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**The Catholic Church's influence
on women's conditions
and lifestyle in Europe**

An historical work starting from the Early Modern Age

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INDEX

ABSTRACT p. 6

INTRODUCTION p. 8

CHAPTER I: The feminine condition during the Early Modern Age

I.1 The feminine submission in the social sphere p. 14

I.1.1 The dependent social status of women in the Early Modern Age p. 14

I.1.2 The discourse on women's inferiority p. 18

I.1.3 The discourse on women's inferiority and the Catholic Church p. 19

I.2 The Catholic Church limitations to women's rights p. 24

I.2.1 The limitations to the right to be educated p. 24

I.2.2 The limitations to the right to control their own bodies p. 26

I.2.3 Limitations to women's legal rights p. 29

I.3 The feminine submission in the economic sphere p. 34

I.3.1 Women's workforce in a patriarchal and Catholic society p. 34

I.3.2 Women's jobs p. 35

I.3.3 Women's jobs using their bodies p. 37

I.3.4 From the countryside to the city p. 41

I.4 Chapter's conclusions p. 44

CHAPTER II: Case study – Women and the witch hunt in the Early Modern Age

II.1 The origins of witchcraft p. 47

II.1.1 Magic and witches in the Ancient times p. 47

II.1.2 Witchcraft during the Medieval era p. 49

II.1.3 How witchcraft propelled in the Early Modern Age p. 51

II.2 The role of gender in witchcraft p. 54

II.2.1 Witch hunt as a gender-biased phenomenon p. 54

II.2.2 The Hammer of Witches: *Malleus maleficarum* p. 56

II.2.3 Witches as scapegoats p. 58

II.3 The Catholic Church's response to witchcraft during the Early Modern Age .. p. 62

II.3.1 The criminalization of witchcraft by the Church p. 62

II.3.2 The Tribunal of the Inquisition	p. 64
II.3.3 The Witch Trials	p. 65
II.3.4 Torture on witches	p. 67
II.4 Chapter's conclusions	p. 69

CHAPTER III: The Modern Age, the Era of the Rising of Women

III.1 How the profound changes of the Modern Era have affected women	p. 72
III.1.1 The structural changes of the Modern Era	p. 72
III.1.2 The consequences of the modern changes on women	p. 77
III.1.3 Modern demographic changes and women	p. 80
III.2 The First Wave of Feminism	p. 83
III.2.1 The development of feminist ideas	p. 83
III.2.2 The birth of the movement	p. 86
III.2.3 The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen.....	p. 88
III.2.4 The representation of women as subjects	p. 91
III.3 The battles of women against the Catholic Church	p. 94
III.3.1 The Blame of Eve and its consequences	p. 94
III.3.2 Gender inequalities within the Church	p. 95
III.3.3 Reproductive issues	p. 97
III.4 Chapter's conclusions	p. 100

CHAPTER IV: The contemporary era: women's enhancements and new challenges

IV.1 Women's conditions in the Contemporary Era	p. 103
IV.1.1 Women's new social representations	p. 103
IV.1.2 Women's achievements	p. 107
IV.1.3 Women's challenges in the workplace	p. 112
IV.1.4 Women and the Catholic Church in the Contemporary Era	p. 114
IV.2 The influence of the new conservative waves in the Western World on women .	p. 117
IV.2.1 The European Union	p. 117
IV.2.2 Eastern Europe	p. 118
IV.2.3 The United States	p. 121
IV.3 Chapter's conclusions	p. 123

CONCLUSION p. 126

RIASSUNTO p. 131

BIBLIOGRAPHY p. 138

RINGRAZIAMENTI p. 151

ABSTRACT

This Thesis aims to analyze and study how various and disparate factors have influenced women's conditions and lifestyle since the most ancient eras and, more specifically, since the Early Modern Age. Among these factors also appeared a secular institution, the Catholic Church, which, with its beliefs and teachings, has often discriminated women, precluding them from obtaining and benefiting from social, economic and political rights. The Early Modern Age has been an era of discoveries and general developments for Europe; however, these changes and advances did not touch every single sphere of the Europeans' lives, especially that of women. Indeed, during this era, the Catholic's perpetuation of a distorted idea of females, based on the biblical narratives about Eve and her betray of God, acted as an additional gender discriminating element for women, who were already regarded as second-level human beings and thus not able to enjoy the same rights and privileges men had at the time. This Church's misrepresentation of women during the Early Modern Age was also at the basis of the development of an actual and structural war against them with the fomentation of witch hunts and witch trials, led by the Tribunal of the Inquisition. The living situation of women started to change only in the Modern Era not due to external causes but because of the acknowledgement by women themselves of all the discriminations and injustices that they were subjected to since the most ancient times. Besides fighting against social and cultural traditions, women also had to clear various Christian beliefs that have helped maintain a patriarchal and misogynistic view upon society. Some of these Catholic's pillars, like for instance the ban of abortion, continue to discriminate and preclude women from joining their rights also in our contemporary era, as we can observe in certain areas of Europe which are still highly subjugated by these religious beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the conditions women had and are still living under a patriarchal and misogynistic society was moved by my attendance to a course during my Erasmus experience in Spain, namely *Historia social de las mujeres*. Indeed, by following these lectures, I had the possibility, thanks to the kind professor Maria del Henar Gallego Franco, to deepen my knowledge on this subject and to nurture a more profound interest in these problematics.

Before deeply engaging into this dissertation, I want to write some clarifications and specifications about my work. Of course, the history of women's inferiority and subordination to men is not just a Western and modern phenomenon; it has deep and complex causes and motives which are widespread throughout all the world, encompassing every single territory, every single society, especially that of the greatest monotheistic religions. Having stated and acknowledged this, however, my analysis of women's status and lifestyle will specifically concentrate on that of Western and European ones. Moreover, within all the factors and reasons at the basis of this phenomenon, I had decided to primarily focus on the Catholic Church's beliefs, traditions and pillars which have influenced and sometimes also fomented these conditions, without intentionally concentrate on other aspects that have led to the same outcome.

My analysis, thus, will try to partially link the discriminations and injustices women have suffered for centuries to some of the Catholic's teachings that have been fostered throughout the centuries, starting from the Early Modern Age and coming to the Contemporary Age. Indeed, also the era we are living in today is still, unfortunately, influenced by the conservative beliefs of the Christian institution *par excellence*, the Catholic Church.

I have chosen to focus on the Catholic Church and the Christian religion as factors that have discriminated and are still discriminating European women because I believe that these two elements had and they are still having the power to deeply influence the political life of various European states. Indeed, I believe that a more or less level of engagement and relation between the Church and a nation's government leads to a more or less tolerance in regards to women's freedom and rights; at the same time, a more or less level of emancipation of the states from the Church is reflected into a different level of tolerance in regards to these same feminine rights and freedom. For this reason, I believe that studying the history of European women focusing on the Catholic Church's development of the beliefs and norms about the feminine population, can help understanding the inferior status European women were relegated to for centuries. On the other hand, I think that, by analyzing the history of European women under

this lens, we can comprehend why, today, some nations on the European soil are more open and tolerant with respect to women and their own liberties while others are more close on this same front, such as the difference between nations like, for instance, the majority of the Western European countries on one side – nations that have, since centuries, emancipated themselves from the Church’s rulings – and Hungary and Poland on the other side, two Eastern European states whose governments are still greatly under the control of the Catholic Church. Thus, to conclude, I think that this analysis can help both to understand the past but also the present of the European women.

The first Chapter is entitled *The feminine condition during the Early Modern Age*. I decided to analyze this phenomenon starting from the Early Modern Age because I think this era was a fundamental age for women and all their future developments.

In the Western world, the Early Modern Age is the historical era that goes from the discovering of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 to the First Industrial Revolution that broke out in Great Britain in 1760. Historians have usually described this period as the “age of discovery” because it was the time when Europeans began to explore, encounter and exploit territories in Asia, Africa and America. It was a blooming and innovative period not only on the geographical and economic sphere, but also on the social and public field.

However, the developments and enhancements of this period did not embrace every single area of the human beings’ life, especially that of women. This Chapter will analyze the dynamics at the basis of the static and stagnant situation women were relegated to during the Early Modern Age. At the roots of this scenario lied the Christian patriarchal doctrine, which regarded men as the direct image of God, thus the only ones that could benefit from all the social, economic and political rights, while women were considered as second-level human beings since they were created as second to men. Women were also stigmatized and marked by the original sin generated by Eve, the Biblical representation of all women on Earth.

Throughout this Chapter, I will examine the characteristics of this patriarchal model as well as the repercussions that this same model provoked on women’s lives as well as on their social, economic and political rights during the Early Modern period.

The second Chapter is entitled *Women and the witch hunt in the Early Modern Age*. This Chapter is a case study on the European witchcraft and the phenomenon of the witch hunt, which has started to emerge as an important occurrence during the Early Modern Age. This phenomenon was not circumscribed only in the Catholic world, but it was primarily a Protestant

event. However, also in this case, I wanted to focus on the ways in which this phenomenon has developed in Europe and, more especially, under the ruling of the Catholic Church, without encompassing how this phenom has developed in the protestant countries because, once again, I wanted to focus specifically on European women who have suffered limitations to their rights and freedom in the context of those states influenced by the Catholic Church's beliefs and teachings.

Focusing on the Catholic territories, it has been estimated that from the early decades of the fourteenth century until 1650, continental Europeans executed between 200.000 and 500.000 witches at stake, 85% or more of whom were women. The stigma of this aberration fell on the Catholic sphere: indeed, the phenomenon of the witch craze and witch hunt was an unprecedented propaganda exercise projected in those centuries characterized by these internecine wars within the Christian bosom.

Even though magic and witches were concepts already present and widespread since the most ancient times, in this Chapter I will analyze how these two entities, namely magic and witches, started to be sudden persecuted in Europe during the Early Modern Age. Much of the work at the basis of the phenomenon of the witch hunt and witch trials was done by the Catholic Church itself, through the establishment and functioning of its Tribunal of the Inquisition.

The third Chapter is entitled *The Modern Era, the Era of the rising of women*. In this Chapter I will analyze the profound changes that have crossed the entire European continent during the Modern Era, both in the economic sphere, such as the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution, but also in the social one, such as the French Revolution and the birth of new movements, like the one of Feminism.

Indeed, the Modern Age was not only characterized by the long male domination and the absolute submission of women, but actually, the nineteenth century marked the birth of Feminism, an emblematic word that designed both the important structural changes of the period – namely the introduction of women to the salaried work, autonomy of the civil individual and the right to education – as well as the collective appearance of women on the political scene.

Throughout this Chapter, I will examine all the achievements women have made during this period, also adding all the critics women have made and battles they had to fight against the Catholic Church in order to clear all the Church's statements and beliefs about women, including the blame of Eve, the support of gender inequalities and the limitations to the female sexual and reproductive rights.

Finally, the fourth and last Chapter of my Thesis is entitled *The contemporary era: women's enhancements and new challenges*. In this Chapter, I primarily focus on today's condition of women, through the analysis of both their enhancements as well as the new challenges they are and they will face in the next future.

The first part of this last Chapter focuses on the condition itself of the woman, thus it analyzes women's new social representations and their achievements, but it also investigates the new challenges women are subjugated to as well as the new relation women have with the Catholic Church. Within these new challenges, we can find the gender pay gap, sexual harassment, inequalities in working opportunities and advances as well as the unbalances of the sexual and reproductive rights.

The second part of this Chapter focuses on the comparison between different Western areas of the world, namely the Western and Eastern Europe as well as the United States. I have chosen to examine these areas because I wanted to highlight how a more or less engagement of the state with the Catholic's beliefs and principles affect women's lifestyle and rights on different levels: for instance, the more emancipated Western Europe recognizes multiple rights and prerogatives to women, something that females living in some areas of Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary and Poland, cannot join due to the Catholic Church's strong influence on these governments. Finally, the last part of the analysis focuses on the United States, also as a consequence of all the latest events on the US soil.

CHAPTER I
THE FEMININE CONDITION DURING THE EARLY MODERN AGE

I.1 THE FEMININE SUBMISSION IN THE SOCIAL SPHERE

Even though the Early Modern Age was regarded as the era of discoveries and social, economic and political developments for Europe, this evolution did not touch every single sphere of the Europeans' lives, especially that of women.

This Chapter will analyze the dynamics at the basis of the static and stagnant situation women were relegated to during the Early Modern Age. At the roots of this scenario lied the Christian patriarchal doctrine, which regarded men as the direct image of Christ, thus the ones that benefited from all the social, economic and political rights, while women were relegated to an inferior and subordinate level since they were created as second to men but, especially, because they were marked by the original sin generated by Eve. Throughout this Chapter, I will investigate the characteristics of this patriarchal model as well as the repercussions that it provoked on women's lives as well as on their social, economic and political rights during the Early Modern period.

I.1.1 The dependent social status of women in the Early Modern Age

As stated by Cissie Fairchilds at the beginning of her book,

Every society has a set of deep seated and often unarticulated beliefs that people use to make sense of their lives. In Early Modern Europe, one of these sets of beliefs was what I call the *patriarchal paradigm*. Its basic tenet was that women were born inferior to men and therefore destined to live under male guidance and control. Women were assumed to be less intelligent than men and more willful, with less self-control, a greater tendency to sin and a daunting array of negative personality traits (Fairchilds, 2007: 7).

In Europe, during the Early Modern Age, this *patriarchal paradigm* was inherited from a long tradition that was based on the Christian conception of women as the projection of Eve's image and, particularly, of her sinful action which had led Adam, thus all men, to sin. Therefore, the status and reputation of women in the Early Modern society was influenced by this religious ideology which, as the other two monotheistic religions of the world – Judaism and Islam –, has deep patriarchal norms about women, such as their innate subordination and the need for obedience to their husbands; the notion of *honor* and *shame*; the idea that women's bodies represent sin and evil and, for this reason, that women's sexuality needs to be controlled (Jeffreys, 2011: 3).

Indeed, during the late medieval and modern centuries, women lived in environments of marginalization and violence which were usually the result of the social relations of the time, which followed the Catholic pillars and teachings, combined with other personal and familiar circumstances that have lasted throughout the years, throughout all history (Córdoba de la Llave, 2006: 8).

One simple word to describe women's social condition during the Early Modern Age could be *dependency*. Indeed, during the Early Modern period in Europe, from the moment a girl was born of legitimate birth, what she was defined with, regardless of her social origin, was her relationship with a man. The father, at first, and then the husband were the legal responsible of the woman, to whom she must honor and obey (Hufton, 2000: 25).

Indeed, in Early Modern Europe, her family was the center of a woman's life. Society viewed the woman not as an autonomous individual but as a subordinate member of a patriarchal family. For this reason, her major social roles were family centered: women were only expected to perpetuate the family through the production of heirs and to take care of the members of the household. How she fulfilled these duties changed during the course of her life: in fact, the life of a woman was divided and characterized by her changing roles in the family as well as the changing relationships with its male head (Fairchilds, 2007: 33). Women were not thought as individuals provided with their own freedom of will and action, but their entire life and their social status completely depended on the man they were subjected to.

At the first stage of her life, the woman was a daughter. This meant that the little girl was completely under the authority of her father, the man of the house, thus the chief and the only figure who could take decisions for all the members of the family. Early Modern Europe was characterized by a patrilineal society, such as a society that follows the descent and succession on the father's side. Thus, giving birth to a girl often consisted in an unfortunate event because a female could not be an heir of the family fortune nor a bearer of the family name.

Moreover, when a girl was born, parents of all social classes faced a challenge because women were considered harder to raise than boys for two reasons: the first one was because of the belief of women's deficiencies of intellect and will while, the second one, was because women had to marry. In order to be marriage materials, girls had to be beautiful, provided with a kind soul and, additionally, they had to be virgins. However, due to their supposedly strong sex drive and weak moral sense, the preservation of their daughter's chastity was considered as a difficult task for parents (Fairchilds, 2007: 36).

Secondly, the woman became a wife, switching from her father's tutorage to her husband's, to whom she had to obey and please, following his orders and wishes. This switch from being a daughter to becoming a wife was enshrined by the marriage, which was negotiated between the father of the spouse and the fiancé.

When the marriage was contracted, there were some popular expectations about the proper behavior of the husband and, especially, of the wife. Indeed, the husband was believed to be the figure who ruled the household and guided and corrected his wife. Thus, in absence of her father, the figure that controlled and disciplined her during childhood for her own safety, the husband had to replace him in this important mission: women needed male assistance in everything because of their physical and intellectual weakness, though they have souls and so were responsible for their own salvation (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 18). Indeed, due to the early age of marriage, most treaties on matrimony published in the first half of the sixteenth century took it for granted that girls had to be further educated within wedlock by their husbands (Jacobi, 2017: 245). Husbands had to correct the behavior of their wives using admonitions and kindness. However, if gentle admonitions failed, husbands were to use force against their wives (Fairchilds, 2007: 69).

Thus, with the marriage, the husband took over the responsibility of the wife's wellness, while her contribution at the time of marriage was decisive for the establishment of the new house (Hufton, 2000: 25). Wives, indeed, had the task of serving and revering their man and of being the best housekeepers for their houses.

During the Early Modern Age, marriage between a man and a woman was considered as an unyielding institution controlled by male religious and political figures in the public areas and by fathers and husbands within the home. For this reason, both secular and religious authorities attempted to regulate marriage and to use it as a means to instill patriarchal ideals (Poska, 2013: 437).

After becoming a wife, the following stage for a woman was to become a mother. In all religious traditions, the procreation of children was viewed as one of the most important functions of marriage (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 78). Becoming a mother and carrying children was the sole purpose for women, a task they were preparing to since they were little girls. Moreover, during the Early Modern Age, pregnancy and childbirth were strongly desired after marriage as a confirmation of fertility and of a successful marital union (Toulalan, 2017: 83).

Since being a mother and carrying a baby was considered the most important achievement for women, childlessness hit women particularly hard. Indeed, despite the belief

of the time according to which the man was considered the source of all the active forces in the creation of a child while the woman was simply the vessel, childlessness was invariably seen as the woman's fault (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 78). Besides childlessness, women were also considered the culprits for the birth of a girl instead of a boy. Since girls could not bear the family name and could not inherit the family's fortunes, everyone from poor peasants to kings on their thrones wanted sons as heirs. Furthermore, girls were also seen as passive members of the family, draining away family sources because of the dowries necessary to marry them off (Fairchilds, 2007: 35).

Finally, the last stage of a woman's life was the one when she became an older woman or a widow. At the time, women's stages of life were based on their familiar and reproductive capacities. Thus, when women were no longer able to become mothers, such as at the onset of menopause, women of Early Modern Europe entered into the last phase of their life: they became old.

When women reached this last phase, they began to be considered as androgynous, sexless beings and even, as celibate nuns, "honorary men": indeed, older women were given power in their families, their communities and the state (Fairchilds, 2007: 103). This was due to the idea that, since the woman was grown old, she was deprived of her sexual needs, the cause of her misjudgment and weakness.

On the other side, this stage could also be reached when a woman was left a widow. In most legal systems, widows gained the ability to act for themselves at law and they were frequently named guardians of their children. They also regained control of their property and often inherited substantial holdings from their husbands. However, being an elderly woman or a widow could also have disadvantages. In fact, if these women wanted to continue their sexual life, they were considered pathetic and ridiculous, or worse, evil witches (Fairchilds, 2007: 104).

Thus, to conclude, due to the patriarchal society that characterized the Early Modern period in Europe, being a girl and a woman was a disadvantage in the social sphere. Indeed, the Early Modern European society's assumption of women's sinfulness and lack of intelligence and self-control were used to restrict their opportunities for education, careers and power in the public sphere (Fairchilds, 2007: 14).

I.1.2 The ancient discourse on women's inferiority

The mechanisms that develop from the cultural sphere act as subordinating devices with regard to women; men, on the other hand, hold an extensive social control that is transmitted in the society through negative beliefs about women, which strengthen their daily inferior position. This subaltern cultural status explains and legitimates an immense variety of facts and realities.

The mechanism that justifies the authority that men possess over women exists since the most ancient times. At the basis of this mechanism lies the so-called "natural incapacities of women", such as the consideration of women as permanent minors who cannot represent themselves, on their own. It's these incapacities that do not allow women to detain this right.

This belief was supported by a source of truth, the Catholic religion: indeed, the Church endorsed the traditional discourse about women's incapacity, working as this mentioned "source of truth" that legitimated this mechanism of subordination.

The mechanism about women incapacities had been developed since the Greek-Roman age. Indeed, it is unarguable that the ancient world accepted female inferiority in both moral and legal terms and, consequentially, the necessity of the male rule, the male laws and, more in general, the supremacy of male contributions. This social sentiment was further reinforced by the conviction that the male dominance is natural and inherent in the way in which things are (Berg, 2019: 21)

At that time, Aristotle wrote in his opera *Politics* that the male is by nature better, while women are worse: the first one suits the role of commander, the woman has the role to obey to him. The natural hierarchy between men and women is anchored to the soul theory, according to which the rational part inherently governs over the irrational part. The rational part is present in women; however, in women's *psyche*, the faculty to deliberate does not occupy a "sovereign" position. For this reason, it is necessary that, since they are unable to govern themselves, they accept to be led and guided by the deliberative faculty of men (Pazé, 2019, 269). Women were considered as more mischievous and less simple; more impulsive, more compassionate, more prone to tears and weeping, more jealous, more complaining, more apt to rebuke and hurt, more prone to discouragement as well as more brazen, more lying, more deceitful, more diffident and more difficult to induce to action than men.

Nevertheless, at the base of the Aristotelian idea of the subordinate condition of women over men also lied another theory, the reproductive one. Indeed, it was thought that the political and social inferiority of women reflected the passive role she plays in the proactive process: the man is the one that gives the form, the movement, the soul during the act, while the woman

only provides the inert material, comparable to the wood that the artisan has the responsibility to shape (Pazé, 2019: 269). Until the nineteenth century, women were thought to have a secondary role in the reproductive process by nature: in fact, the ovule was believed to be just a passive receptacle that men had to actively fill and give it form, making it active.

Along with the Greek conception, these negative imaginaries over women survived also in Ancient Rome. In the imperial Roman world, being a female stereotypically meant being weak, irrational, undependable and incompetent: Roman citizens referred to women's conditions with the phrase *Infirmitas et imbecillitas feminarum*, such as weakness and firmness, the summary of women's essence at the time. Thus, during this age, women were customarily attributed to two different types of gender specific weaknesses: the physical-sexual weakness, *infirmitas*, and the moral-intellectual one, *imbecillitas* (Berg, 2019: 8).

