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The Sociological Research on LGBT population in Italy

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Abstract

In this paper, five of the most important books written by Italian Sociologists on LGBT population in Italy are reviewed. The specificity of the Italian context, which in large part is also due the delay of the Italian debate on LGBT issues, is also analysed. Despite this, Italian research has its own particular characteristics and its own wealth, here considered, recognizing at the same time the limits of a field (on Gender, Gay and Lesbian Studies) which has only recently begun to enter Sociological Studies in Italy.

Keywords: LGBT population, Gender studies, Italian society

I. Introduction

On the occasion of the last Synod on family (Pontificium Consilium pro Familia) summoned last October by Pope Francis I, one of the most important themes discussed was the possibility of accepting homosexual couples into the Catholic Community – in addition to the one regarding Holy Communion for remarried divorced people. Even though in the “Relatio post disceptationem” it is possible to read that “homosexual people have qualities to offer to the Christian Community” and the “mutual support” in homosexual couples is to be appreciated, the “Relatio finale” didn’t show the same open-mindedness, defining it “unacceptable for Church pastors to be put under pressure on this subject and for international organizations to give hand-outs to poor countries on the condition that laws instituting the marriage between people of the same sex be introduced”. Since its inception in the ‘70s, the Italian LGBT movement has always had to take into consideration the hostile presence of the Vatican. At the same time, however, since the 70’s, the debate on LGBT issues has become more and more of a

public discussion in Italy, becoming more and more relevant. So much so that in 2011 Istat (the Italian National Institute of Statistics) turned its attention to the theme of homosexuality through the national research titled “Discriminations based on gender, on sexual orientation and on ethnicity”, investigating “The homosexual population in Italian society”. And in the same year (2011) UNAR, the National Office Against Racial Discrimination, conducted a research named “Disorientation: Discrimination and social exclusion of LGBT people in Italy”. Furthermore, in 2013, as a result of the programme promoted by the Council of Europe “Combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity”, the National Strategy for the prevention and countering of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was drafted, arranged and coordinated by UNAR in collaboration with the Italian LGBT organizations. At the beginning of this paper we mentioned the Vatican: its influence has definitely affected both the history of the Italian LGBT movement as well as the research conducted in Italy on homosexuality, which is very recent. The first quantitative sociological work on sexuality, on a national level, in which homosexuality is considered, is Giampaolo Fabris and Rowena Davis’s, “Il mito del sesso Rapporto sul comportamento sessuale degli italiani”, Mondadori, Milano, 1978; and only in 1991, with: “Il sorriso di Afrodite. Rapporto sulla condizione omosessuale in Italia”, Vallecchi editore, Firenze, 1991, promoted by Ispes with the support of Arcigay, has our country been able to provide statistical information on a national level for a study specifically on homosexuality. The Catholic Church has influenced both the Italian LGBT movement and the studies conducted in Italy on homosexuality, as was also pointed out by Giampaolo Fabris; it might seem controversial, but another feature that conditioned homosexuality in our country has been the absence of overtly anti-homosexual laws, which was emphasised – as in previously mentioned works – by Gianni Rossi Barili in “Il movimento gay in Italia”, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1999, by Massimo Consoli in “Indepence Gay, Alle origini del gay pride”, Bolsena, Massari, 2000 and by others.

The fact that there were no explicit laws against homosexuals in the past does not mean that homosexuality was tolerated: on the contrary, it was not even recognized by law, denying its existence while punishing it at the same time. The invisible nature of the same and the “don’t ask, don’t tell” mentality were the predominating features in our country until the mid-’90s: everyone knew about the existence of homosexuality, but preferred not to talk about it. As far as academic studies are concerned, sexuality and homosexuality had often been considered frivolous topics and of lesser importance in Italy, as is reported in the book edited by Costantino Cipolla, *Sul letto di Procuste, Introduzione alla Sociologia della Sessualità*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1996, as

Elisabetta Ruspini reported more recently in *Comunità omosessuali, Le scienze sociali sulla popolazione LGBT*, Milano, Franco Angeli 2013 and as relayed in the book edited by the Italian Association of Sociologists, *Sotto la lente del genere, la Sociologia Italiana si racconta*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2014. This kind of evasive attitude from the academic circles brought to the absence of specific Gender Studies courses until a few years ago. In fact they've appeared in some Italian Universities only in the last two or three years. Again, on an academic level, male homosexuality is the most inspected kind and it is quite common to identify the whole LGBT community with the gay condition. On the whole, the sociological discussion on homosexuality in Italy is considerably late compared with the international review. Maybe it is enough to remember that one of the most important sociological studies concerning sexuality in general, after Giampaolo Fabris and Rowena Davis' work, already mentioned, is the study by Barbagli, Dalla Zuanna, Garelli: *La sessualità degli italiani*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2010. Though defined "the Italian Kinsey Reports", it was however only published in 2010, while the American Kinsey study dates back to the '50s...

