year she had no problem eating it. Other tarantate were scabbed by the softer colors, such as light blue or pink. The black, however, was the color hated by every tarantata.

Once identified the color associated with the particular taranta, the tarantata, during the dance, played with the colored cloth and sometimes even destroying it. The tradition and the culture of the Taranta is very deep and it is not only part of the old generations, but also of the new generations that still today dance following the Taranta melody. People are dragged by the sound of the tambourine and hypnotized by the pressing rhythm of the ballads, they are all reunited in the squares of the city and participate to the secular tradition of Taranta. The Apulian Pizzica represent part of the southern culture and people from the region take big pride of what their traditions were. (Carroll, 1992) The taranta was part of popular beliefs linked to the malaise of the woman's mind state in the end of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Tarantism was a phenomenon of a social nature to which many women unconsciously used in order to vent,

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according to a form officially accepted by society, frustrations, pains, traumas, difficult family and personal situations, during a historical period that saw the role of the woman forced into a human condition of almost slavery and subjection to the merciless and cruel social laws of the patriarchal peasant community of the past. In many cases women were accused of suffering from hysteria, the word hysteria comes from the Greek word 'yстера', that is, uterus, therefore it was an issue that was believed to be linked only with women. This form of psychological disease was already recognized in the 900's and some women were recovered in hospitals under the will of their fathers or husbands to get the removal of their uterus. Others were even forced to go to asylums just because they did not agree over something or because they simply expressed their opinion. (Carroll, 1992)

Chapter 4: Apulia Today

4.1 Women of Apulia today

In Italy women were seen for many centuries bound to a decisive role within the family nucleus, but completely absent in the social, political and cultural sphere in which decisive choices were made for the community. Even if these aspects are now changed and the role of women has obtained a major recognition in all fields, women in the south do not cover the same equal position in society as men do. The femicide rates in the report of over 400 pages from the presidency of the senate shows for example how women are killed by their partners every year or assaulted sexually in Italy. In the section focusing on the South, specifically from the Salento area of Apulia, in a 4 years period 48 women were murdered in Salento, a number higher than in any other part of Italy. Another characteristic of the femicide in Apulia are the assassinations occurred by mainly Italians and not immigrants like data shows in the north Italian regions. From

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2013 until 2016, 48 women were killed, and 192 suffered sexual violence in Salento. (Mongiò, 2018) This data shows how the situation for Apulian women is high in number of violence, but it also shows how women spoke up and went against these abuses to denounce what they had to go through and eventually prevent their rapist from doing it again.

In an interview from *Giornale di Puglia*, the psychologist and psychotherapist Franca Cecere, talked about the differences between the women of the 70's, that she helped in the family counseling house, and the women today that have made huge progress in such a small amount of years. In the family counseling house she worked for, originally many women from Lecce and surroundings went there mostly for abortions or for moral assistance, in a period where women had little knowledge of contraceptives, and their bodies were men's properties. Franca also noticed how women have changed more their social role in the past thirty years than in the last centuries. She also adds how this new family model where women have reinvented themselves and have shown a stronger and independent personality creates instability in the old stereotyped roles of men and women. Indeed as Franca stated "The imbalance created in the couple relationship causes a confusion in their respective roles, which no longer follow the same patterns that existed in traditional families (the master man, and the woman devoted to the house and the family)." (Franca Cecere) This "unusual" relationship between male and female is the reason why according to Franca violence and femicide cases occur. She also blames the school, the society and the family for not being able to teach children what a refusal is and why it should be respected. (Greco, 2018) If so much progress has been made in the most recent thirty years, so much is yet to be done for a complete emancipation and progress in women's right.

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The Regional Councilor for Equality of the Puglia Region in an interview stated that only 30,5 % of women are employed in Apulia, the other 71% is instead either working illegally or just unemployed due to maternity reasons or other factors.

To promote and incentivize women to find a job in Apulia, the region has realized a new project called Dea that will help women find a job in the following years. ("Puglia, in sette anni raddoppiato il numero di donne che si dimettono dopo la maternità", 2016) Another important topic when talking about women in Apulia is the abortion rates and the "Legge 194". The latter is the law that legalized abortion on demand. Unfortunately even today there is a widespread tendency to criminalize abortion, especially in Catholic and politically conservative circles. As stated in the article from "il paese nuovo": "The percentage of medical objectors in Italian hospitals are, even today, very high and consequently, decreases the number of structures that practice the interruption of pregnancy, including the therapeutic after the twelfth week. In Lecce and the province, the situation presents many differences between the structures". This phenomenon highlights also how the Church has a big impact and influence on the National health system in the region of Apulia. (Signorella, 2018) In Lecce, like in other parts of Italy, hospitals have to guarantee the right of women to have access to abortion, either pharmaceutical or surgical, but in reality not many doctors give their consent very easily. In Lecce only two hospitals have doctors that allow abortion: one in Lecce and one in Casarano. For what concern the other part of Salento, women are redirected to only these two hospitals. At the hospital of Casarano, 220 abortions per year have been registered, with only one doctor that guarantees this

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practice. While in the hospital of Lecce, 900 cases of abortion have been registered per year, with the help of only two gynecologists over seven working there.