Moreover, according to the Roman thought, the *virtus* was less in women than in men: women were seen as less owners of firmness, both physical and moral, as people with lack of decision; moreover, the weakness of her body and of her willingness, the lack of control of her passions, her easier predisposition to madness and mental illness made the woman in need to be protected during her entire life, because she was not capable of dominating her life and, of course, that of others.

I.1.3 The discourse on women's inferiority and the Catholic Church

Women's subordinate tradition also continued and, what is more, was reinforced by the instauration of Christianity as the official religion in the Ancient Roman Empire. At the beginning of the spread of the Christian religion, women were very active: some acted as missionaries while others carried out priestly functions such as baptism. However, as the Christian religion started to gain more and more followers in between the ancient Roman Empire, women began to be gradually excluded from church offices and priestly functions as the Catholic Church itself became more hierarchical.

The idea upon which was developed the Christian consideration of women as inferior human beings is based on two biblical episodes contained in the Old Testament: the episode of Genesis and the episode of the Fall.

In the book of Genesis, the woman's creation is represented as an episode with a discriminatory nature. According to this book, after having concluded the creation of the universe, God decided to create the man. He thought to create him in his image and likeness.

He took dust from the earth, formed the shape of the man and breathed into his face the breath of life. He then put him in paradise to cultivate and guard it, allowing him to eat the fruit of all trees except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Adam's opinion, however, things were not going well. God noticed that there was still something missing because he said: "It is not good for the man to be alone, I am going to make a help similar to him.". To make up for what Adam missed, God ordered all the animals to parade before him so that he could name them, and, under this pretext, God allowed him to take a look at them. "But among them all there was no helper for the man similar to him." In view of this, he caused a deep torpor on the man, took one of his ribs and formed a woman. When Adam recovered, God introduced her to him - as he had previously introduced him to the animals - to see if it was what responded to his particular desires. Adam was delighted and burst into approving exclamations. With this approval of the man, the existence of the woman was legitimized. Like animals, Adam also gave her a name, that of "woman", since she had been taken from the man, that is, from himself (García Estébanez, 1993: 76). Thus, this episode highlights the genesis of woman, who was born from the man and just for the advantage of the man himself.

The second episode contained in the Old Testament that is considered at the root of the Christian consideration of women as inferior is the episode of the Fall. This episode narrates the myth of the feminine evil: tempted by the serpent, the incarnation of the Devil in the paradise, Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, immediately becoming ashamed of her nakedness. However, Eve's sin did not stop at herself: she went to Adam and tempted him since he fell as well, eating the forbidden fruit. As a consequence of this action, God condemned Adam and Eve to forgo paradise and enter into the sin of sexual union. By banishing them from the Garden of Eden, Adam was obliged to work in order to get what he needed to survive while Eve was condemned to give birth in pain (Jeffreys, 2011: 24). Thus, with the narration of this episode, the Old Testament embodied the cause of all evils and misfortune of man in the figure of Eve, thus the representation of all women on Earth.

The discourse about women's inferiority was further consolidated in the New Testament. Indeed, the first epistle to Timothy, included in this Holy Scripture, tried to set the basis for women's subordination in the church. As it is stated by this epistle, women were considered as secondary and inferior human beings because of a double reason: firstly, because they were created second after the male and, secondly, because they were to be punished as they have been guilty of originating humanity's fall into sin. Due to this status, women could not exercise any kind of authority in the Church. Their only task was to bear children, the only motive why

they would be saved at the end, and to remain in silence, since they cannot teach anything to men (Radford Ruether, 2014: 85). Indeed, since the moral quality of women was considered lower than that of men, their chances of salvation were lower as well, since they deal worse with temptations and sins.

Together with the example of Eve, the Hebrew Scripture also described other women whose actions helped create a negative stereotype for the feminine figure. Delilah, for instance, was pictured as a woman whose sexuality could tempt even the strongest man; Rebekah, on the other side, was a woman whose love for one of her sons led her to deceive her husband; finally, Lot's wife, whose name was not recorded, changed into a pillar of salt after disobeying God and her own husband (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 16). Thus, women have been depicted as evil and sinful since the Hebrew tradition, which was the one that influenced the Christian heritage.

Moreover, women's conditions were worsened by the ideas of one of the most important early Christian philosophers, Saint Augustine, who lived and professed the Christian religion approximately from 354 to 430 A.D. According to this Church's Father, the initial decision by Adam and Eve had ended human free will for all time and for all people, but it also created the sexual desire. St. Augustine saw as proof of this the fact that men cannot control the actions of their sexual organs by virtue of their will or reason alone. This thinking made most of the Church's leaders start to believe that even sexuality within the marriage was considered sinful and both clergy and laymen were warned against the temptations of women (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 17).

Medieval scholastics continued this view: indeed, the traditional consideration of the woman as a subjugated and inferior human being became the dominant Western Christian tradition in the following centuries. Women, as the concrete incarnation of Eve on Earth, represented the original sin and, for this reason, they were forced to lead a life of subordination and inferiority in the society.

For instance, during the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas reinforced this Catholic view by repeating what Aristotle stated centuries before, such as that the woman is biologically defective physically and mentally. The inherent inferiority of women in body, mind and will makes them incapable of autonomous existence and must be under male subjection. Aquinas applied this view to his Christology: according to him, since women represented an indirect representation of God while men represented the direct one, only males could represent Christ in the priesthood (Radford Ruether, 2014: 86). Thus, by synthesizing the classical ideas of Aristotle about women and the Christian ones, Thomas Aquinas concluded that women's

inferiority was not simply the result of Eve's actions, but was inherent in her original creation. Indeed, Eve was created second to Adam, who was the proper and direct image of God on Earth. In this case, Eve was only a representation of the man, created just to keep him company during his activities. This idea of the secondary role of women was also supported by the function women were believed to have in the procreational process: thus, Thomas Aquinas inherited Aristotle's idea of the woman just seen as the giver of the material substance that the man, the father, had to supply with his active force (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 18); he institutionalized this idea as one of the most important pillars in the Catholic Church.

To conclude, also in the Middle Ages, women were supposed to embrace their subordinate and inferior position over men. The good Christian woman demonstrated her converted mind and heart by interiorizing her secondary place in creation and her deserved punishment for Eve's sin. Quietly and submissively, she would accept her husband's rule over her, as well as that of other males in authority, like her father, brother or every other man in her life (Radford Ruether, 2014: 87).

The traditional discourse about women's inferiority continued and, what is more, it deepened during the Early Modern Age. There is a colossal difference between Jesus's teachings and the pillars on which the Catholic Church was based during the Early Modern Age. Indeed, at the time, Jesus himself spoke frequently to women and included them between his followers; he professed that men and women were equally capable of achieving life after death, and that women as well as men should not let their domestic responsibilities come before their spiritual well-being. During his speeches, he used women as positive examples, like Mary Magdalene (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 16).

However, the Catholic Church's ideas about women were built on the Jewish and Hebrew tradition, bypassing Jesus's lessons about society, poverty and emarginated people. Indeed, the untraditional nature of Jesus's ideas was quickly downplayed by many of his followers shortly after his death (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 16). As written in the Holy Writings, the Bible, the woman is the reflected image on the man who, on the other side, is the direct reflection of God. Indeed, as explained in the Genesis, God created the man first, Adam, and then the woman, Eve, following the man's model. The consequences of this simple statement have been enormous: presenting the man as the God's image means that this is the figure that has the power. The authority and the power lie in the man, who reflects the transcendent and his power.

To conclude, Eve's original sin had led the Catholic Church, the most influential institution during the Early Modern Age in Europe, to regard all women as sinful and second-level human beings. Their role in the society completely depended on the men they were related to, starting from the father and then continuing with their husbands' authority. For this reason, their only scope in life was to become good daughters, good wives and then good mothers.

The direct consequence of all this discourse is that, since the beginning of its spiritual work and activities, the Catholic Church has worked as an additional factor to the already marginalized and subordinated condition of women, historical characters considered as inferiors since the ancient times. Only men were considered the specimen representative of humanity: the masculine part of the population has always held the power over women and the society more in general.

The Bible has been used to define the roles and the categories in the Church: this book has been instrumentalized for the purpose of a political project, excluding women out of any type of economic, political and social administration, embracing every single sphere of their life.

The consideration of women as inferior and subordinate human beings has led to the fact that, over the decades, the feminine population has been pursued by reference to their reproductive capacities, their sexuality, their attitudes to childbirth and childcare, their family roles, their position in the community, in the work-force and the family economy (Hufton, 1983: 125).

I.2 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH LIMITATIONS TO WOMEN’S RIGHTS

As already mentioned before, during the Early Modern Age, women were subjected and dependent to men in every stage of their lives and the sources at the basis of the idea of subordination and inferiority of women in the patriarchal Early Modern European society was the Catholic Church and all its beliefs.

To look at the Catholic Church throughout the early modern period is to look at an institution, a set of beliefs, doctrines and practices that embraced the European society at its roots (Terpstra, 2015, 747). As defined by Anthony Giddens, religion is “*a set of beliefs adhered to by the members of a community, involving symbols regarded with a sense of awe or wonder, together with ritual practices in which members of the community engage*” (Giddens, 1997: 584). Indeed, during the Early Modern Age, Christianity was the most important source of ideas about the world, the society and, what is more, about women (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000,15).

The Catholic religion was born in a pre-modern context, therefore before the elaboration of concepts like "human rights", “human equality” and “gender equality”; for this reason, the cited doctrine is affected by a patriarchal vision that has had enormous consequences on women and their conditions in the Western society. Women’s consideration as second-level human beings during the Early Modern Age has led them to detain few – if not any – rights compared to the ones held by men in the same period.

I.2.1 The limitations to the right to be educated

Since the beginning of the institutionalization of the Christian religion as the official belief of the ancient Roman Empire, a woman’s destiny was defined by matrimony and, accordingly, a girl’s education had to prepare her for this. Indeed, for the sake of right living in this world and salvation, girls had to be prepared spiritually and practically to become Christian wives, mothers and housekeepers (Jacobi, 2017: 244).

During the Early Modern Age, Juan Luis Vives emerged as the most influential author to proffer the best method to achieve this goal. In his treaty of 1523 called *De Institutione Feminae Christianae*, he covered the life cycle of Christian women from virginity to widowhood (Jacobi, 2017: 245). This manual was written for an audience composed by well-educated European girls who were part of the upper and the upper-middle class families.

According to this author, women had to be prepared for their tasks as wives and mothers in their own home from early childhood. Among all the activities, girls had to be well-educated in reading in order to perform their religious duties and then being able to instruct their children

and servants in their future household. Domestic skills and handicraft were considered as primary subjects: girls had not to play with puppets, which instilled in misses the desire for adornment and finery, but with toys made of tin or lead because they taught them how to use the traditional household objects.

The indulgence of parents is very harmful to children, since it offers them free access to a thousand vices and even thrusts them in their face. But this is especially harmful for the girl, for she is held back to a greater degree solely by fear. If that is not present, then all the barriers of nature are let down. If she is drawn to evil by nature, then she plunges into it headlong. She will not turn out well unless she is good of her own nature and character, which may be so in some cases. Therefore, she will learn, together with reading, how to work with wool and flax, two arts passed on to posterity from that former age of innocence, of great usefulness in domestic affairs and contributing to frugality, which should be a matter of prime concern for women. I shall not descend to particulars or I will appear to be searching into matters too humble for my subject. But I should not wish any woman to be ignorant of the skills of working with the hands, not even a princess or a queen. What could she do better than this when free of all the household tasks? She will converse with men, I suppose, or other women (Vives, 1523: 58).

Thus, according to Vives, the moral improvement of girls would result from a joint effort of teaching them how to read and of how to work with wool and flax. Indeed, little girls also had to learn how to work these two materials that would be extremely useful in domestic affairs and which would teach them frugality, a matter of primer concern for women. Furthermore, according to Vives, needlework was considered as an appropriate occupation for all women because it was performed inside of the home, where women should stay all day long, and kept women from idleness. By occupying girls with this domestic activity, Vives thought that this would protect women's virginity and dignity against the omnipresent dangers waiting outside the safeguarded home. Lastly, talking about academic learnings, Vives stated that the humanist curriculum of higher learning was out of the question for women because even if a girl were to study Latin, her reading material of ancient literature should be confined to Christian authors (Jacobi, 2017: 246). This program to educate good and Christian girls dominated the educational discourse during the following centuries.

Vives's model was then re-emphasized by a German author, Johann Michael Moscherosch, one hundred years later. According to Moscherosch, there was a strong tie between moral, intellectual and practical education for women. Indeed, according to him, girls' hands were made to hold just two things: a prayer book in one hand and a spinning wheel in the

other one. Moreover, Moscherosch wrote that a virgin girl, who was not already married, should never get close to the window of her house and even pass the threshold of the front door, unless she was told by her parents or she wanted to go to the church (Jacobi, 2017: 247).

The education of a boy was significantly different from that of a girl. Usually, girls were taught how to read, how to pray and, to a lesser extent, how to write. Recommended reading referred to ‘good books’ only, which ranged from selected parts from the Bible, such as the Psalter or Jesus Sirach, catechism and prayer books. Wealthier families ensured that their daughters also learned writing or accounting, two useful skills for the management of a household and for family finances in general. Those parents who desired a more ‘worldly’ education would pay extra lessons in instrumental music and dancing.

However, besides these few activities girls were confined to, girls could not attend any other lessons. Only when boys were instructed at home, some girls were allowed to participate in a more academically oriented education (Jacobi, 2017: 271).

As already stated before, one field of teaching and training beyond reading and religion was part of every girl’s curriculum: needlework. Girls belonging to every kind of social rank were expected to know how to spin, how to sew and knit as well as doing the domestic arts of elaborate embroidery. Needlework was conceived as an integral component of female education by the Catholic Church. Indeed, Catholic iconography represented Mary rocking her son to sleep while reading a prayer book and doing needlework (Jacobi, 2017: 273). No other subjects such as history, geography, philosophy or foreign languages like Italian, French and English became part of the girl’s curricula. This changed only in the eighteenth century, when all these subjects began to be taught in boarding schools.

Thus, to conclude, since the Early Modern Age, little girls were educated in order to be raised as good housewives, pious mothers and obedient spouses and they lacked an actual right to be educated since they could not access a whole sphere of teachings, which were only a prerogative of boys and young men.

I.2.2 The limitations to the right to control their own bodies

As already stated before, during the Early Modern Age women were obliged to preserve their own virginity, arriving in a chaste status at the marriage. This imposition was established by the Christian religion, which, from the very beginning of its installment in the ancient Roman Empire, promoted virginity and “the virgin lifestyle as a way to return to the original state of

human life, before the fall, sin, and sexual intercourse.” (Torjesen, 1993: 209). According to the Fathers of the Catholic Church, women had to maintain their virgin and pure status till the marriage in order to preserve their dignity and try to escape from the original sin they were stigmatized with due to Eve’s betray of God in the Garden of Eden. Only in this way women had the possibility to be respected by the society, which, at the time, expressed male virtues as ideal.

According to Torjesen, throughout the first decades of the installation of the Catholic Church, Christian theologians developed another argument in support of women’s virginity and chaste status: the belief that the original sin – such as the doctrine which states that the betrayal actions performed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were the causes of why human beings, especially women, were born sinful – happened because of sex. Indeed, in the opinion of the early Christian theologians, humanity was created without sexual desire and the necessity of sexual relations and intercourses. Thus, the cause of the fall of the first man was linked to Eve and to her sexuality, gained by eating the forbidden fruit offered by the serpent, the incarnation of the Devil itself (Torjesen, 1993: 210).

Moreover, since humanity was created without the need and the desire of sexual intercourse, the Fathers of the Church saw sexual relations just as an instrument with the scope of procreation. Thus, the only motive why people, both men and women, should engage in this activity was in order to create a new life by their union. Sexuality, although tolerated within marriage, was supposed to focus solely on the generation of descendants to the exclusion of pleasure, which was considered sinful (García, 2014: 185).

Thus, while imposing chastity and the preservation of girls’ virginity, the Catholic Church implemented enormous limitations for women to the right to control their own bodies, starting from the expression of their own sexuality and sexual needs. Marriage was the institution through which the Catholic Church could control women sexuality and, in a more extent way, their lives. Indeed, the organization of marital sexuality was just an institutionalized expression of the power dynamics of marriage that were implemented during the Early Modern Age: dominance, submission and subversion (Crawford, 2013: 576). Marriage was just a way the Catholic Church and men used in order to control women’s sexuality and to keep them relegated to a subordinate and inferior position within the society: indeed, during the Early Modern Age, both secular and religious authorities attempted to regulate marriage and to use marriage as a means to instill patriarchal ideals (Poska, 2013: 437).

A second way in which the Catholic Church limited the right of women to control their own bodies was with the prohibition of abortion.

Since the beginning of its instauration, the Roman Catholic Church has opposed the practice of abortion, affirming that it is a serious sin to destroy a fetus at any stage of development. Thus, Church has always condemned abortion as a violation of the rights of the unborn (Harrington, 1971: 14). This Catholic position has been developed and implemented since the beginning of the constitution of the Church; however, it was during the Early Modern Age that this attitude was reinforced through the publication of an important Constitution concerning abortion, the Constitution *Effraenatam* of Pope Sixtus V of 1588.

Before the emanation of the bull *Effraenatam*, the Catholic Church's doctrine about abortion was based on a system of punishment which differentiated the degree of severity of the sentence according to the different level of development of the fetus. However, by emanating the Bull *Effraenatam*, Pope Sixtus V eliminated the previous distinction that was believed to exist between animated and unanimated fetuses, stating that any abortion or any intentional abortion would have been punished with excommunication as well as the legal sentences for homicide. Moreover, since sexual intercourses should have been held only as a way to procreate new lives, Pope Sixtus V also condemned any action that would have led to prevent conception like, for instance, the use of medicines, potions, poisons, blows, weights, burdens and hard work and labor (Harrington, 1971: 15).

While trying to avoid and eliminate the practice of abortion, the Catholic Church had issued an enormous violation of the woman's right to control her own body and, in a more general understanding, of her life as well. By banning abortion and imposing excommunication and the sentence of homicide as the consequences in the case of implementation of this process, the Church limited women's freedom and their own choices about their bodies.

Thus, during the Early Modern Age, not only the Catholic Church influenced women's education, but it was also responsible of the limitations to women's control of their own bodies, which began to be seen just as instruments to procreate, repressing any other type of desire and necessity.

I.2.3 Limitations to women's legal rights

During the Early Modern Age, women have been relegated to an inferior and subordinate condition not only in the social sphere, but also in the legal and criminal codes. The cause of the lower position of women in these codes has to be traced in the social and public treatment of the woman as a permanent minor. When men reached their legal age, they also directly achieved their legal independence and became fathers, husbands and heads of their own families; however, this mechanism did not work the same for women: indeed, even when girls reached the age of majority, they did not achieve their legal independence. Thus, despite changing their civil status into wives, mothers and, in some cases, even widows, women could never be legally independent, they would always be under the legal guardianship of a male figure (Warner, 2013: 523). In fact, when they were daughters, they were under the judicial legislation of the father; when they got married, they depended on their husbands and, in the end, in the case of becoming widows, they were put under the tutelage of a male relative designed by the husband.

The legal inferiority of women during the Early Modern Age was inherited from a tradition that had developed throughout the human history.

The first traces of the legal submission of women can be traced back to the Ancient and Classical times. In Ancient Egypt, for instance, women became legally independent once they reached the age of majority, but this changed when they got married, since they needed to accept their subordination to their husband also in the legal sphere. In Ancient Greece, the legal dependency of a woman was passed from the father to the husband and then, in case of the death of the spouse, to a legal guardian (Warner, 2013: 524). Finally, the legal subordination of women in the Ancient Rome functioned in a way similar to the Greek model.

These ancient models were protracted throughout history, coming to be implemented also in the Middle Ages and then during the Early Modern Age and they were essentially repeated until the nineteenth century.

The concept that nurtured the juridical and legal inferiority of women lied in the concept of the natural disabilities that the female sex represented. Indeed, women had always been pictured as creatures that could not govern themselves because of their nature and temperament: women were seen as more mischievous and less simple; more impulsive, more compassionate, more prone to tears and weeping, more jealous, more complaining, more apt to rebuke and hurt, more prone to discouragement as well as more brazen, more lying, more deceitful, more diffident and more difficult to induce to action than men. Thus, since women were considered

as inferior human beings compared to men, they lacked political, legal and civil rights (Warner, 2013: 524).

The laws under which women of early modern Europe lived were a complex mixture of customary law, derived from the laws of the early Germanic tribes, which treated women as the property of men and denied them the right to inherit land or bring lawsuits in court, and Roman law, which recognized women as legal persons and allowed them to own property, make wills and bring lawsuits but denied them any power over others, meaning that they could not hold public office, act as legal guardians or as witnesses in court.

The outcome of the juxtaposition of these two different juridical movements produced multiple variations which differed from country to country as well as from region to region (Fairchilds, 2007: 14). For example, in England, wives were the ones who lived with the more restrictions because the common law issued the so-called “doctrine of coverture” according to which the husband “covered” the wife, so she had no legal identity of her own. Indeed, English wives could not sell, buy, contract or write a will without the consent or cooperation of their husband. Throughout the early modern period, an English wife did not have a right to separate property, even to the clothing she wore (Warner, 2013: 528). On the other side, in continental European countries, the civil law established that the property that a bride and groom each brought into the marriage became community property, jointly shared by both the husband and the wife. However, this joint property could be managed only by the husband. Only the dowry was supposed to be beyond the reach of her husband and it became a safety net for the wife, if she became a widow.

Women’s limitations in the legal and juridical sphere were not only confined to their impossibility or difficulty to access to their own property, but they also entailed other aspects of their life. For instance, since women did not hold any legal right, filing and getting a divorce from their husband was extremely difficult and, in most of the cases, impossible.

During the Early Modern Age in Western Christian Europe, if the couple exchanged promises in the present tense and had consensual sex then, according to the Catholic Church, they had entered into the religious sacrament of holy matrimony before God, and there was no exit strategy beyond the death of one of the spouses. Also in the case of severe abuse by the husband, the wife was denied the right to seek separation and to divorce.

Marriage was officially declared a sacrament during the Council of Trent, which was held in this town from 1545 to 1563. During this reunion, the Fathers of the Council sought to delineate and sanctify the framework within which a man and a woman could have sexual

intercourses together (Martín García, 2014: 184). What was determined during this Council was the idea that, even though celibate was considered as the highest state of perfection in life, marriage was proposed as a means of salvation for incontinent. Thus, marriage was considered as the only solution for men and women in order to save the soul and have the possibility to have access to the heavenly kingdom after death.