II. Book Reviews

Although important, we will leave out the contribution of psychoanalysis here, like Vittorio Lingiardi's (*Compagni d'amore. Da Ganimede a Batman. Identità e mito nelle omosessualità maschili*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 1997; *Citizen Gay. Famiglie, diritti negati, salute mentale*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 2007) or Paolo Rigliano's (*Amori senza scandalo, Cosa vuol dire essere lesbica e gay*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2001; *Curare i gay? Oltre l'ideologia riparativa dell'omosessualità*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2012) or Scalise's documentary work, *Cose dell'altro mondo*, Milano, Zelig Editore, 1996, and other sociologists' research: Buzzi's: *Giovani, affettività, sessualità. L'amore tra i giovani in un'indagine Iard*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998, Roberta Sassatelli's books, such as her edition of Harold Garfinkel's book *Passing and the managed achievement of sex status in an intersexed person* – also translated in Italian with the title *Agnese*, Roma, Armando, 2000, and Elisabetta Ruspini's works on gender identity (*Le identità di genere*, Carrocci, Roma, 2003). We will present a brief selection of the five most relevant books for Italian sociological studies on homosexuality, as follows:

Crescenzo Fiore, *Il sorriso di Afrodite. Rapporto sulla condizione omosessuale in Italia*, Vallecchi editore, Firenze, 1991;

Marzio Barbagli, Asher Colombo, *Omosessuali moderni. Gay e lesbiche in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2001;

Chiara Saraceno, *Diversi da chi? Gay, lesbiche, transessuali in un'area metropolitana*, Guerini e associati, Milano, 2003;

Luca Trappolin, *Omosapiens 3, Per una sociologia dell'omosessualità*, Carrocci Editore, Roma, 2008;

Fabio Coribisiero, *Comunità omosessuali, Le scienze sociali sulla popolazione LGBT*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2013.

1) Il sorriso di Afrodite. Rapporto sulla condizione omosessuale in Italia, edited by Crescenzo Fiore, Vallecchi editore, Firenze, 1991

This work, carried out by ISPES (the Institute of Social, Political and Economic Studies) in collaboration with Arcigay, represents the first quantitative research on homosexuality nationwide, conducted through consulting the homosexual population in Italy. An attempt is made to understand what homosexuality means, on a cultural and social level, and to investigate the homosexual condition in Italy, through a questionnaire distributed to 3000 Italian homosexuals. The second phase of the study concerns the perception of homosexuality by Italian people, through another questionnaire on a randomly chosen sample of over 3000 people. 2044 people responded, with a lower proportion of women than men (14.7% vs 85.3%). The data on the age of the participants in the study is most interesting and indicative. Scholars study the age of discovery, awareness and acceptance of homosexuality; the feelings on and the definition of "homosexual" given by heterosexual Italian people, the age at which homosexuals and heterosexuals had their first sexual experience and their feelings about it. They also take into consideration favourite sexual relations, frequency of homosexual and heterosexual relationships, frequency of masturbation, number of gay partners, best kind of relationship (an exclusive couple relationship was chosen by the majority of participants), duration of the relationship, preferred age of a partner, meeting places, type of sexual practices and where they take place. Risks and prevention are also investigated: Italians are asked if homosexuals are discriminated against because of HIV and what the discrimination suffered is, if someone contracted HIV and if HIV has changed their sexual behaviour. The habit of using condoms is also reported on. Further investigation includes the difficulties and frustrations of the homosexual condition, living a "double life", hiding one's homosexual nature, reactions to the discovery of homosexuality in a relative, the difficulties of being homosexual depending on social contexts: in the family, with friends, at school, at work and so on. Data is then shown on family members aware of homosexuality of a participant and their reaction, military service and any violence suffered and the difficulties in the workplace. Non-homosexual

people are asked what the most likeable aspects in a gay person are and what is most difficult to accept, as well as how Italian society should act towards homosexuality. At the time (1991) the dominant attitude towards homosexuality was discriminatory / racist (51.2%). Analyses are also carried out on the violence suffered by homosexuals and suicide attempts made. The last part of the study is on leisure, politics and LGBT associations.