In the Apulia region the data shows how 86% of gynecologists is against the practice of abortion, while the rest of Italy has 70% of objectors. These statistics have a strong impact on women's choices and access to their rights.

It also shows how in Apulia is even harder compared to the rest of Italy to obtain a right and apply the law in favor of women seeking for abortion. Moreover the small amount of doctors that agree to this operation, create a long waiting list and hardships in achieving something that is supposed to be a right and that it's part of the law since 1978. (Colluto, 2017)

The lifestyle and role of women in the society of today is very different from the past. Old female generations still have embodied the old mentality of respect and silent obedience towards the male figure. They believe that their role in society is limited to the one of mothers and housekeepers, and new generations of females are enlarging the perspective of a new and more emancipated woman. Technologies are also contributing in showing a new ideal of independent and empowered woman. Italy is a country, which cannot escape its rich religious history of the Roman Catholic Church and the role it plays in shaping people's attitudes and ideologies. Especially in the south of Italy the religious beliefs, and as we have seen the traditions and myths like the tarantella, or the hard work conditions of the tabacchine have shaped the social status of women nowadays. In spite of the old, almost archaic, southern Italian traditions –with their strong religious components, a socio-cultural and political change seems to be inevitable.

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This change will imply a need to evaluate the existing policies. Women are advised to empower themselves and stand for what they believe in to overcome dominant traditional and religious cultures in their communities. This is the only way to sustain the fight for equal opportunities. Formation of civil society movements for the rights of women is an important milestone in ensuring women's voices are heard in the society and are considered during policymaking (Rosselli 2014). Such actions have succeeded in the past in other nations and they have no chance of failure in Italy.

Moreover, new women empowerment groups are emerging and taking over the political scene in most of the big and small communities in the southern areas as well. The formation of these groups like for example the one called: Women in Campo-Cia (an Italian Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Women of Agriculture) could easily lead to a number of rights reforms for women of the south. (Loghin)

Conclusions

Gender inequality refers to the unfair representation of sexes whereby one sex is elevated more than the other. Elevation of sexes can be seen in various ways such as the allocation of more economic and political opportunities and the manner in which the society perceives the sex. For instance, historical societies were founded on the beliefs that men were greater than women in terms of intellectual capacity and the physical strength to accomplish tasks. For this reason, various stereotypes were created regarding the place of woman and men in the society. On the other, religious beliefs also instituted the concepts of gender inequality through the incorporation of doctrines that either demeaned women or denied them rights to expression of ideas and having a fulfilled life. Cases of gender inequality are rampant in regions where women have not been allocated fair opportunities in education and economy. Due to this, the society through the men in their lives such as fathers or husbands find chances to mistreat them. For example, in some countries in Africa and the Middle East, women are not supposed to drive and should they do this, they are punished. Some societies do not allow women to hold leadership positions or participate in political activities. These issues have been addressed by nations of the world with great

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seriousness. However, Italy unlike most European countries still lags behind in terms of having strong policies to cater for women's rights.

Some of the policies already in place cannot be implemented due to the lack of determine attention from the male-dominated leadership positions. As a result, women have little or no advocacy for their rights within the institutions of Italy. They have the free will to make decisions about their reproductive health but religious entities limit the actualization of these decisions in their lives. We have seen from the chapters above how medics refuse to comply to abortion laws on stands of moral grounds. Such decisions sometimes jeopardize the health and freedom of women in Italy. In the society, abortion is also discouraged in churches and use of contraceptives is discouraged among Catholics and is not even provided in Catholic hospitals. This forces women to adapt to their society and cultural setting in order to survive. The unfortunate thing is that despite the modern advancements of this age, women are still treated as second-class citizens and denied equal opportunities due to the Italian adherence to Catholic teachings. However, there is a need for change so that Italy can meet the standards of European policies regarding gender equality, there are also greater opportunities that lie ahead for Italy should it implement the gender equality policies.

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