Moreover, during the development of this reunion, it was also stated and made clear the central role that men should play in wedlock. Indeed, as stated by the Dominican friar Vicente Mejía,

Las mugeres casadas sean súbditas a sus maridos como a señor: porque el marido es como cabeza de la muger, así como Christo es cabeza de la yglesia, y el mismo es salvador de su cuerpo: y por eso así como la yglesia es subjecta a Christo: así las mujeres han de ser en todo subjectas a sus maridos (Mejía, 1566, 47).

Mejía statement can be translated as it follows:

Married women are subject to their husbands as to lords: because the husband is the head of the woman, just as Christo is the head of the church, he himself is the savior of her body: and for this reason, just as the church is subject to Christ: thus women must be subject to their husbands in everything (Mejía, 1566, 47).

Thus, by virtue of human and divine laws, with the marriage women fell under the authority and rule of their husbands. Women were expected to obey their men's decisions without questioning while, in contrast, husbands were required to maintain constant control over their wives, in order to protect their own honor in society. As a means to uphold this authority, husbands were entitled to inflict violence on their wives, in order to make them "understand" the right way of acting and thinking (Martín García, 2014: 193).

Even though the Council of Trent had declared that the sacramental union between men and women was indissoluble, actually marriages were often unsuccessful. Thus, the Catholic Church had tried to offer solutions in order to face with this reality. One of these was the annulment of marriage; however, this practice was used very rarely and, as an alternative, the Church put forward another instrument: partial divorce. In this case, the husband and the wife were allowed to live in a temporary separation while preserving their marital bond.

Nevertheless, in the reality, the Church also dragged its heels even in granting partial divorces and preferred to exert pressure on the couple to resume their life together.

Of course, those worst affected by these actions implemented by the Church were women, since they were helpless against the violent behavior of their husbands. Statistically, most applicants for divorce proceedings were women, and in the vast majority of cases the reason was abuse. In these situations, the natural reluctance of the ecclesiastical judges to grant separations was compounded by their distrust of these lawsuits, since in the case of a favorable judgement they could lead to the undesirable situation, according to the social and psychological values of the Early Modern period: women's independence (Martín García, 2014: 193).

Thus, women's social, familiar and economic inferior situations as well as the pressure exerted by the Catholic Church and the clergy, often restricted women's recourse to a legal solution.

Finally, another important difference between men and women in the legal sphere during the Early Modern Age could also be seen in the case of adultery.

Early Modern marriage and the sexual relationship at its center were about preserving the male line, the inheritance that passed through it and the political power that occurred to it. For this reason, adultery by women was a serious crime because it threatened these priorities; adultery by men was irrelevant (Crawford, 2013: 575).

Indeed, during the Early Modern Age, adultery entitled the husband to a separation from his wife as well as the demand of a punishment for the other man involved, the so-called *honour killing*. Thus, during the early modern period, only the husband was allowed to accuse his wife of the offense and the crime of adultery, and this was recognized by both the common and the royal laws.

Adultery could lead to civil and criminal punishments. In the case of criminal law, the husband had to present physical evidences on the wife in order to prove this crime while, in the case of civil law, Courts just needed circumstantial evidences, suspicion and hearsay. Thus, under civil law, a woman could lose her dowry and possessions. However, things were completely different under royal role. Indeed, in this case, only husbands had the right to sue for adultery. In the case the Royal Court decided to condemn the wife with the crime of adultery, it could deliver her together with the adulterer so that, if the husband desired as such, he could execute them with his own hands (Martín García, 2014: 188).

To conclude, during the Early Modern Age, not only the Catholic Church acted as a form of discrimination for women in the social sphere, but it also operated enormous limitations in the legal one, restricting women's rights. However, what is more, the Church also influenced women's inferior position in the economic sphere.

I.3 THE FEMININE SUBMISSION IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

In Early Modern Europe, women's consideration as second-level human beings in the social sphere had repercussions also in the economic sphere. Indeed, since their inferior consideration, women were also regarded as second-level workers and this belief had enormous repercussions on the jobs that were made available to women but also to the conditions women had to work into.

I.3.1 Women's workforce in a patriarchal and Catholic society

During the Early Modern Age, although the actual work of men and women was often very similar or even the same, their relationship to work and work identities were enormously different (Wiesner-Hanks, 2000: 103). Thus, in Early Modern Europe, women worked in an enormous range of jobs and professions: they were farmwives, fishmongers, guildswomen as well as artists, scholars, midwives, prostitutes and servants. However, even though women were present in virtually all sectors of the Early Modern economy, their work was not understood or valued in the same way as men's work (Lanza, 2013: 620). There are many reasons at the basis of women's workforce discrimination.

First of all, western European guilds in the early modern period were archetypical patriarchal institutions. This meant that in the cities and towns where these guilds were instituted, they operated a strong restriction of their membership to men. These restrictions imposed on women were influenced by an idealized vision of the preindustrial family economy in which the master, such as the man, the head of the family, directed all the other members of the family: his wife, his children, his journeymen and his apprentices (Crowston, 2008: 19).

Thus, since guilds were considered a largely masculine organization and since women's work had always been seen as inferior and, the obvious consequence was that women's workforce, during that period, was considered as inferior to the one of men and, for this reason, it was not safeguarded and controlled by guilds or other institutions.

Secondly, since women's work was considered as inferior compared to the one of men, women also lacked a proper professional and formal training in order to access to skills or to processes of production and reproduction of work. Indeed, during the Early Modern Age, European girls could not have apprenticeship contracts, thus they needed to learn these skills necessary for their role in their own home from their mothers and other kin (Crowston, 2008: 30).

Thus, guilds commonly excluded women from formal occupational training. These restrictions and this exclusion was enshrined by religious and medical constructions of women which portrayed them as “weaker vessels” as well as by political and moral concerns about the importance of containing female sexuality (Spicksley, 2017: 289). Indeed, also the Catholic Church played an important role in stigmatizing women and their social as well as economic role in Early Modern Europe.

Thirdly, even if women were obliged to work for their own maintenance, Early Modern European society did not conceive that women could or should live in total independence. Indeed, the feminine independence was seen as something unnatural and abhorrent. Men, both the father at first and the husband after the marriage, provided women with a home, thus contributing to their upkeep. This reasoning had enormous consequences on women’s work, especially on their wages: in fact, a woman could be paid less for her work because a man gave her a roof over her head (Hufton, 2000: 26). Thus, women’s wages were most of the time lower than men’s because they were considered to be “complementary wages” compared to the main wage of the husband, the head of the family and the member that primarily held the task of economically supporting his family (Bellavitis, 2016: viii).

I.3.2 Women’s jobs

As defined by Szołtysek, an household is a task-oriented residence unit composed by a group of people who share the same physical space for the purpose of eating, sleeping, taking rest and leisure, growing up, childrearing and procreation. The household can be composed by relatives and non-relatives members of the family, who are living under the same roof and share the same hearth, as well as servants and lodgers who participate in some common activities (Szołtysek, 2015: 403).

During the Early Modern Age, the household was the most important place for an European young woman. There, she was taught all the domestic skills she would need for her future house and in order to take care of her husband and her children, the natural consequence of her growth. As written by Thomas Smith in 1583,

The naturalest and first conjunction of two toward the making of a further societie of continuance is of the husband and of the wife after a diverse sorte ech having care of the familie: the man to get, to travaile abroad, to defende: the wife, to save that which is gotten, to tarrie at

home to distribute that which commeth of the husbnades labor for the nurtriture of the children and family of them both, and to keepe all at home neat and cleane. So nature hath forged ech part to his office, the man sterne, strong, bould, adeventerous, negligent of his beautie, and spending. The women weake, fearefull, faire, curious of her bewtie and saving (Smith, 1906: 22).

This description of the gender division of labor by Sir Thomas Smith represented the ideal structure of the working lives of men and women during the Early Modern Age. As written in this passage, the man was the member of the family who had the economic responsibility of the family, he was the income generation; for this reason, he had to engage in the external world, working outside of the house and travelling. On the other hand, the woman was the member who had to remain inside the home in order to provide the necessary cares and attention to her husband and to her family more in general. Women had to garner together the men's income and use it to provide the goods and the services that would be needed to ensure the survival of the family, including the maintenance of a healthy living environment (Spicksley, 2017: 284).

Roles in the household were apportioned according to understandings of capacity and necessity, in line with readings of the female body and, in particular, its sexual nature, that gave the confinement of women and their work within the household (Spicksley, 2017: 284). As cited before, Juan Luis Vives, who was the most influential author about young women and their education of the time, in his book called *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* of 1523 he wrote that:

The working of wool was always the occupation and skill of a good women. [...] It makes no difference, I think, whether it be wool or flax; both are essential to the needs of life and both are an honorable occupation of women (Vives, 1523: 113).

Thus, also according to Vives, women's work was good for both body and soul in Early Modern Europe and it also helped young women to preserve their virginity, since by staying in the household, they were safe from the external threats.

Besides the work in the household, during the Early Modern Age, women started to perform other jobs. Indeed, during the Early Modern period, women in urban areas had been clustered in the goods and service sectors as well as the supply of food and clothing. For instance, in Coimbra, the retail commerce of bread, fish, oil, fruit and wine was held by women; the same

happened in Venice, where women sold food, fruit and spices on the street, dealt in second-hand clothes and made linen. In London, women worked mainly in the areas of food, drink and entertainment as well as in the area of textiles and clothing (Spicksley, 2017: 305).

Moreover, women were also pioneers in the emerging book trade market in Early Modern Europe. Indeed, immigrant women coming from the countryside were able to sustain the nascent printing industry in the sixteenth century and their involvement in the sector continued throughout all the period (Spicksley, 2017: 307).

However, even though the presence of women in the retail and service sectors became increasingly strong, female workers found it more difficult to engage in the production sectors, which were exclusively dominated by men. This was due to a strong gender bias at the basis of guilds, which, as the society in general, considered women as second-level human beings as well as workers, thus not permitting them to engage in this sector. Indeed, as already written before, guilds were archetypal patriarchal institutions, which restricted their membership to men (Crowston, 2008: 19).

I.3.3 Women's jobs using their bodies

During the Early Modern Age in Europe, besides the jobs performed in the areas of the retail of goods and services and of textiles and clothing, women also engaged in jobs that were carried out by using their female body as a working tool. Indeed, serving, feeding, caring, giving birth and prostitution were activities predominantly or exclusively carried out by women (Bellavitis, 2016: 111).

Working as servants and slaves was one of the occupations regarded as suitable for women, since their domestic and serviceable attitude. Indeed, women could sell their labor to households in need of extra hands. Domestic service had been an important stage in the life of many young European women since the late medieval period, and it remained a significant and enduring aspect of the early-modern urban labor market (Spicksley, 2017: 304).

During the Early Modern Age, usually girls also provided domestic service in relatives' homes: for instance, young women could work in the houses of unmarried male relatives or widowers who needed someone to look after their homes. As written by Samuel Pepys on the 9th of November 1660 in his famous book *Diary*,

I went to my father's and staid late talking with my father about my sister Pall's coming to live with me if she would come and be as a servant (which my wife did seem to be pretty willing do to do-day), and he seems to take it very well, and intends to consider of it (Pepys, 1893: 45).

After 3 days, on the 12th of November 1660, Pepys added that:

My father and I took occasion to go forth, and went and drank at Mr. Standing's, and there discoursed seriously about my sister's coming to live with me, which I have much mind for her good to have, and yet I am much afeard of her ill-nature. Coming home again, he and I, and my wife, my mother and Pall, went all together into the little room, and there I told her plainly what my mind was, to have her come not as a sister in any respect, but as a servant, which she promised me that she would, and with many thanks did weep for joy, which did give me and my wife some content and satisfaction (Pepys, 1893: 46).

Moreover, on the 2nd of January 1661, with his sister permanently working in his house as a servant, Pepys wrote that:

I by the water to my office, and there all the morning, and so home to dinner, where I found Pall (my sister) was come; but I do not let her sit down at the table with me, which I do at first that she may not expect it hereafter from me (Pepys, 1893: 48).

In the Early Modern Age, being a domestic servant was one of the most accessible occupations to girls emigrating from the countryside to the urban centers. There was an enormous demand for domestic workers in the cities (Lanza, 2013: 634). Also men could perform this type of job; however, the difference was that girls were mostly live-in domestic workers, while male servants more often lived independently of their masters and this could give them the possibility of creating a family of their own (Bellavitis, 2016: 115).

Indeed, if, in the premarital period, a woman could not find enough work to support herself in her own home, she had to enter the house of his employer, becoming part of the household. The employer would assume the role of the protective male figure and he would be held responsible for food and shelter costs of the girl. Of course, the wage perceived by the girl would also take into account these costs. Moreover, in this case, the employer acted in *loco parentis* until the woman left him for another job, or returned home, or married a man (Hufton, 2000: 26), indeed until the woman entered into the protection of another men. Thus, again, this process highlights how women, also working women outside their own house, were not

considered as independent individuals, who could live alone, because they always needed a man's protection, be he her father, her husband or her guardian.

One of the biggest problems linked to domestic service for young women was the one of illegitimate pregnancy. Indeed, female domestic slaves were often targets of their owners' sexual attention, with the consequence of the birth of illegitimate children, who could be abandoned or could be raised in the masters' house, being regarded as "born of an unknown father" (Bellavitis, 2016: 114). However, instead of blaming men, more or less consensual sexual relationships between the head of the household, or his sons, and the young maids were at the root of the bad reputation of female servants, considered the culprits and the temptresses (Bellavitis, 2016: 116).

The second working field in which women were present during the Early Modern Age was the one of caring and feeding. In many European cities, the mechanisms of assistance of the poor organized at a local level were largely based on women's work, which was seen as an extension, in the public sphere, of the activities carried out by women in the private sphere. This represented a paradox, since women, who were not allowed and were excluded from universities, where medical knowledge was passed on, had to work assisting other people also by using medical practices.

Thus, women were hired to work in hospitals, lazarettos and orphanages, where they had to take care for the poor and the sick. Generally, the management positions of the institution were in charge of married or widowed women, but the lower ranks were occupied also by unmarried women, who were especially employed during epidemics (Bellavitis, 2016: 131).

During the Early Modern Age, wet nursing was one of the most common jobs in the caring and feeding area. Wet nurses were women who had recently lost a young child or new mothers prepared to leave their babies with other women in order to breastfeed the children of others, or women whose children had grown enough to be weaned by who continued to produce milk. Before the development of formula milk, when a woman could not breastfeed her own children due to illnesses or physical impediments, wet nurses were hired in order to feed these babies. However, wet nurses were also employed by wealthier families as a form of social control: in fact, contraceptive effects of breastfeeding were already known at the time and, for this reason, upper-classes women were not allowed to breastfeed their newborns in order for them to quickly resume their public life as well as their sexual relations with their husbands in order to conceive again and ensure, in a context of very high infant mortality, the continuation of their families and dynasties (Bellavitis, 2016: 134).

Thirdly, during the Early Modern Age, women were also hired as midwives. This was considered as a typical feminine activity which, during this period, became heavily formalized and was subjected to tighter institutional control, both at local and state levels. This change was made in order to ensure that the reproduction occurred in the best possible conditions, but also in order to avoid abortions and infanticide by subjecting traditional women's practices and knowledge (Bellavitis, 2016: 145).

Since midwives were entrusted with the important and delicate tasks of preventing abortions by reminding women of the criminal consequences of their actions but also by reporting them when those ones had not succeeded in avoiding pregnancy, the authorities were also very aware of the role they had in carrying out or facilitating abortions, abandonments and infanticide. For this reason, midwives were sometimes accused of being tempted by witchcraft and, in some cases, even by heresy. For this reason, during the Early Modern Age, there was a widespread tendency to progressively transfer midwifery skills to male doctors, in order to create a boundary between midwives and doctors and surgeons, two occupations that could only be performed by men (Bellavitis, 2016: 146). The transfer of the midwives' skills to male figures, in an attempt to socially control the power of women in the field of maternity and abortion, highlights, once again, how women were considered inferior to men, but also how they were seen as evil, wicked and corrupted creatures.

Lastly, another common female occupation at the time was the one of prostitution. This job was primarily performed by women who lived on the street, with no fixed abode and who worked sporadically in agriculture or, in the cities, as domestic workers or laborers (Bellavitis, 2016: 158). Working as a prostitute meant occupying the lowest rung of the employment ladder and, for this reason, sex workers were often victims of abuse, arrest, disease and degradation (Lanza, 2013: 637).

According to the Christian Church, prostitution was a necessary evil because it was a means to protect respectable girls and women from the advances of lustful men. For this reason, this activity, if licensed and regulated in contained brothels controlled by the city government, it was classified not as so harmful, even by the Church itself. Indeed, some city governments like the one of Florence, began to consider brothels as a way to curb homosexual activity among unmarried young men.

However, even though prostitutes were considered as socially useful, the women who worked in this field were marked out from the rest of the female inhabitants of the city.

Moreover, they were obliged to wear distinctive clothing and live in certain areas of the city in order to differentiate and separate them from respectable women (Lanza, 2013: 638).

Nevertheless, the initial tolerance toward prostitution collapsed in the sixteenth century, when the schism of the unified Christianity during the Reformation reshaped attitudes toward women, family life and sexuality. Since that moment, prostitutes were forced into an illicit market: brothels were closed and the selling of sex began to be considered as an outlaw activity. Since sex workers were forced out of brothels, they were taken to the streets, beginning to relying on the protection of violent pimps or placing themselves at the mercy of clients without any way to defend themselves. However, even though the Catholic Church had decided to initiate this internal war against prostitution, this activity did not diminish during the Early Modern Age. It just changed the way this activity was held: women, in fact, started to drift into and out of this job, relying on it only when other work was not available and leaving the streets behind when they had sufficient hours of licit employment (Lanza, 2013: 639).

To conclude, during the Early Modern Age, since European women were considered as unskilled workers – condition also imposed by the fact that girls lacked of a proper professional and formal training, something that was guaranteed to men –, besides the work in the household and as second-level laborers in factories, women usually used their own bodies in order to gain some extra money and to economically sustain themselves and their families.

I.3.4 From the countryside to the city

During the Early Modern Age, despite growing levels of urbanization, around 80% of the European population still lived in the countryside. Thus, if the urban areas were characterised by a huge growth from rural migration, at the same time the impact of population growth in these same rural areas had the consequence of speeding up the demise of the peasant household. Indeed, the population growth and the changes in the structure of landholding saw the peasantry polarise into a minor group of wealthy landlords and farmers and a much bigger group of land-poor or landless peasants. Thus, this polarisation consequently raised both the demand for and the supply of rural labour (Spicksley, 2017: 328).

During the Early Modern Age, women did not have any right to hold any landholdings, since the inheriting process favoured the eldest surviving son, while daughters were more broadly disadvantaged and did not inherit any of the family's possessions. For this reason, in the countryside, women were more likely to work for several years in their youth as agricultural

servants, hired on annual contracts. While working as agricultural servants, girls were available day and night throughout the year and their tasks included feeding the stock, milking and any other chores that could not be deferred until the following day.

Agricultural servants were usually provided with bed, board and clothes in addition to their salary, although younger women did not always receive cash remuneration. Sometimes girls were also hired in specific position like, for instance, servants with dairying skills; however, in these cases, these girls were also expected also to be available to cook, to bake, to brew and childmind, as well as, if necessary, to work in the fields and to assist the textile production of the household (Spicksley, 2017: 331). Working in the countryside was hard not only for men, but also for women.

Thus, at the beginning of the Early Modern Age, most of the European population was living in rural areas, conducting a countryside life. However, during this period, people began a path of mobility from the countryside to the cities and women were an integral part of this movement.

Both men and women took part of this movement in order to find greater opportunities in the cities than the ones present in the countryside and in little towns. There were two different kinds of migrations: seasonal migrations, in which people moved to the city at the end of their work in their little farm, returning when their help was needed again in the country; secondly, permanent migrations: these were the most common between the two and they were drawn by different motives and incentives.

First of all, abandoned wives and widows might be forced and pressured to leave their houses in the rural areas in order for other men to exploit these landholdings in a more productive way. Moving to the cities did not imply finding a secure job; however, cities offered many job opportunities and, in addition, they made available for single and old women the possibility of living together and sharing costs in order to stretch inadequate income (Lanza, 2013: 631).

However, the majority of people moving from the countryside to the city were young and single women. On the one hand, some of the younger women engaging in this phenomenon did it because of the same motives of the abandoned wives and widows: job prospects, greater liberty of action without the constraints of rural life, the opportunity the shift employment and lifestyle. Younger women also hoped to amass savings in order to attract a marriage partner and establish their own household. However, on the other hand, some women were not pulled by

the potential offered in the cities, but they were pushed out of this reality: abuse and situations of neglect impelled women to leave their families in search of employment elsewhere.

Another motive at the basis of the movement of women from the countryside to the cities was the change in the agricultural production. Indeed, since the seventeenth century, agriculture became more dominated by men and more oriented to high levels of production. For this reason, women found fewer jobs in the countryside because farmers preferred to employ male day labourers. Moreover, during the eighteenth century, new agricultural practices and the use of new machineries brought to a decrease of the male peasants' salary, diminishing even more the one of women, since they were always paid less than men (Lanza, 2013: 633).

Although all the disadvantages and problems women had to face when moving from the countryside to larger cities, this wave of internal migration, which started during the Early Modern Age, will be one of the biggest change that will help women gain the consciousness and willingness of their own independence in the following centuries.

To conclude, during the Early Modern Age, women's work was still inevitably dependent to the male figure because the European patriarchal society, reinforced by the Catholic pillars and beliefs, did not allow women to become economically independent. The feminine work was just seen as a supplementary to the man's one: men were the primary responsible for the sustenance and livelihood of the household, while women had to work just to help and support men. For this reasons, women usually engaged in unskilled and underpaid jobs during the early modern period.

I.4 CHAPTER'S CONCLUSIONS

The Early Modern Age was inherently a religious period in which there was no sphere of life where religion was irrelevant. Indeed, in Europe, the Catholic religion was the only accepted source of knowledge, which explained every single phenomenon, from the natural to the social ones. As such, the Catholic religion also justified social hierarchies, relationships of power and taxation, economic relationships, and politics and warfare (Katajala-Peltomaa, Toivo, 2020: 22).

Thus, as seen throughout this Chapter, Christianity and its institution *par excellence*, the Catholic Church in Europe, have operated as factors of discrimination during the Early Modern period: in the context of hierarchical gender relationships, the Christian religion is seen as a tool of oppression and a major force of history that holds back both societies and women, preventing freedom, activity and subjectivity (Katajala-Peltomaa, Toivo, 2020: 32). As a matter of fact, the Catholic pillars and beliefs acted as a gender discriminating element for women during the early modern period. Indeed, since the beginning of the installation of the Christian Church in Europe, women were advocated as second-level human beings because of two Biblical episodes: the one of Genesis and the one of the Fall.