2) Marzio Barbagli, Asher Colombo, Omosessuali moderni. Gay e lesbiche in Italia, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2001 - Also mentioned are Colombo's *Gay e aids in Italia. Stili di vita sessuale, strategie di protezione e rappresentazioni del rischio*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000 and Barbagli's *Storia di Caterina che per ott'anni vestì abiti da uomo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2014;

From 1995 to 2001 Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo carried out different studies through surveys comprised of self-questionnaires, personal life stories, surveys at meeting points for gay people and about their patrons. This information was obtained through direct observation, printed sources and thanks to the secondary analysis of the data by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Higher Institute of Health). All this research contributed to the birth of this book, with a second edition published in 2007, updated with information about the perception of homosexuality according to public opinion and about the people who visit LGBT places. The first part of the volume *Omosessuali moderni* is dedicated to the search for identity, which is defined as "fluid". After analysing childhood memories, observation moves to the age at which homosexual attraction first manifests; sometimes the search for a stable relationship is combined with more open ones. Sociologists also wonder about the frequency of suicide among homosexual people. Close attention is paid to the coming out process, in which people reveal their homosexuality to themselves and to others. As far as this aspect is concerned, sociologists also take into consideration the reactions of families to the discovery of their children's homosexuality and the process which leads to the acceptance of their homosexual identity. Social restraints and controls are important, because they can encourage or prevent people from revealing their homosexuality to themselves and to others. The data reveals that women are more "fluid", but at the same time that they are the most exposed to social norms. The importance of cultural and social factors is crucial, because it is often necessary to neutralise them to let homosexual identity surface. Another analysed trend is that of homosexuals from Southern Italy who move to Central-Northern Italy, leaving an environment which is more adverse to the expression their homosexual identity. Active and passive roles inside a couple are mostly interchangeable and rarely fixed in a modern couple. The authors

also study the gay recreational and social meeting points, both the clubs and their distribution within the territory and shops, in addition to homosexual intercourse for money and how it is organized. They further measure the importance of homosexual associations for LGBT people. Even gay and lesbian families are studied: the authors study how they divide work, how they manage economic resources and their desire to become mothers or fathers. Nevertheless, those families appear to be particularly fragile, lacking in external acknowledgement. The two sociologists also concentrate on the concept of “the modern homosexual” and this analysis involves overcoming the connection between homosexual gestures and homosexual actors and between behaviour and identity. They also explain that, for modern homosexual people, relationships are based on equality and reciprocity, on gender endogamy – alternating of heterosexual and homosexual is not frequent or it is absent – and that some associations and bodies make coming out easy while others prevent it. According to the authors, the modern homosexual expression appeared in the ‘70s in Italy, as changes regarding the homosexual world are ascribable to the great transformations that involved the heterosexual one, too: the crumbling of patriarchal society, the reduction of marriages and births, the decrease of inequalities within couples and more marital instability.

3) Diversi da chi? Gay, lesbiche, transessuali in un’area metropolitana, edited by Chiara Saraceno; Guerini e associati, Milano, 2003- by the same author, we also mention: *Coppie e famiglie. Non è questione di natura*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2012

This study only concerns Turin’s area, but contains research and considerations which affect the whole Country. The results come from a survey on a 514-people sample taken from in-depth interviews, focus groups and interviews of the representatives of the main LGBT associations. The authors state that it is impossible to outline a common profile of those who identify as homosexual, that gender differences between homosexual men and women are substantial, and that nowadays sexual orientation and gender identity are profoundly separated. They discuss the process of sexual identity normalization and naturalisation, which corresponds to that of civilization. After that they examine gender distinctions and identity “fluidity”, which is the result of a self-meditative process. They analyse transgenderism, the role of public policies and of cultural events aimed at homosexual people and the acknowledgement of homoerotic relationships. They state that the definition procedure for sexual identity involves three dimensions: erotic attraction, sexual behaviour and sexual experiences. Women are less willing than men to