This Christian idea of women as inferior and subordinate to men was then linked to the more traditional discourse about women's incapacities, a discourse that was born during the most ancient times and that was enriched throughout the Western history.

As a consequence of both the consideration of women as the cause of the decline and the difficulties men have been relegated to during their lives as well as their inferiority because of their lack of intelligence, self-control, control of her passions, and so on and so forth, women's lives during the Early Modern Age in Europe were characterized by strong discriminations in the social, economic and political spheres.

However, during the Early Modern Age, not only the Catholic Church acted as a discriminatory factor in regards to women in the social, economic and political spheres, but it also influenced the creation of a distorted narrative and ideology about witchcraft and the role women had in this activity. During the early modern period, the Church fomented the witch hunt which resulted in the creation of an actual internal war against women, with the institutionalization of the use of the Tribunal of the Inquisition.

CHAPTER II
CASE STUDY – WOMEN AND THE WITCH HUNT
IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE

II.1 THE ORIGINS OF WITCHCRAFT

European witchcraft and the phenomenon of witch hunt is beginning to emerge as an important chapter in Early Modern History. The fully developed concept of witchcraft that matured throughout the years of the great European witch craze appeared only in the early fifteenth century, emerging from all the trials for heresy and sorcery (Bailey, 2001, 960).

It is estimated that from the early decades of the fourteenth century until 1650, continental Europeans executed between 200.000 and 500.000 witches at stake, 85% or more of whom were women (Ben-Yehuda, 1980: 1). The stigma of this aberration fell on the Catholic sphere: it was an unprecedented propaganda exercise projected in those centuries characterized by these internecine wars within the Christian bosom (Callejo, 2008: 15).

The sudden rise in prosecutions for witchcraft began in Europe during the Early Modern Age due to multiples and different reasons, at the basis of which operated the Catholic Church. However, in order to understand the phenomenon of witch hunt and its escalation in the Early Modern European chapter of witch craze, we have to analyze the beginning of the conception of magic and witches from the ancient times and throughout the Medieval period.

II.1.1 Magic and witches in the Ancient times

The history and hysteria of witchcraft is the history of a superstition and a persecution that lasted longer than desired and more centuries than the common sense allowed. However, it is also the entertaining and grotesque story of a string of mistakes, incompetence, fanaticism and clumsiness that fed on misery, ignorance, suffering and despair as well as the work of the Catholic Church (Callejo, 2008, 22). For a long time, the West has kept hidden in its imagination the conviction that the practice of evil and demonic witchcraft was intimately related to female nature and, by extension, that every woman was a potential witch. As far as we know today, this stereotype was born around 1400 and continued, at least in the criminal law, until the end of the 17th century (Sallman, 2000, 471).

Denying what we usually think about the origins of witchcraft, this phenomenon and belief was not born in the Medieval era, but its roots are much more antique and they have to be found in the ancient world. Indeed, some of the earliest examples of magical performance can be traced in the records of ancient Mesopotamia, the current Iraq. In the eighteenth century, thousands of clay tablets containing myths, proverbs, prayers and magical texts which were used by the local civilizations, such as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites and Assyrians, were

discovered in this area. These magical texts contained practical remedies that people had to pursue in case of wounds caused by animals or other people, actions in case of natural disasters as well as incantations to quieten crying babies, in order not to awake the household god (Maxwell-Stuart, 2017, 2).

In that period, witchcraft was assumed to be at the root of a good many illnesses, mental as well as physical like, for example, impotence and indigestion, strokes and facial palsy, childhood convulsions, fevers and a variety of skin complaints. According to these civilizations' belief, witches introduced their evil into a person via food or water which had been bewitched. In order to expel these harms, people would have to perform exorcist's magic as well as wear amulets on one's person or hang tablets inscribed with incantations on the wall or door of the house (Maxwell-Stuart, 2017, 4).

Magic was also a fundamental aspect in another significant ancient civilization: the Egyptian one. With the discovery and decipherment of the Rosetta Stone in 1799, historians were able to comprehend and read the Egyptian writing-system composed by hieroglyphs. Magicians used to make incantations and rituals on amulets and figurines, infusing power in them with the aim of protecting people both in their earthly and otherworldly lives. Female magician-healers were invested with the particular task to diagnose spirit-possession caused by ghosts and demons (Maxwell-Stuart, 2017, 9).

With the onset of the Greek and Roman ages, the authorized magic began to be clearly separated from the unauthorized and repressed "black" one. Thus, the Greco-Roman world condemned only harmful sorcery as illegal.

In the Greek world, the initial tolerance and appreciation of magic was then substituted by a strong disapproval. The cause of this change was the presence in Greece of itinerant magicians and healers from Mesopotamia who specialized in binding spells. The arrogant inwardness of Athenians intellectuals, who regarded non-Greeks as barbarians, manipulated the public opinion in order to abolish the practice of magic and its allied occult disciplines (Maxwell-Stuart, 2017, 22).

In the Roman world, people employed magical practices regularly and for much the same reasons and purposes as everyone else. In the first century AD, Pliny the Elder recorded two laws that prohibit the use of incantations for harmful purposes, which he considered the most fraudulent of the arts. If, on the one side, the Greeks pointed against foreigners, in the literature of the early Roman empire, women were the human beings that were mostly identified

with many of the magical arts, especially those designed to do harm or enable adultery or even kill someone. Indeed, with Rome we can discern the beginning of that female magician who will in later times be designed as ‘witch’ (Maxwell-Stuart, 2017, 25).

An important aspect of the Greek and Roman culture to remark is that the dark and violent magic was mostly associated with feminine figures, hence with women. Indeed, together with the female magicians par excellence, Medea and Circe, the classical culture also proposed a panorama of figures halfway between reality and myth (the Lamias, the Erinyes, the Furies), who were an integral part of the cultural substratum in which the different forms of magic were rooted (Centini, 2002, 15). The word *strix* was used for the first time by the Greek poet Theocritus, who described these creatures as capable of turning into nocturnal birds in order to commit their ignominies and drinking human blood. Moreover, in the Ancient times, people were also threatened by the Empusa, a feminine demon able to turn herself into different appearances like animals, although she generally manifested herself as the seductress who killed the men she slept with by sucking their blood (Centini, 2002, 18).

Lastly, witches have also been mentioned in the Old Testament. Indeed, the Bible recognizes the existence of witchcraft and sorcery, and the reality of magical powers. The Old Testament recognizes the possibility of human beings in their free agency to make pacts with the devil, sharing his supernatural and darkness powers. As Paul stated in Ephesians 6:17, Satan’s power at work is represented by demons and human agents, the so-called witches, which he uses in order to expand his wickedness and rebellion against God on earth (Kibor, 2006, 156).

In the Bible, there is a reference to the witch of Endor, who represented the image par excellence of the classic witch that used magic with illicit and unlawful purposes. By reading the Sacred Scripture, we can discover an important information about the repression against witchcraft at the time: when Saul went to the witch of Endor to evoke the spirit of Samuel, the woman resisted, fearing being the object of a deception and ending up suffering the penalty reserved for magicians and necromancers. Nevertheless, when Saul granted her immunity, the woman freely performed her magic (Centini, 2002, 20).

II.1.2 Witchcraft during the Medieval era

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, magic was an important and vital aspect of many areas of the medieval culture. However, as the kingdoms born from the Roman Empire became increasingly Christians, an important change took place: the classical supernatural spirits who

were often called to perform acts of sorcery were gradually transformed into Christian demons. For this reason, the Christian world started to disapprove sorcerers, trying to correct their “behavior” but not persecuting or torturing them (Bailey, 2001, 964). However, it was only toward the end of the Middle Ages that the critical transformation of simple sorcery into the far darker crime of witchcraft occurred (Bailey, 2001, 961).

Thus, throughout the medieval period, secular rulers legislated harshly against magic in order to express their piety and emphasize their role as protectors of Christian communities, and as the Christian territories of Europe became stronger and more consolidated such legislation had a broader impact (Page, 2017, 30). Indeed, the centuries brought a deepening of Christianity, which, introduced from above, penetrated little by little downwards, crossing one class after another. During this process, the laws against the practice of certain pagan rites became stricter parallel to the growth of the power of Christianity; the Church proved its strength against witches, declaring a proper war in the fifteenth century against the remains of paganism with the famous Bull of Innocent VIII (Murray, 1978, 25).

In the bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* published in 1484, the Pope made official numerous ideas that were already widely known and believed about witchcraft and witches: by propelling this bull, he fulfilled the requests of the two Dominican friars, Henrich Kramen and Jacob Sprenger, authors of the “Witch hunter’s Bible” known as *Malleus Maleficarum*, to act as inquisitors and hunt witches as well as officially recognizing the existence of witches and their evil and sinful behavior (Murray, 1978, 26). Thus, published with the blessing of Pope Innocent VIII in 1487, this book turned centuries of Catholic orthodoxy on its head by arguing for the reality of witchcraft as a practice and insisting on the need to prosecute it (Kerrigan, 2014, 127).

Thus, the official concept of witchcraft was a composite theory formulated out of elements originally pagan but transformed by Christian theological and ecclesiastical interests (Horsley, 1979, 690).

During the Medieval time, according to the popular opinion, the witch was a woman who had made a pact with the Devil and, through him, was capable of doing extraordinary things like flying through the air or floating on water. However, within the term “extraordinary”, witches were considered guilty of everything: from murder and the spread of dreadful diseases, to the destruction of crops by enchanted substances, or the impotence of a newlywed by cursing him (Callejo, 2008, 28). Witches were believed to have sold their bodies and souls to Satan: for this reason, they were not just individuals possessing harmful supernatural and extraordinary powers, but members of a vast conspiratorial satanic cult

(Bailey, 2001, 979). Moreover, the medieval witches were accused of orgiastic practices and the children born from such orgies were sacrificed and devoured at their secret meetings. Furthermore, the majority of the women that were accused tended to be old, poor and on the margins of society, often widowed and without children or men that could defend them (Blom, 2017, 92).

Already in the Medieval era, it was obvious how the phenomenon of witchcraft was related to the feminine figure. Without doubts, one of the factors that most contributed to this rage against women was the model of the creation of Eve and its origin derived from the man, Adam: this ideal determined a reduction of the consideration of women as slaves of values, which also had the support of religious tradition that theologically certified female inferiority (Centini, 2002, 28).

Before the fourteenth century it had been difficult for clerics to believe that women, who were deemed physically, mentally and spiritually weaker than men and lacked clerical training and literacy, could control powerful, threatening demons. However, this paradox was resolved by an increasing theological emphasis on the satanic pact, a formal written contract which involved the complete and explicit submission of the witch to Satan (Page, 2017, 60). Thus, even though women were considered to be invested of these extraordinary powers, they were still considered as inferior and submitted creatures; the problem was that this submission was not paid to God but to the Devil instead.

II.1.3 How witchcraft propelled in the Early Modern Age

But did actually witchcraft and witches exist? What we know for sure is that, in the Early Modern Age, the conventional wisdom believed that there were two different kinds of witchcraft: the folkloric witchcraft on the one side and the satanic one on the other side.

The folkloric witch was thought to be a wise woman, sorceress, pagan, fortune teller, powerful, with visible powers and with unknown address.

On the other hand, the satanic witchcraft can be said to be a Christian invention although it was not created by the Inquisition as has sometimes been said. The satanic witch was considered, like the folkloric witch, as a woman capable of numerous powers but, in this case, this woman had made a diabolic pact with the devil, so she was serving him by committing crimes and horrible gestures. The satanic concept and its pejorative characteristics, as we understand them today, emerged throughout the Middle Ages because there was no way to

eradicate the remnants of paganism within the lower social classes. Indeed, the survival of numerous pagan and magical elements in rites and ceremonies celebrated by people who claimed to be Christians was notorious. For this reason, the popes and bishops dedicated themselves to Christianize whatever pagan festival and ritual they found (Callejo, 2008, 33).

During the Early Modern Age, theologians interrogated themselves over the true and concrete origins of the witches' powers. The outcome of this investigation was that these powers could only derive from the devil: since these powers were usually held by a lowly person and not priests, monks, bishops or other ecclesiastic figures who would use them within a Christian perspective, therefore this power that did not come from God, came from his Adversary, Satan (Callejo, 2008, 34).

The Christian doctrine was not against the belief in strange facts that could occur in nature: any saint worked miracles and any father of the desert overcame the temptations of demons. However, the Church objected to "miracles" when they were the work of demons. From this moment, it has started to forge the myth of the witch that arises and ends with the magical arts, divination and wizardry.

Therefore, the Church's aim began to be the eradication of the pagan image that considered these women as wise, healers or teachers who had somehow had access to divine powers. For this reason, a full-fledged crusade was opened against women, against the remnants of paganism and against the snares of the devil. The result of this declared war was a rotten pot that embraced far too many mixed things, unifying them in a single enemy: the devil and his henchmen, women (Callejo, 2008, 35).

Thus, one of the main factor behind this shift was represented by the rise of various types of learned magic, such as astronomy, alchemy and spiritual magic among the educated elites of western Europe. All these disciplines, which were born plenty of centuries before, started to be considered as heresies by the Church, which condemned them and all their adherents and practitioners.

In order to make people believe the importance of this phenomenon, the Catholic Church mounted a conspiracy theory: according to this thesis, there was a great sect whose tentacles were scattered throughout Western Europe, a sect that sought to destroy Christianity, whose members worshiped Satan in sacrilegious ceremonies where everything was inverted and degraded. Theologians insisted that the devil was present in society and that the witches were his ministers. In order to make people believe the existence of witches and, more importantly, the threat these creatures exercised on society, especially men, the Catholic theologians distorted

the Holy Scriptures, giving them a more misogynist and patriarchal meaning. People, threatened by the possibility to be accused of heresy and witchcraft began to lie in the pulpits; inquisitors, invested by a new strong power, allowed anonymous accusations; women were insulted, tortured and killed always under the insane idea that the Devil, manifested among other things in witchcraft, was in every house and every street of every town, except in the churches. Psychosis, delirium, hysteria, hate and madness is what aroused in people, feelings that were exacerbated between 1450 and 1650 (Callejo, 2008, 36).

II.2 THE ROLE OF GENDER IN WITCHCRAFT

For ages, the witch craze has been interpreted by most historians as *not* a matter of gender. It is true that this phenomenon did not only include women, but also male witches were persecuted and burned at the stake. However, numbers and statistics show that over 80 percent of the accused and over 85 percent of those executed were women (Barstow, 1988: 8). Thus, we can highlight a really close relationship between the perception of the female figure in the Early Modern Age and witchcraft.

Indeed, the demonized image of women, usually referred to as witches, is what has caused that for centuries in most religions – also in the Christian one – women themselves have been relegated to the background, in an inferior position compared to men. And, what is worse, in times of plagues, wars and fears of any kind, scapegoats were sought and women personified as witches, sorceresses or devil worshipers, as well as other groups considered as inferior such as the jews, were good candidates (Callejo, 2008: 146).

II.2.1 Witch hunt as a gender-biased phenomenon

Even though also men were among the victims of the European witch hunt phenomenon, during the Early Modern Age, the real protagonists of the witch hunt were women. As already stated before, statistics show the huge gap between the male and female victims of the burning at the stake under the accusation of witchcraft: 80 percent of the accused and 85 percent of those executed were women (Barstow, 1988: 8). For this reason, Mary Daly stated that:

A specifically Western and Christian manifestation of the androcratic state of Atrocity was the European witchcraze (Daly, 1990: 179).

Indeed, the Early Modern European phenomenon of witch hunt was influenced by an enormous number of gender-biased factors which are linked to patriarchy and its constituent elements, such as gender roles, sexism, misogyny, machismo, marianismo, manhood status and human vulnerability (Kgatla, 2020: 2). At the roots of this patriarchal factors lied the Catholic Church's effort to maintain its own *status quo* in an era of huge changes due to the internal crisis the Christianity was living and which had led to the schism between Catholics and Protestants during the Early Modern period.

As a system constructed by humans, patriarchy serves men's interests in defining gender roles. In patriarchy, the male members of society hold primary power and prominence in roles related to political, social, economic and cultural leadership, which include moral authority,

social privilege and all spheres of control and power. Patriarchy is the bedrock of many witchcraft-related accusations, as well as many other punishments women may be subjected to, because of their failure to perform to the expectations of their male counterparts (Kgatla, 2020: 2).

As a system of gendered and subordinated relations, patriarchy is closely related to misogyny, that is the hate of women (Kgatla, 2020: 3) as well as to the male attempt to socially, economically and politically control the female part of the population. Thus, in this scenario, witchcraft is a highly gendered crime since most of the women who were susceptible to being accused of witchcraft were either those who enjoyed high level of education, high income or sexual independence from men, such as lesbians or the elderly, or those who stood at the margins of society because of their diversity (Kgatla, 2020: 5).

In addition, as already discussed in the first Chapter of this thesis, what also influenced the gender-biased phenomenon of the witch craze was the historical discourse about women's incapacities and inferiority which has been developing and enriching since the most ancient times, starting with the Greek-Roman ideologies. Reinforced by the Catholic Church throughout the decades and centuries, this historical discourse on women's inferiority was exacerbated, coming to be used in the Early Modern Age as an explanation of why women were the predilected characters chosen by the Devil to fulfil its own objects on Earth. Indeed, during the early modern period, an institutionalization of the discourse on women's inferiority was operated by the Catholic Church itself.

At the edge of the change from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, a true mental revolution took place and established a system of representation of the world which affected the social, political and economic structure that had been maintained for almost three centuries: the West persuaded itself that existed, in its womb, a sect of sorcerers consecrated to Satan through a pact in which they enjoyed evil powers to harm men and God, in order to establish the religion of the Devil.

Developed and enriched throughout the decades and centuries, this historical discourse about women's incapacities and inferiority triumphed also in the Early Modern Age; however, during this period, there was a huge step forward which was represented by the institutionalization of this historical and traditional discourse with the publication of the *Malleus maleficarum*, also known as the Hammer of Witches, by Jacob Sprenger and Henrich Kramer, which gave a more "scientific" justification of why women were regarded as the primary responsible of this phenomenon.

II.2.2 The Hammer of Witches: *Malleus maleficarum*

In 1486, Jacob Sprenger and Henrich Kramer published in Strasbourg a book that reached an extraordinary success at the time: the *Malleus maleficarum*, also known as the *Hammer of Witches*. Thanks to the publication of this work, it was established, for the first time, a direct bond between the heresy of witchcraft and women (Centini, 2002: 33). This book is divided in three different parts: in the first part, the two hunters attempted demonstrate the reality of sorcery against skepticism of the part of both laity and certain clergymen; in the second part, Sprenger and Kramer treated the actual practices of sorceresses, dealing with both the actions of the sorceresses and the legitimate methods of counteracting them; finally, the third part dealt with the judicial method of investigating and convicting sorceresses.

When creating this volume, they did not invent anything: they relied on an argument extracted from the greatest anti-feminine tradition of the Old Testament, from the classical age and from various medieval authors. Indeed, the argument Sprenger and Kramer used to create the “scientific” bond between witchcraft and women goes back to the Genesis, more precisely to two specific episodes: the creation of Eve and the Fall. The creation of Eve narrates how God generated Eve and the woman more in general: God created Eve from Adam and this first argument itself legitimized the subjection of women to men. More specifically, Eve was created from Adam’s rib. Thus, since the rib is a curved bone, these two authors affirmed that the woman’s spirit could not help but be twisted and wicked (Sallman, 2000: 474). The episode of the Fall is a proof of the woman’s inferiority as well as her evil and malleable soul. Indeed, although Satan tempted Eve, she herself was the one who seduced Adam and led him to sin. Therefore, the woman was considered as the direct and true responsible for the fall of man.

According to Sprenger and Kramer, there are three reasons why women are found to be superstitious in larger numbers than men:

The first is that they are prone to believing and because the demon basically seeks to corrupt the Faith, he assails them in particular. [...] The second reason is that on account of the tendency of their temperament towards flux they are by nature more easily impressed upon to receive revelations through the impression of the disembodied spirits, and when they use this temperament well, they are very good, but when they use it badly, they are worse. The third reason is that they have loose tongues and can hardly conceal from their female companions the things that they know through evil art, and since they lack physical strength, they readily seek to avenge themselves secretly through acts of sorcery. [...] Since they are prone to flux, they can more quickly offer children to the demons, as in fact they do (Sprenger, Kramer, 1486: 164).

In this passage, Sprenger and Kramer added their personal experience as inquisitors and witch hunters. Indeed, they noticed that, due to her rebellious natural and congenial weakness, the woman is sensitive to demonic temptation and curses. They argued that there were three different reasons that lead women to embark on the path of superstition in a more easily way than men: firstly, women showed a much greater credulity than men, something that Satan knows perfectly well when primarily addressing them. Secondly, women are also naturally more impressionable and therefore more malleable by the devil's lures. Lastly, they are very talkative and cannot avoid talking to each other and passing on their knowledge of the art of magic. Thus, their weakness constrains them to use those secrets to take revenge on men through curses and evil practices (Sallman, 2000: 475).

Moreover, they added that:

Indeed, just as the result of the first defect, that of intelligence, is that they commit the renunciation of the Faith more easily than do men, so too the result of the second, namely irregular desires and passions, is that they seek, think up and inflict various acts of vengeance, whether through acts of sorcery or by any other means. Hence, it is no wonder that such a large number of sorcerers exists in this category (Sprenger, Kramer, 1486: 167).

Thus, what the two witch hunters were trying to state throughout their work was that women were weaker than men and it was this weakness itself that made women more prone to be subjugated by the Devil.

Consequently, the two authors of the *Malleus maleficarum* only saw two utilities in women: they were necessary for reproduction, since they give birth to men, and they were useful for the economic life of the domestic household, since they help men in their work. However, women were considered dangerous because of their sexuality. According to the Christian principles, virginity remains an ideal and the life of the couple is seen just as a simple necessary evil through which laymen avoid falling into the deadly sin of concupiscence and fornication (Sallman, 2000, 475). Thus, the misogyny of the authors of the *Malleus maleficarum* relied on this ancient Christian traditional thinking.

What the *Malleus maleficarum* created and officialized was an actual "war of the sexes": on the one hand, there were the aggressive witches; on the other hand, there were men who were threatened in their ability to reproduce. Men's fear of being deprived of their genital capacity

widespread throughout all the West, the same fear that fed the trials and the bonfires during the Early Modern Age.