define in a univocal way their own sexuality, which appears more “fluid”, just like Colombo and Barbagli had advised. This research studies the moment and the way homosexuality and attraction for the same sex are discovered, by referring to the age at which this happens and the sense of inappropriateness when compared with the male model. The authors study when and how the first homosexual and heterosexual relation happens, how the partner is met, how the homosexual identity is recognised, coming out and how the possible requests for help are carried out. A large space is dedicated to the relationship with one’s family of origin by studying the members to whom homosexuality is most often confided, how silence strategies are developed, the family’s reactions and the possible changes in the relationships after the revelation of one’s homosexuality. The authors consider the relationships with parents, at school and with peers. They make a list of negative examples in terms of fewer opportunities offered by schools and professional environments after homosexuality has been discovered and a list of discrimination processes which can lead homosexual people to prefer not to expose their sexual orientation for fear of being treated differently. The importance of gender differences also has ramifications for the duration and intensity of love affairs and for their stable or occasional nature. The number of past partners is elaborated on, as are the places and the ways chosen for meetings and how the moments of intimacy and sexuality are experienced within the couple. The researchers also study homosexual cohabitation and families, the division of work within them and the problem of the lack of social acknowledgement of these kinds of unions. Even the expectations concerning the legal acknowledgement of homosexual couples are analysed, as well as their assimilation into common-law marriages, the problem concerning children and how homosexual parents are considered by society. There is also room for participation in homosexual communities, which often implies a certain kind of commitment to undertake homosexuality as a life style; this is studied in correlation with gender differences, type of relationship – stable or not – and choices concerning exposure. The authors report that the homosexual exposure changes over time by analysing its connection with identity and how much implication matters in terms of exposure. They also explain attitudes towards homosexuality, how homophobia has developed through episodes of violence and discrimination to tragic cases of suicides by gay people. The Government and the Church are charged with often having a delegitimising role, while a part of the volume is dedicated to the complex phenomenon of transsexuality by explaining which medical and legal norms allow it and by clarifying the acknowledgement process of transsexuality, the social pressures from families and schools, the sex change, the social, family and professional contexts in which it takes place and the organization of sexuality and

relationships. Sociocultural contradictions and management of insecurity are also explored, as are the vagueness and casual nature of gay relationships.

4) Omosapiens 3, Per una sociologia dell'omosessualità, Roma, Carrocci Editore, 2008, edited by Luca Trappolin – we also mention, by the same author: *Identità in azione, mobilitazione omosessuale e sfera pubblica*, Carrocci Editore, Roma, 2002 which analyses the mechanisms of collective action during the 2002 Padua Pride Parade.

In the volume *Omosapiens 3* – which also includes essays by international researchers – the starting point is the statement that homosexuality is an essential moment for the identity definition of some individuals who intervene in the public debate through gay and lesbian communities, demanding acknowledgement. This study examines in depth the semantics of homosexual differences and the requests for acknowledgement from gays and lesbians, which translate into cultural pluralism that the researchers try to interpret. They also consider studies about queer theory, trying to identify what is lacking in sociology of sexuality, which mainly concerns the relationship between society, culture and texts. The papers in this book are the result of a group effort, which also includes an essay by Barry D. Adam about the structural basis of the homosexual world by analysing family ties, the contribution of women in the economic reality of work, the transformation of masculinity, laws concerning homosexuality issued by the Government and a brief treatise about the homosexual situation in the 19th century. Jeffrey Weeks' work, on the other hand, begins with the realization that it is not possible to talk about only one type of homosexuality. Homosexual identity is expressed as a social construction and, by considering the labelling theory of deviance, stigmatization effects are mentioned along with the limitations of the studies on symbolic interactionism, on the philosophy of lust and on the power theory by Foucault. The conditions which gave birth to the homosexual category and the factors which contribute to its acceptance or rejection are studied on two levels here: one on social categories and the other on the individual sense construction. Cyrus Rinaldi focuses on sociologist studies about deviance in the USA from the '20s to the '70s considering the medical and psychiatric analysis which involved American homosexuals, the research from the Chicago School, functionalist theory and empathic approaches. The concept of deviance underwent a deconstruction process and, little by little, homosexuality stopped being identified as a deviance, emancipating all from the stigmatization which had previously characterised it. On the other hand, Beatrice Gusmano's essay concerns homosexual identity in workplaces and the sample taken in