The *Malleus maleficarum* became a sort of “manual”, a “handbook” on witchcraft for the use of jurists and inquisitors (Centini, 2002, 33). Indeed, this book served as a sort of guide for other members of the Inquisition engaged in the task of rooting out the crime of witchcraft. It was characterized by a systematic organization in which the chapters established the step-by-step procedures for prosecuting the alleged witches (Smith, 2002, 85). This handbook contained all the brutal and malefic acts the witches were responsible for, but also all the right and appropriate remedies people could perform against such aggressions.

Thus, to conclude, there was a really close relationship between the perception of female sexuality and intellect in the Early Modern Age and the relation between femininity and witchcraft. Indeed, the Early Modern period was the time when the historical discourse about women’s inferiority, which had started in the Ancient times and which was reinforced by the Catholic Church throughout the centuries, was institutionalized. With the *Malleus maleficarum*, Kramer and Sprenger justified this old theory, giving it “scientific” and solid basis. According to them, women rather than men become witches because they are seen as weaker human beings, less intelligent and with an easily malleable mind that makes them more prone to be tempted by the Devil.

The direct consequence of this institutionalization was the beginning of the work of the Inquisition with the Witch Trials.

II.2.3 Witches as scapegoats

At the beginning of the studies above witchcraft, historians completely bypassed the gender component at the basis of this phenomenon. They would only acknowledge the special association between women and witchcraft, without making it a significant part of their research (Bever, 2002: 956). However, the first social and anthropological historians tried to explain how gender was in strict relation with the phenomenon of witch craze in the social context of the Early Modern Age. What these scholars have discovered is that witch hunt had been a process with a highly effective means of social control.

Anti-witch and persecutory movements occurred in times of social change and in a climate of cultural disorganization. During the last decades of the Middle Ages, waves of plague continued to strike Europe after the first big torrent of the Black Death in 1348 that killed

perhaps a third of the population in a few short years. Moreover, also the rise of capitalism brought instability: businesses succeeded or failed, enriching new people, increasingly impoverishing jobless persons and, more in general, leaving behind misery and deprivation. Fights over property became more serious, often with men wanting to control lands inherited by women and orphans. Moreover, since people had noticed that women tended to live longer than men, suspicion about their secret ways increased (Pavlac, 2009, 49).

In this new confused context, one of the ways authorities dealt with social and cultural distortions, in order to maintain the status quo, was seeking the reason of the society's illness outside of existing cultural institutions, developing an ideology directed against perceived threats such as deviant groups and rival movements, leading to scapegoating and persecution (Schoeneman, 1975: 533). That is what had happened in the case of witch hunt.

Indeed, witch hunt was a process created in order to reduce systemic stress and distortion in the Early Modern European society: the accumulation of bad harvests and the constant fear of famine and illness caused an increase in this cruel collective hysteria, namely the Witch Trials (Blom, 2017, 75). As Blom (2017, 74) writes, the Little Ice Age, such as a period of particularly disturbed climatic patterns and events that stretched from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth century, had direct connections with the spreading of witch fear and the consequent witch hunt. From about 1300 to 1700, the average temperature in Europe dropped a few degrees. This meant that the years belonging to this age were characterized by severe weather and fear: the sun was always hidden, even during summer months; crops strongly resented the climate change and the harvest was decimated; as a consequence, food prices doubled. In general, there was less food and more hunger. Thus, toward the end of the sixteenth century, the pervasive impression that nature was out of kilter and that the end of the world was imminent led to an intensive intellectual search for new explanations and interpretations of all the natural catastrophic phenomena of the age.

In these times of change and crisis, people wanted reassurance about life's meaning. Individuals have often relied on magical explanations to relieve anxiety when no other rational or effective means were available (Pavlac, 2009, 50). Indeed, at the time, there was no formal scientific method to guide the acquisition of knowledge: knowledge flowed mainly from religious sources. All over Europe, the Catholic Church as well as the Anglican one, the Calvinist and the Lutheran ones, led a battle in order to maintain the Holy Scripture, such as the Bible, as the only source of all knowledge, from the spiritual one to the natural one. In practice, this meant that every natural observation, every earthquake, every volcanic eruption, every

storm had to be supported by biblical quotations and episodes, so that they could be interpreted as an expression of divine will (Blom, 2017, 78).

Thus, the political, economic, social and cultural transition from medieval to early modern times offered the setting for hunts (Pavlac, 2009, 50). Indeed, since no other biblical explanation was found at the basis of these natural disasters, the suspicion that all this was due to witchcraft began to widespread. From that moment on, in every single village and town disseminated in all Europe, women considered as the cause of the installment of a catastrophic and tragic natural disaster began to be burned at the stake.

However, the spread of the witch craze was not only due to the interpretation of natural catastrophes as caused by witches; indeed, the Early Modern Age was characterized by a medical revolution that had influenced the development of the witch paranoia in Europe. Until the Middle Ages, the medical studies about the human body were based on Claudius Galenus, a Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher during the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, during the Early Modern epoque, it was discovered that the majority of the Galenic anatomy's presuppositions that were taken for granted till that time were actually wrong. If, during the Middle Ages, diagnosis were made with the help of astrology and uroscopy, during the Early Modern Age we can see the clear emergence of medical facts, such as the revival of Neoplatonism, the explosion of medical texts after the invention of printing, the increasing organization of the medical profession and the challenge of new diseases imported from Asia and from the New World, which were thought not to support standard Galenism.

However, there have still been cases in which doctors could not explain the causes and the remedies of an ailments. For this reason, whenever doctors were not able to understand the causes or they could not recognize the symptoms, the intervention of a witch and its dark powers was suspected. Thus, every illnesses that were strange and irregular or which reacted in unusual ways to standard modes of treatment, usually resulted in witchcraft trials (Estes, 1983, 274).

Witches were held responsible for all the diseases of the nervous system, both functional and organic: apoplexy, paralysis, epilepsy, vertigo and comatose conditions were the most common. Also hysteria and all its manifold manifestations, like St. Vitus' dance and insanity for instance, were believed to be caused by these evil women. In addition to wasting diseases, lingering sickness and sudden deaths, witches were also considered responsible for various anomalies in the sexual sphere, such as impotence, frigidity, sexual neurasthenia, sterility and even different forms of perversity (Deetjen, 1934, 165). Also blindness and other eyes diseases were linked to witches.

A concrete example of the connection between the medical field and witchcraft arose in the fifteenth century and it was represented by the tendency for male sexual issues, such as impotence and sterility (Carter, 2016, 2). As a consequence, male biological problems were projected onto women in the form of witchcraft. Indeed, during the Early Modern Age, the idea of witches attacking fertility was widespread. Natural philosophers and medical writers were convinced of the fact that male impotence could be justified by two different causes: on the one hand, male impotence could derive from physical or biological causes; on the other hand, the same disease could be magically-caused by supernatural or magical means that prevented procreation. Nevertheless, in the case a physical cause could not be traced, then magic was the rational explanation doctors laid their eyes on. Thus, it is clear how, by targeting the opposite sex, men in the Middle Ages projected their own biological issues onto women as a way to avoid threats to their masculinity; therefore, women were mere scapegoats for male issues of impotence (Carter, 2016, 7).

Thus, in general, witchcraft was the manifestation of the misery of the time: man, still unable to tame nature, found in the realm of the supernatural an explanation for phenomena beyond his understanding. The epidemic, the bad harvest, the unexplained death, the misfortune, all of these were believed to be due to the action of the Devil (Sallman, 2000, 476).

To conclude, the encounter between the historical and traditional idea about women and their natural incapacities and flaws compared to men, the sudden change in the climatic and natural scenario of the time as well as the birth of an imperfect medical revolution were at the real basis of the exacerbation of witchcraft tolerance, resulting in an actual outbreak of a war against those who were considered witches.

II.3 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO WITCHCRAFT DURING THE EARLY MODERN AGE

While for the most part early-modern Witch Trials were conducted by secular authorities, the mentality behind them was ecclesiastical and inquisitorial; indeed, clerics played a major role in shaping the concept of witchcraft (Bailey, 2001, 962). Indeed, since witchcraft involved the worship of the Devil, being a witch was considered a spiritual crime, thus it needed to be punished by ecclesiastical authorities and tribunals. The ecclesiastical court par excellence was the Tribunal of the Inquisition.

II.3.1 The criminalization of witchcraft by the Church

During the Early Modern Age, the adoption of new criminal procedures facilitated the combination and synthesis of the various ideas about the activities that witches were believed to engage in. Indeed, the great European witch hunt phenomenon was essentially a judicial operation lead by the Catholic Church (Levack, 2006, 74). The sources that we possess about the first cases of legal attention related to magic and witchcraft date back to the Late Roman Empire and the Middle Ages.

In 314, during the Council of Ancira, prescriptions against the practice of black magic and of curses were made for the first time while in 340, during the Council of Alvira, instructions about the proper punishment to perform against whoever caused death with the help of magic. In 319, Constantine prohibited any form of magic (Centini, 2002, 36).

Later, in 438, Constantine's ban was ratified in the Codes of Theodosius II. Indeed, the *Codex Theodosianus* codified existing Roman legislation into a single volume, dividing the laws about magic in four different categories: divorce of a spouse who practices magic, the pardoning of incarcerated persons by imperial fiat with the exception of those accused of practicing magic, the practice of magic in the private sphere and the burning of heretical books. Thus, with this Codes, the normative religious practices were clearly and officially separated from the non-normative religious ones: from that moment, all the religious practices that were considered as non-normative became constituted as *superstitio*, such as the practices of others outside the orthodox faith (Miletti, 2015, 3).

In 534, the emperor Justinian I reconfirmed the Theodosian Codes by promulgating the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. In this Corpus, the emperor preserved the laws against magic and all their forms of punishment: exile with the confiscation of property and the capital punishment (Miletti, 2015, 15). However, it was with the Edict of Liutprand of 727 that a more deep

reflection about this issue was reached: according to the document, witchcraft was seen as an expression of dangerous pagan behavior which seriously and severely offended the Christian religion (Centini, 2002, 36).

Throughout the medieval period, secular rulers, influenced by the Church, which emphasized their role as protectors of Christian communities, legislated harshly against magic. For instance, in 789, the emperor Charlemagne prohibited, with his *Admonitio generali*, all pagan worship because it was considered as the cult and devotion to the Devil; thus, he required magicians and enchanters of his kingdom to repent or be condemned to death (Page, 2017, 30). Afterwards, in 1233, the Pope Gregory IX published the bull *Vox in Rama*, in which he proposed a portrait of the pagan cult in which the first images referring to the coven are described. The climax of the war against magic in the Medieval time occurred in 1252, when Innocent IV published the bull *Ad extirpanda*, giving the first regulation for the inquisitorial processes and officially authorizing the use of torture in the witch trials (Centini, 2002, 36).

In 1326, Pope John XXII issued a decretal called *Super illius specula*, in which he assimilated magical practices such as the making of images, rings, mirrors, phials or other things for magical purposes, with heresy. Magic, in the terrifying form of idolatrous, licentious and demon-worshipping sorcerers, was now at the center of inquisitive activity (Page, 2017, 56). Thus, by issuing this bull, the Pope extended the power of the inquisitors to cases of magic and witchcraft, since they started to be considered as heresies. The proper inquisitorial process formally began when Pope Gregory IX issued *Excommunicamus et anathematizamus* in 1231. With this papal bull, all heretics were excommunicated and they were turned over to the political authorities for actual punishment (Pavlac, 2009, 41).

The Early Modern Age was characterized by an increasingly intensification of the harsh attitude against witchcraft and heresy by the Church. In 1474, Pope Sixtus IV, publishing his bull *Nuntiatum est nobis*, accused those who denied that magic was a form of heresy (Centini, 2002, 36). In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued his famous bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, giving Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, the two most famous inquisitors, the support they needed in order to pursue their hunt. With this text, the Pope certified the existence of witchcraft and, in practice, made its persecution official. Indeed, the fateful result of the bull of Innocent VIII was that all the common believes in witchcraft and all its superstitions were now served on a platter by the Pope himself. With this papal bull, the people finally got the support of the Church to prosecute those witches who caused so much trouble (Henningsen, 2014, 138).

Finally, in 1623, Pope Gregorio XV, by publishing the bull *Omnipotentis Dei salvatoris nostri*, indicated the procedures to be followed in cases of witchcraft: this bull enjoined the death sentence on individuals convicted of having apostatized to the Devil and having committed a *maleficium* resulting in a fatal injury (Tedeschi, 1983, 166).

Thus, throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church began to work in a more and more strict contact with the secular authorities in order to promote and facilitate the war against heresies and, more in specific, against witchcraft. As a result of all the bulls that were published since the first years of the introduction of the Christian religion in the Roman Empire, witchcraft began to be criminalized inside every single European state of the time, with the direct consequence of the widespread of the witch trials in order to eradicate this phenomenon to its roots.

II.3.2 The Tribunal of the Inquisition

The Tribunal of the Inquisition was a group of decentralized institutions within the justice system of the Church, which was founded in 1184 in order to combat and fight against all kinds of heresy.

Actually, the method of the Inquisition had been invented in ancient Rome, but it disappeared when the Roman Empire fell under the German invaders: since the Germanic kingdoms originally relied only on oral tradition for their law, the Roman court system collapsed and disappeared. However, by the 12th century, the Roman legal system began to be rediscovered and reintroduced in the Medieval legal and juridical system. During this century, the Inquisition became the chief tribunal of the time and of a specific juridical system: indeed, instead of punishing criminals only after an accusation was lodged, the Inquisition began to actively seek out criminals for arrest and punishment (Pavlac, 2009, 36). During the witch hunt, this tribunal became the method of choice for hunting the heretics.

The operation model of the Tribunal of the Inquisition could be divided into five different phases. First, the Pope himself nominated an official tribunal composed by a panel of inquisitors, who would be commissioned for a specific district and regional area. Usually, the Pope nominated these officers deciding between the Dominicans because they were found to be particularly successful in handling these affairs. The role of these officials was to investigate

into the cases of a specific regional area, asking the population to report individuals who had committed the crime of heresy (Pavlac, 2009, 37).

Hierarchically, at the apex of the Tribunal of the Inquisition was the General Inquisitor who enjoyed great authority, often also in the political field. The inquisitor was appointed directly by the Pope, to whom he had to answer for all his actions; consequently, the pontiff was the only authority that could dispossess him of his position. The General Inquisitor had the power to establish the internal regulations of the Tribunal, the power to appoint and dismiss the local inquisitors and was the only one capable of accepting appeals and granting graces. Next to the General Inquisitor was the Council of the Supreme Inquisition, which maintained a close relationship with the district tribunals; little by little this organization became the main referent of the inquisitors, until gradually stripping the General Inquisitor out of his authority. In these tribunals there were also some volunteers who collaborated, without payment, with the local inquisitors; they worked with great dedication, showing a determined will to contribute to the fight against heresy and evil. (Centini, 2002,56).

The second phase coincided with the issue of summons for suspects and witnesses who had been implicated by the denunciations. Thirdly, the group of inquisitors examined these witnesses and suspects, taking depositions as evidence against the suspected witch. What these officers wanted was a confession and, in order to obtain it, they would use every single method they possessed: from interviews to the use of torture. Fourth was the trial itself, often quick and simple because a confession required no other proof. Finally, the Tribunal of the Inquisition rendered a verdict. If the suspected person was found innocent, the accused would go free, although with no compensation for lost income, paid fees, bodily injury or suffering (Pavlac, 2009, 37). On the other hand, if the suspected person was found guilty, the sentence to be served was death at the stake.

II.3.3 The Witch Trials

The Witch Trial can be defined as a legal punitive procedure against people of both sexes accused of practicing criminal witchcraft, sorcery and magic (Veltmer, 2017, 97). However, since witchcraft was considered a gender-based crime, the majority of people that were persecuted and condemned at the stake all over the Early Modern Age were women.

During the process itself, the suspects were confined and chained in a jail cell, and allowed only bread and water. Inquisitors usually also tortured them in order to gain information; of course,

this information was generally fictitious and just given in order to stop the torture (Pavlac, 2009, 37). Indeed, in many cases, under the pressure of the Roman Inquisition, women and men came to believe that they themselves were witches and confessed (Levack, 2006,19). In any case, the inquisitors took a deposition as evidence against the suspect or someone else. Throughout the process, the defendant had serious disadvantages because an accused person had no right to legal representation, no right to keep silent so as not to self-incriminate, and no right to see or challenge the evidence or bring defense witnesses (Pavlac, 2009, 37).

The Witch Trials were also characterized by a singular system of judgement. Indeed, before the thirteenth century, the tribunals used a fairly primitive system of judgement, the ordeal or divine judgement. In practice, this system of judgement implicated that the accused had to pass tests in order to prove his or her innocence. For instance, the accused person had to hold a hot iron or a to plunge an arm into boiling water. If it did not burn, his/her innocence was proven but, if not, the sentence was confirmed.

With the thirteenth century and the revival of the Roman Law, the tribunals began to abandon these archaic procedures based on ordeals and started to increasingly resort to human judgment. One of the most absurd tests was that of “swimming”, in which a woman accused of witchcraft was tied to a rope and thrown into the water; if she sank, she was innocent, while if she floated, she was guilty (Centini, 2002, 53). Another legal mean of gaining evidence was the one of “pricking” suspected witches. In this case, this practice concerned the search for insensitive Devil’s marks on a suspected witch’s body (Voltmer, 2017, 112).

Another emblematic example of these kind of proofs women accused of witchcraft had to undertake was the one invented in the sixteenth century in the Dutch town of Oudewater: the scales for witches. Throughout the sad years of the fight against the followers of Satan, the person accused of witchcraft in that city was subjected to a very unique ordeal: the tribunal weighted these alleged witches in order to examine their weight: in order to be declared as innocents, they had to show that their weight could not be supported by a broom and, therefore, that they could not fly. The person in charge of carrying out this type of test was the Master of the weights, a man who had a great responsibility because his judgment could greatly condition whoever was the object of the test (Centini, 2002, 53).

II.3.4 Violence on witches

Torture was a significant and substantial component of the Witch Trials and of witch hunt more in general. Indeed, since the Roman law defined torture as a valid juridical instrument to gain a confession from a highly suspected person, the inquisitorial procedure made questioning under pain of torture a vital element of criminal justice in general, especially with regard to capital offences (Voltmer, 2017,112).

In theory, there were limits to and rules about torture. The Church stated that the intensity of the pain that had to be inflicted to these alleged witches had to increase gradually, usually through “degrees”. The first degree consisted in the preparation for the torture session; the second degree implied the use of an instrument that was just being laid on the person and then, the third degree consisted in the actual pain provoked by that instrument itself (Pavlac, 2009, 38). Thus, the Catholic Church was well aware of the system of torture used against alleged witches, and, what is more, it fomented it.

What is more, the Church also stated that no bloodshed or permanent damage was to be left on the accused person, because this could imply that this person was innocent and it was tortured just to gain a false confession. However, many devices that were used during the torture process, could not help but leave scars, inflict enduring harm and, in certain cases, kill the accused (Pavlac, 2009, 38).

Talking about instruments, torture included different methods and machines. On the one hand, “regular” methods of torture included the strappado, thumbscrews, twisting ropes to cut off circulation and the whipping. However, on the other hand, also other more invasive tools were used like, for instance, the “Spanish boots”, such as wooden or iron instruments designed to cause crushing injuries to the shins or feet (Voltmer, 2017,113). The torturer’s screws had grips, often lined with metal bumps or spikes, that fit around appropriate limb: fingers, arms or shins. Then, the torturer would slowly tighten the screw, squeezing the flesh. Moreover, torture was only to be applied once; however, officials repeated or continued sessions that extended for days, weeks and even months.

Examiners could also apply temporary pain with expanding mechanical “pears” in bodily orifices, force-feeding food or water, withdrawing nourishment, imposing body positions as standing, crouching, kneeling, holding arms outstretched or putting the prisoner in an environment that was too hot, too cold or filthy (Pavlac, 2009, 40).

However, torture not only included bodily suffering and public humiliation; it also involved spiritual methods of torture. Indeed, both physical and mental torture was not limited to the interrogation room: it lingered on in the prison cells, conducted by the turnkeys, who could torment and rape the arrested people at leisure. Moreover, a psychological bond usually developed between the interrogator and the interrogated: the authority figure could apply alternating care and callousness, sympathy and anger, respect and disappointment, to break down the suspects and make them confess (Pavlac, 2009, 38).

Nevertheless, torture was not only used in order to obtain information, but it was also seen as a healing necessary process that had to be inflicted on alleged witches. Indeed, at the time, tribunals were convinced that, when dealing with the crime of diabolic witchcraft, they were actually struggling with Satan himself, who possessed the witch's body, obstructing both her criminal and spiritual confession.

Thus, during the Early Modern Age, justice demanded that a guilty person suffered for committing a crime. For this reason, since the penalty to be imposed on witches was the capital one, the execution was to be as painful and showy as possible, hence the common use of burning at the stake.

The fortunate ones would be strangled first; however, most part of the alleged witches were hoisted at the stake, dying slowly as the flames destroyed tissues and they were suffocated by the smoke. In addition, also hanging by strangulation was common: the body was then being burned in order to purify the unclean remains of the criminal. In spite of these more common methods, witches could also be killed by boiling them in water, impaling them or breaking on the wheel (Pavlac, 2009, 40).

To conclude, we can state that, during the Early Modern Age, extracting a confession from an alleged witch was nothing less than a sacred ritualized act with a deep religious significance, a mixture of torture, exorcism and admission (Votmer, 2017, 112). Indeed, throughout both the medieval and the early modern periods, many punishments and executions were public rituals, attended by crowds and formalized with parades, prayers and speeches by the officials and the condemned (Pavlac, 2009, 41). At the time, everyone needed to know what crimes had been committed and the adequate penalty needed to be showed to the whole population.

II.4 CHAPTER'S CONCLUSIONS

This Chapter tries to summarize the horrible history of witchcraft and witch hunt, a phenomenon that started in the Ancient times, just to increasingly being intensified during the Early Modern Age, due to economic, political and, especially, religious causes.

During the decades, women have always been considered as inferior to men. Already in the Greek-Roman period, philosophers were convinced that women were subordinated to men because of their intellect and personality, which was considered more passionate and relying on sentiments than males. Moreover, due to the conception about reproduction, women were seen as performing a background role, relegating them to second-level human beings.

However, this subordinate view was then reinforced by the Catholic Church. Women were seen as inferior also by the Church itself because of Eve's original sin and her unique fault for the Fall of Adam. Thus, women were seen as the only sinners in the Catholic community and this essence of their own made them more prone to be controlled by the Devil.

Thus, during the Medieval Times and then, in a more powerful way, during the Early Modern Age, the Catholic Church made itself the pioneer in the fight and internecine war against witchcraft. In fact, what the Church wanted the most was to impose itself as the only source of wisdom and knowledge of the time, wiping away and Christianizing all other beliefs, particularly the Ancient Roman and pagan ones. In order to achieve this aim, the Church condemned every ritual, faith and ancient tradition including witchcraft.

During the Early Modern period, with the development of an actual war against the Devil and its followers, the witches, an invaluable number of women were persecuted, condemned and then burned at the stake. For centuries, women had to live on a razor's edge because, for any and less predictable reason, they could be persecuted and then killed, just because thought and assumed they had sold their soul to the Devil, receiving hideous and terrible powers in order to cause damage on the environment and, of course, on other human beings.

To conclude, the historical discourse about women's inferiority and then, throughout the centuries, the work of the Catholic Church, have led to horrible preconceptions and prejudices about women, about their sinful soul and, in general, their inferiority compared to men have had and, unfortunately, are still having resonance in our own days.

CHAPTER III
THE MODERN AGE, THE ERA OF THE RISING OF WOMEN

III.1 HOW THE PROFOUND CHANGES OF THE MODERN ERA HAVE AFFECTED WOMEN

The Modern Era was crossed by profound changes which emerged in various areas, starting from the economic ones – due to the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution – to the social ones, such as the birth of new movements, like the one of Feminism.

Indeed, although the distorted image of a grey and obscure nineteenth century, austere and restrictive for women, it would be wrong to believe that this era was only characterized by the long male domination and the absolute submission of the female part of the population. Actually, the nineteenth century marked the birth of Feminism, an emblematic word that designated both the important structural changes of the period – such as the salaried work, autonomy of the civil individual and the right to education – as well as the collective appearance of women on the political scene (Fraisie, Perrot, 2000: 21).

III.1.1 The structural changes of the Modern Era

The Modern Era opened and closed with two events: a revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and a war, the First World War. In both these historical episodes women were asked and called to take important actions and tasks to achieve some society's goals; however, in both cases, sooner or later, when these goals were achieved, the society itself got rid of them. Thus, if modernity was an opportunity for women, it was just because of the consequences of the economic, political, social and cultural changes. Indeed, a lot of elements of those historical changes resulted as decisive (Fraisie, Perrot, 2000: 22).

In between this period, the changes that influenced the most the structural transformation of the European society, economics and politics were substantially three: the Scientific Revolution, the First Industrial Revolution and, in the end, the French Revolution.

The Scientific Revolution consisted in the development of the scientific technology, which has led to the emergence of the modern science. This Revolution has started with the first major advance of modern science in the field of astronomy, which was closely related to geography and to navigation. Indeed, already during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton initiated the achievement of this scientific innovation. In 1543, Copernicus was the first one in the world history to advance the hypothesis that the sun, rather than the earth, was the center of the universe; this idea was then supported also by Galileo Galilei, who empirically proved this advancement by using the

recently discovered telescope. However, the most important discovery was made by Isaac Newton who, in 1687, theorized and proved a fundamental, cosmic law: the law of gravity. After the formulation of this law, nature started to appear as a gigantic mechanical object operating according to certain natural laws that could be found by observation, experiment and calculation. Since the application of this new analytical method of Newtonian physics, the entire field of thought and knowledge, the human society as well as the physical universe – more in general, every single branch of human knowledge – began to be perceived as passive of being investigated by breaking them down into a few, simple and uniform laws (Stavrianos, 1998: 473).

With the Scientific Revolution, for the first time in the Western world history, scientists overturned the Greek learning on the universe and discovered that the Earth was not at the center of the universe but, instead, it was the third planet from the sun. This had an enormous implication on the human's beliefs: they had to face the fact that, since the Earth was not at the center of the universe, they themselves were not at the center too; humans were marginal. The reaction of the Catholic Church, of course, was negative: it opposed the new discovery that the sun was at the center and the Earth rotated around it. As a proof of this opposition, the Church relied on the Bible, where it was written that God had made the Earth and then he set the sun and moon and stars above it (Hirst, 2010: 40). The strong opposition of the Church and the following decision of declaring war against all the heretics that were stating a different position than the Christian one, was affected and influenced by the Catholic's fear of losing authority and control over society. Indeed, by banning any other belief that diverged from the Christian doctrine, the Catholic Church sought to maintain its authority above the Western population.

However, despite the Church opposition, during the nineteenth century, science became an increasingly important part of Western society. Indeed, this discipline was making basic contributions to the old and established industries and it was profoundly affecting the way of thinking as well as the way of living of Western society.

The development of the Scientific Revolution permitted the outbreak of the First Industrial Revolution in England in 1760. Indeed, thanks to the developments in the chemistry field during the late eighteenth century, new progresses were made such as, for instance, the successful creation of the steam engine. This new machine provided an unprecedented amount of power, which was used to operate machines and locomotives and, at the beginning, also to pump water out of mines (Stavrianos, 1998: 473).

This new engine completely changed the way of working of people. Indeed, instead of workers spinning and weaving cotton and wool in their homes, the production was moved to factories where the steam engine did the work. People shifted from being qualified workers to being unqualified workers, since they only became minders and maintainers of the equipment, working to the clock and for a boss instead of being their own master (Hirst, 2010: 141). During the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution spread gradually from England to the rest of the European continent, changing the economic and working conditions of Belgium, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia.

However, this Revolution had dramatic changes also on the population's structure and composition. Indeed, in England, between 1714 and 1820, over 6 million acres of land were enclosed and this meant serious dislocation and distress. The poorest peasants were drawn out of their land, partially or totally sold to bigger landlords, and this forced them to become tenants or day laborers or, on the other side, to seek employment in the cities. These changes in the agricultural field contributed to a complete renovation of the European organization of labor: indeed, by 1870, the majority of the European population lived in cities and was directly dependent on trade or industry rather than agriculture (Stavrianos, 1998: 483).

Finally, the last Revolution that erupted during the Modern Era in Europe was the French Revolution, which broke out in 1789. This event marked the triumph of the bourgeoisie but it also signaled the awakening of the masses. The French Revolution, indeed, consisted in the total subversion of the old and aristocratic regime that divided the population of France in three different "estates" or order of society, which membership determined one's legal rights and privileges: the First Estate was the one of clergy; the Second Estate was composed by the French nobles; in the end, the Third Estate included everyone else, such as peasants, merchants and artisans. The combination of the first two Estates made up only about 2 percent of the total population; however, they owned about 35 percent of the land and enjoyed the majority of the benefits coming from the government. Despite their richness, the First and the Second Estates were exempted from almost all taxes and the burden of taxation consequently fell on the Third Estate, more especially on the peasants (Stavrianos, 1998: 503).

The causes of the French Revolution have to be found in the same nature of the old French regime. This event started as an Aristocratic Revolution just to be transformed into a Bourgeois Revolution and, in the end, to be remodeled as a Mass Revolution. Indeed, at the beginning, the ones that started protesting against the monarch, Louis XVI, were the aristocrats of France; the reason of this uprising was the king's decision to reform the taxation system by

including the nobility in it since he was close to bankrupt. After these protests, an Estates General was summoned, where all the three Estates had to deliberate about certain questions and measures divided one from another. The Third Estate won their first victory by pressuring King Louis to transform the Estates General into a National Assembly, where the Third Estate represented the majority (Hirst, 2010: 95).

The leaders of the Assembly were men of the Enlightenment, whose slogan was *liberté, égalité et fraternité* – liberty, equality and fraternity. The Assembly issued its manifesto under the title *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which declared that (Duby, 1971, 306):

Introduction. The representatives of the French people, constituted as a National Assembly, considering that ignorance, neglect or contempt for the rights of man are the sole causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man, so that this declaration may serve as a constant reminder to all members of society of their rights and duties; so that the acts of the legislative power and of the executive power, being liable at any time to be compared with the purpose of all political institutions, may thereby be the more respected; so that the citizens' demands, henceforth founded on simple and incontrovertible principles, may always operate for the maintenance of the constitution and the good of all.

The National Assembly therefore recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and citizen:

Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in respect of their rights; social distinctions can only be based on public utility.

Article 2. The aim of every political association is the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.

Article 3. The fundamental source of all sovereignty resides in the nation; no body of men, no individual can exercise an authority which does not expressly derive therefrom.

Article 4. Liberty consists in being able to do whatever does not harm another. Thus, the exercise of each man's natural rights has no limits other than those which guarantee to the other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights; those limits can only be determined by the law.

Article 5. The law can only forbid acts harmful to society. Whatever is not forbidden by the law cannot be prevented, and no-one can be forced to do what the law does not require.

Article 6. The law is the expression of the general will; all citizens have the right to participate in lawmaking, personally or through their representatives; the law must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens being equal in its eyes, are equally eligible for all public honors,

positions and duties, according to their ability, and without any distinction other than those of their virtues and talents.

Article 7. No man may be charged, arrested or detained except under the circumstances laid down by the law and in accordance with the formalities prescribed therein. Those who solicit, promote, carry out or cause to be carried out any arbitrary orders, must be punished; but any citizen lawfully summonsed or arrested must instantly obey: he renders himself liable by resistance.

Article 8. The penalties laid down by law should only be such as are strictly and manifestly necessary, and no-one may be punished except by virtue of an established law, promulgated before the commission of the offence, and lawfully applied.

Article 9. Every man being presumed innocent until found guilty, if his arrest is considered essential, any harshness unnecessary to secure his arrest must be strictly forbidden by the law.

Article 10. No man must be penalized for his opinions, even his religious opinions, provided that their expression does not disturb the public order established by the law.

Article 11. The free expression of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man; every citizen is therefore entitled to freedom of speech, of expression and of the press, save that he is liable for the abuse of this freedom in the circumstances laid down by the law.

Article 12. The rights of man and of the citizen require a public force to guarantee them; this force is therefore established for the good of all, and not for the private benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

Article 13. A common tax is essential for the upkeep of the public force and for the costs of administration; it must be levied equally on the citizens in accordance with their capacity to pay.

Article 14. The citizens are entitled, in person or through their representatives, to determine the need for public taxation, freely to consent to it, to control its use, and to fix the amount, basis, mode of collection and duration.

Article 15. Society is entitled to require every public servant to give an account of his administration.

Article 16. Any society which lacks a sure guarantee of rights or a fixed separation of powers, has no constitution.

Article 17. Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no-one may be deprived of it save when this is clearly required by public necessity, lawfully determined, and only on condition of fair and prior compensation.

This glorious document, which founded modern democracy, was, however, destined to produce an inglorious revolution. Indeed, the framers of the Declaration wanted themselves to rule and decided that only property-holders should vote. Thus, common people were left out of this right, but how could they exclude them when they had been declared to be equal? (Hirst, 2010: 97). Also King Louis was by no means willing to accept the new principles contained in

the declaration. Thus, for this reason, the Third Estate stood up in protest against the King, storming the royal fortress of the Bastille and forcing the King himself to leave his palace at Versailles and transfer the court to Paris (Stavrianos, 1998: 505). After these events, a National Assembly with the aim of working on a constitution that established a limited and constitutional monarchy was instituted. On September 3rd, 1791, the new Constitution was adopted by the National Assembly and Louis XVI reigned with limited powers over France.

The situation was later complicated by the French declaration of war on Austria and Prussia, which were considered guilty, according to France, to host exiles who were organizing a counterrevolution. In 1793, Britain, Holland and Spain joined the Austrian-Prussian coalition against France: as a response, French people rose to the defense of their country, smashing the enemy coalition by 1795 (Stavrianos, 1998: 506).

The last phase of this Revolution consisted in an actual Reign of Terror, developed in 1793 with the fights between the Girondists and the more radical Jacobins. During this period, thousands were charged with treason, or merely with insufficient patriotism, and were subjected to the guillotine. After both the King and Marie Antoinette were executed to the guillotine, on August 22nd, 1795, the National Convention, composed for the vast majority of Girondins who had survived the Terror, approved a new constitution, this time bicameral. The executive power would be passed into the hands of a "Directory" composed by five members, and appointed by the Parliament. The protests of the opponents, in particular the Jacobins and the Royalists, were stifled by the army, in which a successful young general, Napoleon Bonaparte, began to emerge (Stavrianos, 1998: 507).

III.1.2 The consequences of the modern changes on women

All the three revolutions that shaped the Modern Era, namely the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, had consequences and repercussions on the female part of the European population; however, they did not have a positive outcome over women.

First of all, the Industrial Revolution, as a consequence of all the new discoveries made possible by the Scientific Revolution, was not only considered as a turning point in the economic life of people, but it represented also a decisive moment for women. Indeed, although working conditions in early factories for women were poor and dangerous, they were no worse than those in non-mechanized jobs, in which they were oppressed by greedy middlemen. The advent

of the Industrialization in England meant better wages and a higher standard of living, not only for men, but also for women, both the ones who had to earn a living on their own as well as those in the households of male workers whose wages were more likely to be sufficient to support a family (Tilly, 1994: 117).

Before the Industrial Revolution, the English economy, like that of the other European nations, relied on agriculture. Thus, the household and all its members were bound to this activity: labor and the everyday tasks were divided among the members of the household, according to their age and to their strength; men were the responsible for the production while women and children were exploited in the fields where they had to plow, hoe and harvest all day long. All the work was performed by hand with the slight help of the simplest inventions such as the distaff and the wheel and by being helped by oxen, wind and water. The household itself was not only the industrial center but also the social center of the family: indeed, the house was the place where people, by working together and participating in rustic amusements, enjoyed their social life, but it also functioned as the school for its younger members, who were prepared for life by sharing in practically all of its phases at home (Gray, 1932: 243).

However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the household and the roles of its members changed completely. The first effect of the Industrial Revolution upon the industrial household was to plunge it into poverty, but then this condition was gradually changed. Indeed, the development of new mechanical inventions such as the spinning jenny, the water frame, the mule and the use of steam for power, combined with the evolution of physical and biological sciences, brought about specialization of labor and of knowledge. The typical household tasks like brewing, cheesemaking, spinning, weaving and baking started to be better done by specialists on a larger scale and, for this reason, these activities were transferred from the home to industry. Moreover, since specialized training began to be required in all lines, universities and colleges started to add new courses of study. Thus, the transfer of activities from the household to the factory, school and other institutions, has resulted into other changes in social and domestic economies. As a consequence, the household began to be not self-sufficient because its welfare was no longer determined by the skills and capacities of its members but by the opportunities offered to wage earners. The members of the household were forced to go out of it and enter the industrial and business world in order to earn money to buy what they no longer produced.

In this new situation, the members of the family no longer worked together at the same jobs. Children began to be sent in school in order to be educated and they did not become productive members of society as early as formerly. Women, whose work used to be considered

as auxiliary or preparatory to that of their fathers or husbands, became a part of the money economy as wage earners. This meant more steady work and higher yearly incomes for factory women. However, the new factory jobs also had various negative features such as long working hours, unhealthy working conditions and myriad rules, regulations and penalties. In this new situation, women were the ones more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their more docile personality and the fact that they were less likely to be organized into unions. Since they were not represented by any union, the average wage for women at the end of the nineteenth century was less than half of that for their male counterparts (Stavrianos, 1998: 489).

During this period, also the female work in the household itself changed completely: women, indeed, were relieved of the rough and heavy work of the field and the handicraft, they were offered the possibility to use new machines such as sewing machines, gas stoves, electric stoves and mechanical refrigerators, as well as to adorn their places with new furniture, rugs and textiles. Thus, women spent more time caring for the house, the family clothing and cooking: the idle woman became a symbol of economic success of a family (Gray, 1932: 244).

Thus, to conclude, the Industrial Revolution radically changed men's productive lives by fueling their economic transformation as well as their transition to a much longer life spans; moreover, all the changes in the household and the creation of smaller families transformed, at first, women's reproductive lives and then their productive lives (Stanfors, Goldscheider, 2017: 176).

Moreover, besides the Industrial Revolution, also the French Revolution of 1789 had a huge impact on women. Indeed, this event viewed the active involvement and work of French women, especially the Parisian ones. Emblematic, indeed, was the march of militant women of Paris out to Versailles on October 5, 1789, armed with murderous pikes, clubs and cutlasses and animated by the will of capturing the King and the Queen, dragging them back to Paris in order to firmly entrenching the Revolutionary victory (Rose, 1995: 187). Thus, the French Revolution and its consequent formulation of what it meant to be an active citizen in the new Republic made women believe, also because of their immense active support of the cause, that they would be invested with the power and right of taking political action.

However, after the final victory, when revolutionaries drew up their first constitution, they made a clear distinction between the active citizens – such as the property-owning males over the age of 21 – and the passive citizens – which included women and domestic servants of both sexes (Hannam, 2006: 19). Indeed, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* did not mean the rights of mankind and, according to the writers of this document, the omission

of women was entirely to be expected. Women were not viewed as political animals but as figures locked in the private sphere and their destiny that of producing and nurturing citizens (Hufton, 1989: 65). Nevertheless, even though the defeat and exclusion from active citizenship, after this event women were encouraged to make the first demands on behalf of their sex.

To conclude, even though neither the Industrial Revolution nor the progressive advent of a democratic political space developing from the outbreak of the French Revolution directly produced equality between men and women, they turned out to be two events by which women experimented and started to gain more awareness about themselves as independent individuals. Thanks to these two historical events, new ideas spread throughout all Europe, especially above women: for the first time, they started to think about themselves as equal to the male counterpart of the population, as workers and citizens. Single middle-class women became conscious of their own rights and demanded education and jobs for themselves (Tilly, 1994: 117). Thus, for the first time, women sought the possibility to be able to break the economic and symbolic bonds of dependency that tied them to their father and husband (Fraisie, Perrot, 2000: 22).

III.1.3 Modern demographic changes and women

Starting from the Industrial Revolution, the Western World was also hit by a demographic transition. Indeed, during the last two centuries, the modern demographic cycle of the West was born, developed and ended. The increase in population was one of the effects of the Industrial Revolution on Europe. Indeed, the population of the European continent in 1914 was well over three times that of 1750: the European population has multiplied by 4; life expectancy has gone from values between 25 and 35 years to 75-80; the number of children per woman has fallen from 5 to less than 2; birth rate and mortality have dropped from values mostly between 30 and 40‰ to values close to 10. This profound transformation, which is an integral part of the social transformations of the last century, has taken the name of “demographic transition” (Livi Bacci, 1998: 140).

There have been various causes at the basis of this demographic phenomenon. However, one of the most important reasons at the roots of this population explosion was the medical one. Indeed, the decline in the mortality rate, starting from the second half of the eighteenth century, was made possible due to the lower incidence of epidemic cycle, to the development of better level of living standards, as well as the disappearance of the plague and the lower incidence of famines due to the improved economic organization, partly due to social and cultural practices

that concurred to curb the spread of infectious diseases and improved survival conditions, especially in early childhood (Livi Bacci, 1998: 144). In fact, with the increased cultivation of the potato during the nineteenth century, nutritional levels rose, natural resistance to disease rose correspondingly and, as a consequence, the mortality rate dropped as well. Famine became a memory of the past in every Western. Furthermore, the application of new medical science through vaccination and segregation of infected people further reduced death rates in Western Europe (Stavrianos, 1998: 484).

Another explanation at the basis of the demographic transition lied in the change in the choices of the Modern Era's couples, induced by those series of social transformations set in motion by the Industrial Revolution itself. In particular, the rise of industrial and urban societies caused an increase in the relative cost of raising and educating children, who became income-producers and, thus, autonomous at a much later age than in agricultural societies, who required greater investments in terms of health, education and well-being and, finally, who started to preclude job opportunities for their parents, particularly for women. Thus, this increase in the relative cost of rising and educating children would be the driving force behind the restriction of fertility. The decrease in fertility was made possible thanks to a lesser social control, during the Modern Era, exercised by tradition, by institutions, by religion; this decrease was produced in parallel with the process of economic and social development of European societies (Livi Bacci, 1998: 145).

The demographic transition of the Modern Age can be seen as a double-edged sword in respect of women's conditions and rights; indeed, this demographic change had both positive as well as negative consequences on the female life. Indeed, on the one hand, the fact that the fertility rate declined during the Modern Era, meant that childbearing and childrearing started to occupy a much smaller part of women's lives, freeing them to engage in activities outside the household, such as education and employment, which were previously unattainable for the female part of the population (McNay, 2003: 3).

However, on the other hand, the demographic transition also produced negative consequences on women. Indeed, the decline of the fertility rate and the consequent downsizing of the family could also create the basis for a parental discrimination in terms of survival-related resources in regards to girls and women like, for instance, health care. This selective discrimination was related to the modern era's attempts to limit the number of girls in a family, once the parents already had one or more daughters. Moreover, even though the demographic transition facilitated the expansion of women's roles in non-domestic activities, women still

continued to fulfill the tasks in the domestic sphere because they were considered responsible of bearing and rearing children as well as caring for other dependents such as the elderly, along with the attainment of the day-to-day maintenance of the household. This meant that women increasingly confront a “double burden” of work as the transition progressed (McNay, 2003: 8).

Thus, to conclude, during the Modern Era, both the structural changes and the demographic changes Western Europe underwent, opened various and new possibilities for women, starting from their chance to access new jobs and clear various traditional oppressing views and beliefs about their inferiority, allowing them to concentrate more on their own education and employment since the decline of the fertility rate.

III.2 THE FIRST WAVE OF FEMINISM

The Modern Era is the period that followed the Early Modern Age, thus the age that started with the Industrial Revolution – which broke out in Great Britain in 1760 – and lasted till the end of the First World War and the development of the technological and digital era.

This portion of the Chapter will analyze the enormous changes women underwent during the Modern Era thanks to their higher self-consciousness and the consequent development of Feminism, the movement through which women were able to fight and gain their human rights.

III.2.1 The development of feminist ideas

Feminism is a term that has multiple definitions, according to the person or the group that it is defining it; however, this word is usually used to define and describe a set of ideas that recognize in an explicit way that women are subordinate to men and seek to address imbalances of power between the sexes (Hannam, 2006: 4).

These feminist ideas that are at the basis of the Feminist Movement were already present in the ancient Greek-Roman age as well as in the Western Middle ages, enriching throughout the Early Modern Age. Before the Modern Age, these ideas were developed through various discourses, images, myths, anecdotes and poetic fictions, but they remained sporadic, allusive, ambiguous and fragmentary. However, with the advent of the printing press during the European Renaissance, everything changed: many women began to write and publish, taking as the object of their reflection the condition of females in general as well as their own controversial condition as women writers. During this period, women – and some men – that shared these feminist ideas turned them into a new way of life but at an individual level, thus without joining a movement (Auffret, 2020: 5).