consideration consists of 32 in-depth interviews. The process of coming out is analysed and interpreted on the grounds of Greimas's semiotic square and some depositions are taken into consideration. The second part of the volume is dedicated to genders and sexual orientation: it opens with Daniela Danna's essay on love among women, which deals with censure towards sapphism, historiographical lesbianism, the lesbian subject itself and the process of recognizing and identifying with the lesbian identity. Giovanni Campolo deals with masculinity, sexual orientation and power by examining men's studies. A similar topic is also dealt with by Elisabetta Ruspini and Massimo M. Greco, who study the ways of being male in Italy, the topics of fatherhood and manliness, reporting the experience of a male discussion and sharing group, the dynamics of spending time together, the relationships with women and with the body. An important part of the book focuses on the acknowledgement and social change requests and on homosexual cultural production. Maya De Leo studies homosexuality in the Hellenic world; James J. Dean concentrates on homosexual film production, while Anna Passarini on TV and media dealing with the American lesbian community. Pasquale Quaranta dedicates his research to the virtual world, to the self-representation in that context and to recognizing dynamics. Sasha Roseneil's essay opens the pages dedicated to pluralism in everyday life and to family ties. Roseneil suggests an approach which goes beyond the heteronormative family to outline a relational space which overcomes that of traditional family. Chiara Bertone finds a convergence between heterosexual and homosexual families, studying the system of the couple and other kinds of familiarity. Margherita Bottino turns her attention to the issue of homosexual parents and homoparenting by analysing the reformed and the planned family units, their structures and organizations. The volume closes with the attempt to make heterosexuality problematic: Steven Seidman suggests a critical reading of obligatory heterosexuality, concentrating on lesbian feminism and the homosexual liberation movement, reviewing the concept and the meaning of obligatory heterosexuality, heteronormativity and normative heterosexuality.

5) Comunità omosessuali, Le scienze sociali sulla popolazione LGBT, edited by Fabio Corbisiero, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2013; - by the same author we also mention: *Certe cose si fanno, Identità, genere e sessualità nella popolazione LGBT*, Gesco edizioni, Napoli, 2010, which opens with a study about the area of Naples to examine the relationship between sexual behaviour and risk (unprotected sex, taking drugs, etc.).

“Comunità omosessuali” represents a multidisciplinary study; Fabio Corbisiero's essay focuses on an analysis of heterosexist society, also

examining the different kinds of homosexuality in a plural community like the LGBT one, studying both rainbow tourism and politics and gay organizations in Italy. Salvatore Prisco adopts a legal approach to ponder the topics of bonds between people of the same sex, of marriage, of family and of protection for the dignity of people and the non-discrimination in our regulations. Rosa Parisi analyses the process of de-naturalisation of social ties and homoparenting and considers how much the introduction of the term “heterosexual” and its reproposal has influenced and determined the current symbolic system. Paolo Gamberini deals with the relationship between the Catholic Church and homosexuality, examining homosexual believers’ thoughts and life stories and the rights of homosexual people according to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Giordana Curati analyses the topic of lesbianism, of lesbian claims, of feminist heritage and of the different forms of heterosexism by distinguishing between paternalistic heterosexism, positive stereotypes, apathetic, aversive and amnesic by explaining beliefs and behaviours that these different forms of heterosexism imply. Anna Lisa Amodeo explains the strategies of Hermes, a programme promoted by the European Union that aims to fight discrimination towards LGBT people and increase support strategies, explaining how Hermes tries to fight homonegativity and homophobic and transphobic violence. Pietro Maturi concentrates on how much the debate has often focused not on being homosexual, but on declaring to be homosexual and how important the “don’t ask, don’t tell” silence strategy has been. Maturi examines the words used to connote the LGBT reality: the German term *schwul* and words from Giovanni Dall’Orto’s “Fagbulary”. The second part of the book, more focused on methodologies, opens with Elisabetta Ruspini, who explains that Italian sociology was only partly dedicated to the examination of sexuality and that there is precious little research built from representative samples of the population. She closes the essay by considering the new way of life and of keeping informed held by the under 30s, that is the Millennials. Cirus Rinaldi deals with queer studies and the research on non-normative sexualities by explaining the attempts to normalize and flatten the differences, to get to the theoretical contributions to the queer theory which lead to a re-definition of the relationships among the researcher, subjects-objects and research meanings/results. Amalia Caputo identifies three important moments in LGBT history: the publication of the Kinsey Reports in the ‘50s, the Stonewall riot in 1969 and the HIV epidemic outbreak in the ‘80s. Caputo also analyses the studies of the 20th century and the works about homosexuality considered as an “inversion”, to the birth of the term “homosexuality”. She also identifies three tendencies within sociological research: considering homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals to have a lower perception of risk

than heterosexuals do, thinking of population in a dichotomy by distinguishing between homosexuals and heterosexuals and identifying the LGBT community only with male homosexuality. She then identifies several dimensions of homosexuality which are interdependent on one another: sexuality, risk perception, the social, economic, cultural, individual and familiar contexts and life style. These are identified by examining how the complexity concerning the studies on LGBT population requires a methodological apparatus of the same complexity, often availing itself of a mixed-method approach. Roberto Vitelli, Paolo Fazzari and Paolo Valerio deal with the pathologisation of non-heterosexual sexualities, that is with the interpretation of homosexuality and also of transsexuality as mental diseases by scientific literature. Maria Cristina Cimaglia analyses how sexual orientation and gender identity can influence personal rights at work. Finally, Fabio Corbisiero and Salvatore Monaco draw a map of a Rainbow Europe, taking into consideration the Rainbow Europe Country Index by Ilga, (the International Lesbian and Gay Association) based on 42 indicators which reveal the presence of laws or practices that protect or violate the human rights of LGBT people. The authors also talk about LGBT tourism and distinguish three kinds of models: rainbow-friendly cities, where the highest level of inclusion occurs; rainbow-to-be cities, where the instruments to promote integration are not adequately used, even though there is a certain sensitivity towards the LGBT issue; And, finally, the rainbow-oriented cities, where the process towards equality is still long, but where at least one of three dimensions is promoted. The three dimensions are: the acknowledgement of same sex unions, establishing LGBT services and help desks, and supporting activities and initiatives promoted by local LGBT associations.

III. Comparing Italian publications within the international debate

Regarding the five publications summarized above, we can see that the first, second and third on the one hand, and the fourth and fifth, on the other, exhibit some common aspects.

The first three investigate the phenomenon of homosexuality through questionnaires given to both the LGBT population and heterosexuals, and detect behaviours and attitudes toward homosexuality by both homosexuals and the Italian heterosexual population.

Each of the three makes an important contribution: the first is very relevant for its pioneering character (it being the first such study conducted in Italy) and for the analysis of the homosexual condition under multiple, extensive views, providing a lot of data regarding the period of the research.

The second, which can be rightfully defined as the most important sociological study on homosexuality in Italy, explains, through very extensive research, how much people's attitudes towards homosexuality have changed, and the behaviour of the modern homosexual. Barbagli and Colombo investigate the difference between modern homosexuality in the past and with the most common stereotypes attributed to homosexual people, exploring how the ways of classifying the relationships between partners has changed, from active or passive roles to homosexual or heterosexual division; how the types of homosexual relationships have changed and now are more egalitarian; the endogamous choice of partners; and the change of venues where homosexual people socialize.

The third book, although geographically limited to the area of Turin, reaches similar conclusions to those of Barbagli and Colombo, and is especially valuable for a gender-sensitive interpretation of said information and for investigating how the lack of recognition affects the instability of homosexual relationships. The application of the concept of commitment to the homosexual lifestyle is innovative and it is also important to recognise the three dimensions of sexual identity: erotic attraction, sexual behaviour and sexual experiences.

The last two books reviewed are not based on quantitative research, but are a joint work by scholars who take stock and evaluate sociology, social science and homosexuality, finding both a lack of sociological studies on homosexuality in Italy and reaffirming the importance of defining homosexual identity, the different forms of heterosexism, and enriching the debate on homosexuality with significant contributions on studies of non-normative sexual practices.

Based on the recognition that these five are fundamental texts of the "Sociology of homosexuality" in Italy, a comparison with the international situation would be difficult if we did not take into consideration the specificity of the Italian situation.

As mentioned in the introduction, the role of de-legitimizing homosexuality held by the Church, the absence of anti-homosexual laws that for decades have made homosexuality an invisible phenomenon in Italy, thanks to the unwillingness of Italian politics to address these issues, the resistance from the academic circles to deal with sexuality in general, have certainly influenced the lateness of LGBT studies in our country.