Later, with the social transformations that accompanied the political and industrial revolutions of the Modern Age, feminist ideas took a new turn: public and collective. Women – and sometimes men – who formulated these new ideas about equality between the two sexes clustered around certain publications: newspapers, manifestos, posters and magazines (Auffret, 2020: 6). Some women in western Europe and North America began to demand their voices to be heard already in the late eighteenth century. However, it was just in the middle of the nineteenth century that Modern Feminism was born, when women began to organize

themselves into groups with the purpose of challenging their subordinate position and achieving improvements in their lives (Hannam, 2006: 17).

The first most representative work was the book of Cristina da Pizzano, *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, in English *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written in 1405. Cristina was an Italian young widow, daughter of a politician and a man of science of the city of Venice who, as a self-taught, became a philosopher and a writer. In her book, she narrated about a factionary society where women did all the work and tasks, generally belonging to men. Already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, she reflected on the inferior and subordinate position women were regarded to, reaching the conclusion that this situation was due to the influence operated by the Western cultural and social traditions and beliefs. In order for women to change this subaltern situation, they needed to get access to education, so that they could develop their own ideas about the world, the society and, especially, about themselves (Caraffi, 2004: 574).

The proliferation of feminist ideas continued throughout the seventeenth century. In 1622, Marie de Gournay published a treaty called *Equality between Men and Women* in which she denounced the situation women were living as a consequence of the impossibilities and limitations that were inflicted upon them by the patriarchal society of the time:

Que si les dames arrivent moins souvent que les hommes aux degrés de l'excellence, c'est merveille que le défaut de bonne instruction, et encore l'affluence de la mauvaise expresse et professoire, ne fasse pis, les gardant d'y pouvoir arriver du tout (de Gournay, 1622: 14).

This passage can be translated in:

If the ladies arrive less frequently to the heights of excellence than do the gentlemen, it is because of this lack of good education. It is sometimes due to the negative attitude of the teacher and nothing more. Women should not permit this to weaken their belief that they can achieve anything (de Gournay, 1622: 14).

In 1673, a man, François Poullain de la Barre, published the book *De l'égalité de deux sexes*, in English *On the Equality of the Two Sexes*, where he advocated equality between men and women. One of his most famous phrase, "*The mind has no sex*", summarized his gender beliefs and defended the intellectual capacity of women for politics.

In 1694, Mary Astell wrote *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* where she exemplified with her life the conditions that women had to face because, due to her lack of dowry, she remained single. She reflected on the tragic destiny of women, since she had to live on the charity of different relatives (Sowaal, 2007: 231).

Another important figure for the creation of the first feminist ideas was Madame de Beaumer, who directed the feminist magazine *Le journal des dames* from 1759 to 1778, in which she treated feminist themes and called for equality between men and women.

However, one of the most important authors that contributed to the birth of the Feminist movement was Mary Wollstonecraft, who is usually regarded as one of the founders of the new modern liberal feminism and precursor of Suffragism, the First Wave of Feminism. In 1792, she published the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in parallel with the development of the French Revolution. This book is a compendium and a synthesis between the arguments of the Enlightenment's intellectuals of the eighteenth century in order to apply the principles of the liberal thought of individual rights.

Her work promoted equality between the sexes, pointing out that the inequality men and women were living in was not due to a biological status but it depended on the education and socialization of the time, which sought the invisibility of women. She criticized patriarchy because it submitted women in marriage as well as in their family; she rejected the exclusion of women in politics since women as well were able to deal with government affairs; she claimed the importance of education and culture to improve girls' lives and to make them achieve equality with the male counterpart of the population. She stated that, by improving their lives, women could become better mother, thus education was important in order to improve the work of women in the house but also in their extra-domestic activities which would facilitate their economic independence (Ford, 2009: 195).

Thus, the feminist ideas on which the Feminist Movement itself was constructed were not just developed throughout the most recent decades, but they were conscious ideals that women have been advancing since the Greek-Roman and Ancient times, at the beginning in a more bland and mild way, and then maturing throughout women's history till becoming concrete and practical ideas.

III.2.2 The birth of the movement

All the ideas about women and feminism and, as already stated before, all the structural changes of the Modern Era converged, during the nineteenth century, into the creation of a new social movement, the one of Feminism. The history of this movement is generally divided into three different periods or waves: the First Wave (of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries), the Second Wave (from 1960s to 1980s) and the Third one (from 1990s to 2000s).

Before the actual development of Feminism as a structural movement, women had already begun to join their forces and ask for their own rights during the French Revolution itself. Indeed, although the doctrine of the rights of individuals, based on inalienable freedoms, only affected men at first, it did not take long before women appropriated of the same language about equal rights and started to reject the set of traditions based on the male control of women. In this whirlwind that developed from 1789 to 1793, women appeared as part of the sovereign people and their unprecedented experience can be considered as a starting point for the fight for equality of the sexes.

Indeed, the fact that women became part of the demonstrations and protests during the French Revolution meant that their presence was constant in public spaces, in the revolutionary days, in the clubs and in the stands. Moreover, the female population had a great impact also during the march on Versailles on October 5 and 6 of 1789 in which more than 6,000 Parisian women staged, alongside with men, with the purpose of bringing the King and Queen back to Paris. These women, aware of the strength acquired by their action, stood before the National Assembly and asked for something new and unusual for the time, such as that the revolutionary power did not fall on that new "male aristocracy" that was already being created during the Revolution itself. Indeed, the women of the city of Paris as well as the women of the markets and of the working classes, asked for weapons to defend the revolution and demanded bread to feed their children; they joined political clubs and, more in general, they became part of the patriotic society (Pérez Garzón, 2018: 31).

Shortly after the women's march on Versailles, a petition addressed to the National Assembly appeared. This petition proponed the abolition of all the privileges linked to the male sex in France, the right of the female sex to the same freedom, advantages, rights and honor that men already possessed and the admission of women to the district and departmental assemblies, as well as to the National Assembly. Moreover, it also included the right of women to wear pants (Nash, 2004: 77).

However, what actually happened was that, not only this petition was left completely unheard, but, during the drafting of the Constitution after the people's victory of the Revolution,

women were left out of any legal and social rights, even though they participated and gave a huge contribution to this same triumph. Indeed, during the debates for the drafting of the Constitution in 1793, the discussion on women's right to vote was raised. During these debates, the deputy Pierre Marie Augustin Guyomar denounced that women were servants of the Republic and sought to integrate them into the sovereign of people. However, he remained in the minority, colliding with the arguments of those who unfolded the concept of citizen, based on the differentiation between active citizens and passive citizens: the former were always men, with economic independence because they were owners or professions that owed them that independence; the latter were those who did not have the right to vote because they were not economically independent, such as women, children and domestic employees, since all were considered members of the family of a proper citizen, the father of the family (Pérez Garzón, 2018: 33).

Specifically, during the operation of drafting of the new French Constitution, it was argued that women had no political rights and should not interfere in the affairs of government because they lacked moral and physical strength. Nor should they meet in political association, since the natural functions that conformed to the order of society derived from their sex, which forced them to other occupations such as being mothers and wives. In this sense, the French Revolution dramatically cut short, figuratively but also with the actual use of the guillotine, this first irruption of feminism. Women's clubs were closed in that same year of 1793 while the following year women were drastically prohibited from having a presence in political life. What's more, the French law stated that no more than five women could go down the street together, while the most outstanding female leaders were reserved the pain either of the guillotine or of the exile. Therefore, at the end of the French Revolution, women were completely excluded from the universality of rights (Pérez Garzón, 2018: 34).

However, even though the French Revolution turned out to be a devastating failure for women, since they could not reach the recognition of their rights and status of equality with men, this same event produced the basis for the development of a new social movement, Feminism.

The term "feminism" was born in France at the end of the nineteenth century and it became generalized in the Western World at the beginning of the twentieth century. The First Wave of Feminism, also known as Suffragism, thus the convergence of all the past ideas about feminism into a social movement, developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At the basis of this movement lied the central idea that women's condition was socially constructed and, as a consequence, there was the possibility to change it by letting women's voices be heard

(Hannam, 2006: 4). Indeed, the new industrial world born with the Industrial Revolution, consolidated throughout the nineteenth century in the West, was a «gender factory» built parallel to modernity: the gender system constituted the ideal framework to produce the mechanisms of subalternity that guaranteed the permanence of inequality and the subordination of women. Thus, this gender system marked the life trajectory of women and their social role in this new industrial world. Therefore, the challenges of women in the world and the struggles for their rights were often focusing on the starting point of questioning the gender system and the archetypes of femininity imposed by the predominant cultural patterns (Nash, 2004: 27).

Thus, to conclude, although feminist ideas were already circulating throughout Europe before the actual development of Feminism, it was just with the outbreak of the French Revolution that women started to being more aware of the injustice they were subject to since the most ancient times. Indeed, after the French Revolution, part of the female population of the nation started to consolidate these feminist ideas into an actual and structural movement, at the basis of which lied specific ideas, critics and recriminations aimed at undermining that time's patriarchal society.

III.2.3 The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen

Women's first recriminations and grievances could be summarized in the Declaration written by Olympe de Gouges in 1791, the so-called *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, which was written following the same exact path of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* of 1789 (Levy, Applewhite, Johnson, 1979, 89-96):

For the National Assembly to decree in its last sessions, or in those of the next legislature:

Preamble. Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, [the women] have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all the members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the authoritative acts of women and the authoritative acts of men may be at any moment compared with and respectful of the purpose of all political institutions; and in order that citizens' demands, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always support the constitution, good morals, and the happiness of all.

Consequently, the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the sufferings of maternity recognizes and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens.

Article 1. Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.

Article 2. The purpose of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.

Article 3. The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially with the nation, which is nothing but the union of woman and man; no body and no individual can exercise any authority which does not come expressly from it [the nation].

Article 4. Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of

Article 5. Laws of nature and reason proscribe all acts harmful to society; everything which is not prohibited by these wise and divine laws cannot be prevented, and no one can be constrained to do what they do not command.

Article 6. The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

Article 7. No woman is an exception; she is accused, arrested, and detained in cases determined by law. Women, like men, obey this rigorous law.

Article 8. The law must establish only those penalties that are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one can be punished except by virtue of a law established and promulgated prior to the crime and legally applicable to women.

Article 9. Once any woman is declared guilty, complete rigor is [to be] exercised by the law.

Article 10. No one is to be disquieted for his very basic opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order.

Article 11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since that liberty assures the recognition of children by their fathers. Any female citizen thus may say freely, I am the mother of a child which belongs to you, without being forced by a barbarous prejudice to hide the truth; [an exception may be made] to respond to the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

Article 12. The guarantee of the rights of woman and the female citizen implies a major benefit; this guarantee must be instituted for the advantage of all, and not for the particular benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

Article 13. For the support of the public force and the expenses of administration, the contributions of woman and man are equal; she shares all the duties [*corvées*] and all the painful tasks; therefore, she must have the same share in the distribution of positions, employment, offices, honors, and jobs [*industrie*].

Article 14. Female and male citizens have the right to verify, either by themselves or through their representatives, the necessity of the public contribution. This can only apply to women if they are granted an equal share, not only of wealth, but also of public administration, and in the determination of the proportion, the base, the collection, and the duration of the tax.

Article 15. The collectivity of women, joined for tax purposes to the aggregate of men, has the right to demand an accounting of his administration from any public agent.

Article 16. No society has a constitution without the guarantee of rights and the separation of powers; the constitution is null if the majority of individuals comprising the nation have not cooperated in drafting it.

Article 17. Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separate; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right; no one can be deprived of it, since it is the true patrimony of nature, unless the legally determined public need obviously dictates it, and then only with a just and prior indemnity.

This Declaration constituted one of the clearest political formulations which defended the female citizenship, even though its immediate resonance was limited and scarce. Olympe de Gouges, a theatrical writer and a revolutionary activist, claimed the importance of the inclusion of women in the political rights recently discussed and proclaimed by the new French Republic.

By starting with the assumption that “Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights.” in the first article of the Declaration, Olympe de Gouges denounced the failure of the Revolution, which had denied the political rights to women and highlighted the falsity of the universality of the revolutionary premises of freedom and equality. She appealed to the condition of citizenship of women and required their rights as such. The keystone of the Declaration, which constantly appointed the female citizens for their inclusion in the universality of the rights, was the principle of equality established with the comparison of the rights of women with the ones of men.

Moreover, for the first time women themselves wrote a political program for the revendication of the female suffrage was presented. Indeed, de Gouges claimed that the woman possessed the right to divorce and, for this reason, she also possessed the right to represent

herself in the elaboration of the laws and in the national sovereignty. She asked for the rights of freedom, of property, of the access to the public charges, to vote as well as to the private property. Her proposal also included rights in the domestic area like, for instance, the rejection of the sexual double standards, the legal equality of spouses and the difference between the legitimate and illegitimate children (Nash, 2004: 78).

Thus, to conclude, with the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, Olympe de Gouges embraced and summarized the principal revendications of women during the First Wave of Feminism: indeed, this Declaration contains criticism of misogyny and the supremacy of male power; highlights the conviction that the situation of the inequality of women responded to sociocultural factors which could be changed; advances the intention to improve the sphere of action of women as well as their capacity of action.

III.2.4 The representation of women as subjects

Besides the criticism of misogyny and the supremacy of male power, during the Modern Era, at the first stage of the development of the Feminist movement, women also focused on the representation of women as independent subjects, just as men always had been considered throughout the world history.

Indeed, due to the structural changes at the end of the eighteenth century, during the next century the old structures between man and the world started to broke down and, despite the formidable rigidity of the representations of women in this same century, the break was real and tangible. For this same reason, a reformulation of the relationship between the sexes was needed. Thus, induced by both the historical changes as well as the awareness of a possible emancipation of women, a philosophical reflection about the female subject was born.

The questioning of the inequality of the sexes was a direct consequence of the postulates of the new era, which founded the ideas of freedom of the individual and the autonomy of the subject. Thus, as a consequence of the emergence of the individual subject, the narrative of the emancipation of women was born. Both men and women started to be assumed as rational beings, since the opposite affirmation was equivalent to denying that they were potentially subjects (Fraisie, 2000: 72). In concrete terms, three themes served as pivots for the conquest of the representation of the female subject: the subversion of inferiority, the family and the property, with its corollaries: work and freedom.

Subversion of inferiority. As already seen in the First Chapter of this thesis, since the most ancient times it was believed that there were physical and intellectual differences between the sexes. Medical and scientific opinion was used to support the view that social and cultural differences were natural, or biologically based, rather than socially constructed (Hannam, 2006: 18). Thus, one of the first ideologies feminists had to subvert was this idea that woman's inferiority was not due to medical or physical issues but because of a social construction created by long decades of development of a patriarchal society.

By proving that the feminine subversion and state of inferiority was due to cultural reasons and not because of any lack in their physical and intellectual capacities, feminists argued that gender should be overthrown, eliminated or rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it has always been a sign of subordination for women (Butler, 1999: xiii).

Family. The second field of criticisms is the one about the role of women in the family, more specifically the consideration of the natural destiny of women to become spouses and then mothers. Feminists criticized the idea that the fate and future of a woman was only to be married to a man and to fulfil his will as well as that of her family (Fraisie, 2000: 76).

Linked to the family field, another recrimination of women during the First Wave of Feminism was the criticism of domesticity. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, some intellectual women spoke out against the discourse of domesticity of women and the female model of "the Angel in the house". According to this model, women had to be perfect housewives and domestic goddesses by not going out and working but staying home and honing skills in order to become ladies, such as painting, singing and fine needleworking. This model was based on the glorification of the housewife, developed as a way to countermeasure all the demands of independence set up by the "new women"; it was an attempt to limit women to certain roles linked to the house and to their inferiority to men. Feminists criticized this model, stating that motherhood could not be compatible with a professional or political activity and that women's destiny should not be that of annulling and sacrificing herself in order to serve her family (Kühl, 2016: 174).

Property. The last fundamental theme for the development of the representation of women as independent subject was property, divided between its two corollaries: work and freedom.

Work. The theme of work was basically divided between two different matters: firstly, the occupational segregation of the female workers and, secondly, the economic discrimination of the female work. According to the first matter, such as the occupational segregation of the

female workers, feminists criticized the fact that women lacked training and education and the consequent consideration of jobs such as childrearing, wet nursing, textile workshopping, hairdressers and market vendors as the only jobs women could do. According to the second matter, such as the economic discrimination of the female work, feminists criticized the fact that women were paid less than men because the female work was considered as complementary to the male one. The reason for not charging the same salary for the same job was justified by the idea that women did not have to support their family, a task that was completely assigned to men.

Freedom. Lastly, feminists also talked about the theme of the freedom of women. Feminists denounced the false equality predicated after the French Revolution and criticized the Civil Code, which assigned the dependency of the female spouse to her husband. The differences linked to the gender and the traditional idea of women as servants prevented women to gain their own legal and social rights. (Fraisie, 2000: 89).

To conclude, during the First Wave of Feminism, women, driven by a new sentiment of awareness of their inferiority to men developed thanks to all the changes that broke out during the Modern Era, concentrated on the attempt to subvert the traditional and patriarchal view of society. The female population tried to dismantle ancient and established beliefs that “proved” the feminine subordination by fighting for the achievement of their rights and for a more equal and proper consideration in the social order.

III.3 THE BATTLES OF WOMEN AGAINST THE CHURCH'S BELIEFS

Besides the legal barriers, the economic interests and the political systems, what the first feminists had to face were also the religious beliefs. Indeed, since the beginning of the installment of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, churchmen and theologians have developed ideas and beliefs that have restricted women's freedom and rights. Within the most evident limits the Church operated on women, feminists found the Genesis's Blame of Eve episode, the gender inequalities within the Church itself with all its consequences and, in the end, the reproductive issues linked to women. What feminists tried to do was to operate a customs-clearance of these Catholic pillars and beliefs.

III.3.1 The Blame of Eve

The core question at the basis of the different status men and women had in the past was the dichotomy between the two human genders. The principle of the two sexes, male and female, was elaborated in the Bible's episode of *Genesis*, the story of Adam and Eve. Indeed, in the Christian tradition, women have been, and they continue to be nowadays, defined and bounded to the biblical image of Eve (Haskins, 2003: 100). As stated by the *Genesis*,

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. [Genesis 2:21-25]

For decades and centuries, this passage – which narrates that the man was created first and then God created Eve, the woman, from his rib – has been interpreted as the justification of the woman's inferiority and subordination to man. However, the Hebrew word "Adam" does not stand for a proper name of a man; actually, it simply represents the word for "human being". Thus Adam, the first human being, had no gender. As a consequence, the creation of Eve did not so much introduce woman into the world as gender difference: out of the gender-neutral human being "Adam" came man and woman (Schrupp, 2017, v).

Thus, equating Adam with man already shows us the root of the problem: in many cultures, actual men, the human beings, are equated with man as such. As a consequence, for

the Western world, men implicitly stood for humanity, whereas women were considered to be somehow derivative, deficient and inferior human beings (Schrupp, 2017, v).

What feminists criticized was the two female stereotypes put forward by the Western Christian tradition, incarnated in the figures of Mary and Eve. On the one hand, there was Mary, the holy Virgin, pure and good, willing to sacrifice herself in order to become the instrument of God and giving birth to his son, Jesus. On the other hand, there was Eve, the temptress who was seduced by the Devil and, due to her sinful action, caused the fall of the man and their expulsion from Paradise. Women criticized the assumption that these two biblical women represented the female duality because these two core qualities that have been traditionally assigned to women were abstract and untrue. Mary and Eve were not the real bearing on everyday life for most women, but females could be described and defined in multiple ways, freed from these two stigmatized models (Kühl, 2016: 171).

III.3.2 Gender inequalities within the Church

As the consequence of the projection of women as the representatives of Eve on Earth and, in addition, also of her sin and betrayal of God, feminists also condemned the gender inequalities created within the Catholic Church itself as well as the Church's perpetuation of these gender disparity. Indeed, the consideration of women as an incarnation of lower human nature by the Church has limited the female population to be recognized as equal members of this institution (Haskins, 2003: 101).

Indeed, throughout the decades and centuries, the Catholic Church has proved itself to be a generator of stereotypes and inferior behaviors in regards to women; indeed, since the beginning of the foundation of this Christian institution, women have been represented as background figures as well as being harmful and sinful temptresses against men, the actual direct image of God. Having developed this literature, the Catholic Church has developed as an hierarchical institution that has showed discriminatory attitudes in regard with women and girls, by placing them under the control of their male relatives and by considering them as unequal and inferior (Wood, 2019: 3).

The justification Catholics used to support the feminine subordination was the Bible, the most important source of the Christian faith. Indeed, the Holy Scriptures have been interpreted by many people different ways, including that of gender inequality and stereotyping (Wood, 2019: 4). Indeed, texts in the Old Testament such as:

So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man,

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." [Genesis 2:20-23]

As well as Genesis 3:1-24, such as the narration of the so-called episode of the Fall of Man, the one where Eve decided to eat the forbidden apple offered her by the Devil itself, causing the following fall of Adam and their banning from the Garden of Eden.

Scriptures about women's inferiority that have been taken as justifications in order to oppress women are also present in some passages of the New Testaments:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. [Timothy 2:11-15]

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. [Corinthians 11:7-9]

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. [Corinthians 14:34-35]

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. [Ephesians 5:22-23]

Thus, these documents have been interpreted by Church's Fathers as actual justification of women's inferiority and the consequent male domination within the institution.

The gender inequality supported by the Catholic Church can be seen in one of the most evident traditional pilaster of this institution: women's impossibility to be part of the clergy and to become priests.

Indeed, at the beginning of the installation of the Church in the Ancient Roman Empire, women could have leadership positions within the institution, operating every kind of activity, just as men did. However, women's leadership was later declared heretical and only men had the possibility to become priests, while women were confined and downgraded to the title of deaconess. Moreover, women were prohibited from administering the sacrament of baptism, since the Church started to argue that Jesus would have wanted his mother to baptize him if he wanted women to baptize in his Church. In addition, with respect to the ordination of women, the Early Catholic institution often used the argument that Jesus had only chosen males as his disciples (Wood, 2019: 4), thus men would cover the most important charges inside the Church, leaving the lowest ones to women.

Thus, to conclude, since the early development of the institution, the Church has justified women's inferiority and subordination to men by referring to the Old and New Testaments' texts and passage, which were based on misogynistic and patriarchal beliefs. The gender inequality perpetuated by the Church can also be seen in the nature of the sacrament of order, which excludes women from the highest positions. According to the Church, the sacrament is directly linked to the mystery of Christ: since the priest is the one who has the power to perform this sacrament, he then acts through the effective power conferred on him by Christ and he takes on the role of Christ on Earth. Thus, the sacrament of order becoming a priority only of males was justified by the belief that only men were the direct image of God, while women were the direct image of men and, as a consequence, they could not embody the holy divinity on Earth (Haskins, 2003: 107).