Another reason for the lateness and backwardness of Italian research on LGBT issues could be attributed to the higher importance given by Italian people to the traditional family unit (data: UNAR, 2011): an analysis in Italy such as Lee Edelman's, strongly critical of the pervasive role assumed by the figure of the child (No future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive, Duke

University Press, Durham, United States 2004) would be hard pressed to drive research forward in Italy. In our country, even the creation of different collective consciousnesses and symbolic systems, such as those proposed by Judith Butler in the U.S.A. on the lesbian phallus and drag transvestism, is still in its inception. (*Bodies that matter, on the discursive limit of sex*, Routledge, London, 1993); and we are also far from the idea of a “Female masculinity” and the consideration on the “bathroom problem” as conceived by Halberstam (1998). Any criticism that can be made about Italian Sociological research on homosexuality must take into account the specificity of the Italian context and the limited quantitative research on homosexuality in Italy. In contexts such as the UK and U.S.A., where men's studies, queer theories, gay, lesbian and gender studies have been established for several years, both the data available and the richness of the debate is certainly wider. The criteria for analysing homosexuality in Italy, then, are mostly related to the paradigms regarding identity and recognition, when, in countries where homosexuality has long been most accepted and the levels of homophobia are lower, new paradigms to analyse it have been developed. Recognizing the limits of identity recognition politics, Queer Studies were developed in the U.S.A. in the 90's, and, although they had been inaugurated by the contribution of a scholar of Italian descent, Teresa de Lauretis, in Italy itself they remain very underdeveloped. However, in the last two books reviewed, “queerness” is starting to be considered in Italy as well, and the criticism against any normalization and sexual identity is beginning to enter even in Italian Sociological debate. Queer Studies have been established in Italian Sociology only in the last few years with Marco Pustianaz in *Queer in Italia: differenze in movimento*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2011 and Elisa A.G. Arfini e Cristian Lo Iacono *Canone inverso, Antologia di teoria queer*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2012 and with some articles by Cirio Rinaldi (2008; 2013).

Even the intersectional nature among different types of discriminations – in addition to those based on gender there are those based on ethnicity, social class or disability – has been dealt with in Italy only recently through publications created in a mostly Feminist environment or, more recently, connected to the phenomenon of disability (Rinaldi, 2013).

In Italian Sociological research, even if the binarism man/ woman is recognized, it is rarely problematized, as instead happens in the Anglo-American context (among others, Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1990).

The same thing happens with the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality: if the studies by Barbagli and Colombo, for example, reveal the historical origin of the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality and its limits, the statistics are always interpreted on the basis

of this normative distinction. But in the Italian context, where the problematisation of sexuality regulations did not reach the level of other countries, it would be unthinkable to interpret the data differently. If we take into consideration international quantitative research, such as “Growing Support for Gay Marriage: Changed Minds and Changing Demographics”, conducted by the Pew Research Center in Washington from 2003 to 2013, regarding the acceptance of same-sex marriage, we see that the highest acceptance (70%) of homosexuality is among those who are called Millennials (born after the 80's): Millennials are also considered in one research in the book “Comunità omosessuali”, already mentioned.

However, we do not have research and studies in Italy that measure the change of views in ten years: data that would help Italian scholars to better understand the phenomenon and develop new interpretations on LGBT issues. The topics more often studied by Italian Sociology and reviewed by research particularly involve the process of coming out, the risk in sexual behaviour, discrimination, homophobia and LGBT parenting.

But that reflects the Italian situation: if we instead compare, not the data and research from Italy, but data on Italy, also mentioned in the last book, “Comunità Omosessuali”, from ILGA (the International Lesbian and Gay Association), from the 2013 report for Italy we read: “Positive developments in Italy result mainly from court decision rather than legislative initiatives, in large part because of the unwillingness of the political class to respond to calls from the LGBTI community to open the discussion on marriage equality or other rights. It is worrying that Italy continues to have a relatively high level of homophobia and transphobia, which expresses itself through violence (...) According to Eurobarometer 2012, 63% of Italians believe sexual orientation discrimination is widespread. This is significantly above the EU27 average (46%). 64% believe gender identity discrimination is widespread. This is significantly above the EU27 average (45%).”

The Italian research and sociological point of view reflect in some way the specificity of the Italian situation, where homophobia and discrimination are still high compared to other countries.

Some topics not really present in Italian research concern the pinkwashing strategies in business and marketing, the condition of LGBT asylum seekers, drag performances, a wide study on consumption and LGBT lifestyles, a national research on different homosexuals sub-cultures, homosexuality experienced by other minorities, and other issues not yet well addressed in Italy.

But the problem is not so much related to the limits of the studies mentioned above, as it is related to the lack, in our country, of publications and information on homosexuality. Not having reached Italy in the richness

and thematic bibliography of the international scene, this paucity combines with the limitations of the specific Italian context described above.

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