III.3.3 Reproductive issues

Besides the gender inequalities perpetuated by the Catholic Church, the First Wave of Feminism also condemned the Church's creation of reproductive issues in regards to women, such as the Catholic's control over women's sexual autonomy and its opposition to both contraceptive measures and abortion. Of course, these two procedures are strictly interrelated.

Abortion has been a practice executed by human beings since the most ancient times. Soranos of Ephesus (c. 98-138 A.D.), the most learned of Greco-Roman gynecologists, had

discussed about abortion, the practice of destroying and expelling what has been conceived, by adding a list of the measures that could be adopted in order to success in this practice, including the purgation of the abdomen with clysters, the injection of warm and sweet olive oil or carrying things beyond one's strength. Moreover, he also listed a number of contraceptives that would have helped women to prevent pregnancies (Noonan, 1967: 86). Indeed, abortion was often practiced in the Greco-Roman world, since knowledge and information about this topic were widespread during that time.

Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament contain anything about abortion. However, since the early instalment of the Catholic Church in the Roman Empire, the Christian teachings of the Church Fathers developed in an opposite way compared to the Greco-Roman one. Indeed, the early Christian community's teaching on abortion developed in a context where two commands of the Old Testament were considered as fundamental: the first one was the one of loving God with all your heart while the second one was the one of loving your neighbor as yourself. In summary, these two commands represented the self-sacrifice of Jesus, which had to be projected in everyone's life by following the maximum that a person had to sacrifice his or her own life for another (Noonan, 1967: 88).

The first centuries in which Christianity was spreading throughout all the ancient Roman Empire, the argument about abortion concerned the distinction between formed and un-formed fetuses and how this related to the time of ensoulment or animation of them. Thus, during the seventh and twelfth centuries, penances started to be graded on everyone performing an act of abortion. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas clearly stated that the abortion an ensouled fetus was an actual homicide, but he did not hold the theory according to which abortion was the equivalent of taking a human life. However, on the other hand, the Jesuit Thomas Sanchez proposed a stronger vision by claiming an absolute prohibition on any act designed to prevent insemination in intercourse. This position was influenced by the fear that pleasure might become the "sovereign good". However, according to Sanchez, two situations could made abortion possible and allowed, such as, in the first case, when the life of the woman was attacked by the fetus and, in the second case, when the woman found herself betrothed to a man other than the one who had impregnated her (Campbell, 1980: 372).

This position was then strengthened in 1588 with Sixtus V's Bull in which he made the penalties for homicide and abortion identical, regardless of the age of the fetus. Even though this decision was then dismantled by the next Pope, Gregory XIV, who repealed the penalties except those applying to the ensouled fetus, the theory of delayed ensoulment became

increasingly accepted in the following centuries and an absolute prohibition on abortion developed in the Church (Campbell, 1980: 373).

To conclude, During the First Wave of Feminism, women also started to criticize the Catholic banning and criminalization of abortion. Indeed, if the Catholic Church had taken an absolutist stance on the morality of abortion and had stressed the rights of the fetus, on the other hand the feminist movement concentrated more on the rights of the woman (Campbell, 1980: 374). Moreover, besides the highlight of women's rights to decide upon their own reproductive choice, feminists started to also explain to the Church opponents to abortion that criminalizing abortion does not reduce the number of abortions performed, while increasing the number of women who die during illegal interventions (Srinivasan, 2022: 88).

III.4 CHAPTER'S CONCLUSION

The Modern Era can clearly and confidently be described as the age of revolutions for Europe; starting from the Scientific Revolution, on which grounds was developed the Industrial Revolution, culminating with the French Revolution. Women participated actively to all these new and exciting scenarios; however, their contribution, even though it was fundamental, was not rewarded as females had hoped. Indeed, even though women started working in new specific and more complex fields, they were still considered as second-level workers, inferior to men; and even though French women had fought by the side of men during the Revolution of 1789, they were not granted the same rights men achieved after this struggle.

However, even if these negative outcomes, thanks to all the changes developed in the Modern Era, new ideas began to spread throughout all Europe, especially above women: the first feminist ideas, such as all those ideas that recognize in an explicit way that women are subordinate to men and seek to address imbalances of power between the sexes, started to proliferate and expand above the European female population. Women began to be more aware of their value but, especially, of all the injustices that they had to be victims of in the traditional patriarchal European society.

As a consequence of this realization, during the eighteenth century women started to gather together in a movement called Feminism. This movement called for equality between men and women as well as the recognition of women's rights in every kind of sphere. Indeed, since the most ancient times, females have been considered as inferior to men because of their "flaws" in both the physical and psychical fields. The first question feminists tried to oppose was indeed this same idea of a natural and, thus, inevitable, subordination of women in the society, affirming that this subordinate position was only due to cultural and patriarchal constructions.

In the end, the feminist's critique has also touched various subordinative behaviors put forward by the Catholic Church. Indeed, throughout the decades and centuries, this religious institution has developed many patriarchal and misogynist beliefs about women, especially in building gender inequalities within the Church itself as well as by creating difficulties for women to embrace their own sexual and reproductive life.

To conclude, even though a complete gender equality has not been achieved and accomplished in every single social, economic and political sector, thanks to the achievements of the First Wave of feminists, women have accomplished enormous results in the contemporary era.

CHAPTER IV
THE CONTEMPORARY ERA:
WOMEN'S ENHANCEMENTS AND NEW CHALLENGES

IV.1 WOMEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

Throughout the Modern and Contemporary eras, women have accomplished important and fundamental achievements and the gender gap has progressively decreased. Nowadays, the international society has recognized that human rights do not only apply to men and privileged classes, but also to women, as well as any other long-discriminated and minority community.

However, even though all the accomplishments women have gained, the feminine situation still lacks of various rights and fair entitlements men are already enjoying since a long time; within these, women's conditions of life are still worsened by, for instance, the gender pay gap, sexual harassment, inequalities in working opportunities and advances as well as the unbalances of the sexual and reproductive rights.

The latter ones have been the core of multiple discussions and debates in almost, if not all, each field of human knowledge, starting from medicine and coming to, of course, the religious sphere. Also in this case, as for all the other Chapters of my Thesis, the focus would be on Europe and European women, this time focusing on the differences between Eastern and Western European countries. Lastly, I will also engage in a brief analysis of the Americas, also as a consequence of all the latest events on the US soil.

IV.1.1 Women's new social representations

The Contemporary Era is the one starting from the First World War and that is still going on, in our present day. Across Europe, during the Contemporary Era, the number of women in the formal economy increased. Indeed, census data starting from the beginning of the Contemporary Era clearly indicated a significant rise in women's recorded employment in various European countries such as Russia, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Britain, and a modest rise in France, Spain and, after a drop, in Italy (Simonton, 1998: 182). This advancement was also influenced by the outbreak of both the two World Wars, which forced men to leave their jobs in order to fight for their countries, as well as employing women in factories in order to substitute men and cover the nation's production.

One of the most important changes in women's experience was the contemporary shift in the structure of work. Indeed, during both the First and the Second World War, domestic service underwent a deep decline exacerbated by the situation of conflict, which provided a new way out for women. The impacts of war on social change in general and on women more specifically, have been the core of important debates and discourses during the twentieth

century. Indeed, both during and after the First and Second World War, contemporaries believed a new dawn was breaking for women (Simonton, 1998: 185).

Indeed, during the decades prior to the outbreak of the two World Wars, government policy tended to strengthen prevailing tendencies towards sex differentiations in the working sphere. As a matter of fact, women who were public employees were normally not permitted to earn more than 80 per cent of what a man with the same qualifications would be paid for doing the same job. Moreover, employment opportunities for women were restricted by the demarcation of jobs into two different categories: “men’s work” and “women’s work” as well as for the existence of a marriage bar for public employees and in some areas of private industry (Smith, 1984: 926).

However, the period of the two wars is often regarded and perceived as one of female emancipation (Simonton, 1998: 187); indeed, the female work began to be perceived and conceived as fundamental and vital, at least considering it during the war effort, particularly during the later stages of the conflict (Smith, 1984: 927). With the majority of men at frontiers, women began to replace them into the factories, escaping from their domestic duties, primarily and often exclusively linked to the household and all its related tasks.

The economic emancipation of women was the starting point for the building of the female freedom also in other spheres and areas. During the post-second world war period, new legislations and laws gave women more control over their earning, as well as a better and greater protection at work and pension rights, something completely new for them. Gradually and, unfortunately, slowly, women began to gain equal rights with regard to property, income, divorce, childrearing and domicile. The transformation of women’s conditions was also helped by the fashion factory, which developed new hairlines and hemlines that gave women more physical freedom of action (Simonton, 1998: 187).

Women’s rights and achievements have evolved and advanced, and their conditions, compared to the ones discussed in the First or Third Chapters, are completely different and changed in a positive way. Starting from the most ancient times and developing throughout the centuries, historical cultural factors, for instance the cultural and gender roles’ construction, have led to the hierarchical and exploitative relationship between men and women.

Indeed, throughout the perpetuation and establishment of these ideas, women have been socialized to hold a subservient position in the male dominated society; they have been conditioned to see their existence as an extension of the males around them. Thus, given this situation, women have gradually learn to adopt subservient positions and to fit themselves into

the frame of obedient daughters, sacrificing sisters, ideal housewives and caring mothers (Emmanuel, 2010: 837). In other words, for an extremely long time, women have been regarded just as images of men; women were seen as identities that would complete men, someone that was not able to act alone, following her own ideas and beliefs, but who needed an external person to tell her what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. Along the history of humanity, women's role in society have been considered as secondary and, thus, subsidiary to men.

In this terrifying scenario, feminist intellectuals and activists played a vital role to improve the social status of women. As a result of all the battles feminists have fought throughout the decades, women are now able to assume positions in our communities, schools, workplaces and governments (Emmanuel, 2010: 837).

The starting point of the transformation of the social consideration of women was, once again, the period during the two world wars; indeed, as a consequence of the development of the new mass consumption, there have been deep and fundamental changes in thinking, especially in certain European and American countries, which have proposed new female models, namely the model of the *New Housewife* and the one of the *Emancipated Woman* (Passerini, 1993: 349).

On the one side, the first model, the one of the *New Housewife*, was the replacement of the old *Angel in the House* model, and reflected the contemporary society's view of woman as capable of rationalizing domestic work in the most relevant aspect of this period, such as performance: indeed, woman's housework started to be represented as the complement of man's work outside the home, where the same processes of standardization and parceling take place. Thus, the functioning of the home was assimilated and integrated into the social organization: work inside the household started to be recognized as important and valuable, just as any other job worked outside the house. According to this model, the housewife must be consumer and administrator of the house at the same time. Therefore, she must be also responsible for controlling consumption, which became an activity that required careful organization and planning, including buying on credit and long-term projects. As claimed by the model of the new housewife, the woman was also required to have a certain appearance: starting from the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century, enormously charismatic female images emerged from Hollywood studios, personified by actresses who offered practical lessons in fashion, make-up, and behavior on the big screens (Passerini, 1993: 355). Thus, in comparison with the model of *The Angel in the House*, which portrayed a middle-class wife who achieved perfection by devoting herself to her home and her husband (Gatrell, 2008: 10), whose life completely rotated around satisfying and pleasing others, as if she were not the owner

of any need or will, the model of the *New Housewife* saw the identity of women still articulated in terms of motherhood and marriage but, the new technologies applied to domestic tasks (such as the gas stove, the refrigerator, the heating, the vacuum cleaner) as well as the economic rationalization of the home, provided greater efficiency and speed to the tasks of the housewife who, in turn, could combine her professional career or her extra-domestic social activities with a perfect functioning of the home (Nash, 2004: 54). Thus, women started to be represented more as thinking subjects able to comprehend what it was best for their own family and with the capacity to act in order to achieve this goal, without following the directives of any male figure, represented both by her husband and her father. This model of the *New Housewife* of the twentieth century also entailed a remodeling of the family structure and a reduction in the birth rates as well as an increase in the female salaried work and a certain degree of transformation of gender relations (Nash, 2004: 55).

On the other side, the cited Hollywood actresses who emerged during the twenties and thirties of the last century, have also been defined as precursors of women's demands for independence: indeed, even though the Hollywood technology was characterized by a sexist worldview, it was capable of including the desire for affirmation of many women. Indeed, the second model that emerged in the contemporary era, was the one of the *Emancipated Woman* (Passerini, 1993: 349). Mass culture, born in the United States and then partly projected in Europe thanks to the spread of Hollywood cinema, extended other images of the new emancipated woman. According to this model, the new *Emancipated Woman* was characterized by a high degree of autonomy and freedom, which synthesized a conglomerate of modernizing cultural representations. The new *Emancipated Woman* was a woman who had innovative life projectors, who suggested different images of femininity and who finally contemplated more open social and cultural perspectives not limited by marriage or motherhood. The figures of the Hollywoodian cinema displaced the old canons of feminine aesthetics in society, at least among the youth. In addition, the transformation of fashion and women's clothing played a significant role in the generalization of the figure of the new *Emancipated Woman*, less subject to traditional gender registers. In any case, her extreme rebellion against traditional gender registers was a response to the great weight of gender repression and social conventions of society (Nash, 2004: 57).

IV.1.2 Women's achievements

Starting from the conception and widespread of the archetype of these new models, the one of the *New Housewife* and that of the new *Emancipated Woman*, a new discourse about gender inequalities in the contemporary society was widespread among scholars as well as the society itself. The core question at the basis of this discourse was that, despite the renewal and modernization about the woman's social understanding, the theory of sexual differentiation and the complementarity of gender roles still sustained a strict sexual division of labor and the unappealable construction of the identity of women from motherhood (Nash, 2004: 61).

One of the biggest achievements women had made during the period after the two World Wars, was the accomplishment of the universal suffrage, such as the possibility for all citizens, regardless of their income, gender or social status, to join their right to vote.

The female suffrage was granted only in the twentieth century, after long and struggling battles started by women's movements in the decades before the First World War. Oppositions to this right were based on the belief that women would use the vote to bring about social and political change as well as the idea that if women had a political voice, then the traditional and historical relationship between men and women in the family, in the workplace and in the society more in general would come under threat (Hannam, 2006: 50).

As already stated in the previous Chapter, the First Wave of Feminism focused on making the society recognize that women are humans and not properties of men or, in general, of others, as well as the abolition of all the limits and absence of rights women were subject to since the most ancient times. The first women's suffrage organizations were formed in the 1860s in the United States, in the context of broader political developments. During that period, two national groups were established on the US soil: the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. At the same time, in Britain, women joined working-class men, who were excluded from a property-based franchise, campaigning for political reforms in the late 1860s. Organized movements then spread slowly also in Australia, New Zealand, France, Canada and Scandinavia during the 1880s and 1890s (Hannam, 2006: 52).

Thanks to the work, protests and campaigns *suffragettes* have advanced throughout the decades, women of the Western world began to join the right to vote, starting from those living in the USA and then proceeding with the ones living in Europe. At the European level, the first two countries to recognize women their right to vote were Finland, in 1906, and Norway, in 1913. Starting from these two pioneers, all the other European countries began to grant this

right to their female citizens: Denmark granted it in 1915; Austria in 1918; Germany, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Sweden in 1919; Ireland and the United Kingdom in 1928; Spain in 1931, France and Bulgaria in 1944; Italy, Hungary, Slovenia and Romania in 1945; Belgium in 1948 and, in the end, Greece in 1949 (Hannam, 2006: 55).

Besides the actual grant of female suffrage in each of these European states, another important achievement in this field was the fact that, in 1948, women's right to vote was introduced into the international legislation when the United Nations decided to adopt the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. With this Declaration, all member states of the United Nations, solemnly commit themselves to the brooding omnipresence of universality in the Charter and this same Declaration (Emmanuel, 2010: 844). Indeed, as stated at Article 2 of this Declaration (United Nations, 1948):

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Moreover, Article 21 specifically declares women's right to vote by stating that (United Nations, 1948):

- 1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.*
- 2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.*
- 3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.*

Thus, thanks to the recognition of women as political subjects by granting them their right to vote, they began to have a social weight above their own national governments, raising their voices over questions and matters that had never been considered before.

Another important field which was revolutionized by the operations and battles of women was the workplace one. Indeed, the second-wave feminism, which was built on the first-wave

feminism and which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, the role of women in society was increasingly challenged.

There are various Acts that helped the change of the image of women in the working sphere. The first of these was the *Fair Labor Standards Act* of 1938, a US law that raised the minimum-wage to twenty-five cents in order to protect the health and morals of women and minors (Tait, 1945: 195).

In the 1960s, in the United States, significant steps have been taken in an attempt to end discrimination against women in employment. Indeed, in 1963, the US government approved the Equal Pay Act, a bill that required that where men and women were doing “equal” work in terms of the use of equal skills, efforts and responsibilities as well as their performance under similar working conditions in the same establishment, they must receive equal pay (Moran, 1970: 31). The discourse about the gender wage difference was then furthered by the publication of *The Civil Rights Act* on the next year, on 1964; this bill was not directly addressed to women but, despite this, it had enormous positive consequences on female work. Indeed, Title VII of this Act stated the importance of having an equal employment opportunity: the *Civil Rights Act* prevented discriminations by employers, labor organizations and employment agencies which are prohibited from discriminating on the ground of sex as well as on those of race, color, religion or national origin (*Harvard Law Review*, 1965: 688).

Later, during the 1970s, the focus of the discourse about women’s discrimination in the workplace incorporated another relevant issue: pregnancy. In 1978, indeed, the USA acknowledged another Act, the so-called *Pregnancy Discrimination Action*. This bill amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by clarifying that the Act’s proscription of sex-based employment discrimination included also discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. Thus, the Pregnancy Discrimination Action required that pregnant employees be treated comparably with men (Siegel, 1985: 929).

This discourse above women’s discrimination in the workplace when pregnant was then reinforced by the publishing of the *Family and Medical Leave Act* of 1993. This bill stated that employers had to provide twelve weeks a year of unpaid leave for birth, adoption, foster care, or personal or family illness. Furthermore, bosses also must continue to provide health care coverage during these leaves and restore employees to their jobs or equivalent positions after their return (Scharlach, Grosswald, 1997: 335).

Besides the pioneering work done by the United States, women’s workplace conditions and rights started to be discussed and tackled also within the European countries.

Indeed, in 1951, the *Convention 100* of the International Labor Organization (ILO) directly addressed the problem of the equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value. According to Article 1 of this Convention (Art. 1, Convention No. 100):

Article 1

For the purpose of this Convention —

- (a) the term “remuneration” includes the ordinary, basic or minimum wage or salary and any additional emoluments whatsoever payable directly or indirectly, whether in cash or in kind, by the employer to the worker and arising out of the worker's employment;
- (b) the term “equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value” refers to rates of remuneration established without discrimination based on sex.

Furthermore, according to Article 2 of this same Convention (Art. 2, Convention No. 100):

Article 2

1. Each Member shall, by means appropriate to the methods in operation for determining rates of remuneration, promote and, in so far as is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.
2. This principle may be applied by means of —
 - (a) national laws or regulations;
 - (b) legally established or recognized machinery for wage determination;
 - (c) collective agreements between employers and workers;
 - (d) or a combination of these various means.

The discourse about women’s workplace conditions and rights increasingly developed in the following decades. The principle of equal pay for equal work was included in the Treaty of Rome of 1957, which at Article 119 (1) stated that (Art. 119.1, Treaty of Rome, 1958):

Each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied.

The principle of equality between men and women has then been presented as one of the five founding values of the European Union in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or the Treaty of Lisbon (De Vido, 2018: 150). At the same time, the Charter of Fundamental Rights

of the European Union contains an entire Chapter on equality. Indeed, Article 23 of Chapter III of this Charter states that (Art. 23, CFR, 2000):

Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favor of the under-represented sex.

However, the European Union has not only focused on the drafting and approbation of laws on women's equality, but it also created legal instruments to policies and non-binding acts in order to adopt measures to address different aspects of gender inequality. As a matter of fact, the European Parliament has activated itself to combat violence against women and domestic violence since 1979, when it voted in favor of establishing a Committee on women's rights, namely the EU Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (De Vido, 2018: 151).

Not only the European Parliament, but also the European Council has taken part in the development and enhancement of equality between genders in Europe. First of all, Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights stated the prohibition of discrimination on any ground, including sex. Secondly, Article 1 of the European Social Charter emphasized the importance of equality in matters of employment and occupation. Lastly, in 2013 the Council of Europe also endorsed the Gender Equality Strategy, which included five different strategic goals (De Vido, 2018: 152):

1. Combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
2. Combating violence against women;
3. Guaranteeing equal access of women to justice;
4. Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making;
5. Achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

Thus, to conclude, compared with the previous centuries and decades, women's condition both in the juridical and in the working fields have improved as well as their recognition at a social level. Indeed, nowadays women are considered as subject of the same rights men are enjoying since a long time. Nevertheless, despite all the achievements women have gained throughout the last few centuries, the situation of equality between genders has not, unfortunately, reached every single sphere and field of the social, economic and political life. As a consequence, in the

Contemporary Era, women are still forced to face challenges and disparities compared to the situation of men.

IV.1.3 Women's challenges in the workplace

Despite all the achievements women have gained through the feminist battles during the last decades, theories and abstractions about gender equality and women's statuses do not, unfortunately, represent the actual and true reality of women's conditions. Indeed, even though much has been done and accomplished, women are still facing problems and new challenges every day of their lives. Within these problematics, we can easily find the gender pay gap, occupational differences, the cover of higher positions in businesses and organizations and, finally, maternity issues.

As already discussed before in the previous paragraphs, one of the biggest problems of society is the gender pay gap, such as the difference between men's and women's pay, based on the comparison of the average hourly earnings of all employees. For a long time, women's work has been considered as complementary and, thus, inferior to that of men's; due to this reason, females are paid less to perform the same exact job men do. Virtually every industrialized country has passed laws mandating the equal treatment of women in the labor market. Yet the gender wage gap, while on the decline in many countries, is a persistent feature of virtually every nation's labor market (Blau, Kahn, 2003: 107).

At the basis of the phenomenon of lower earnings of women compared to men, economists have pointed out two primary factors. First of all, the first cause of the gender pay gap lies in the "gender-specific" factors, which relate specifically to differences between women and men, either in their qualifications or how they are treated in the social, economic and political contexts. According to those who advocated the "gender-specific" factors as the main source of gender differentiation in wages, qualification, conjugated in education and experience, was the element that played the most fundamental role. Talking about education, statistics have shown that, in the past, even though women were more likely to graduate from high school than men, they were less likely to go on to college and graduate education. Furthermore, men tended to concentrate in career-oriented fields of study such as engineering, law, medicine and business that led to relatively high earnings; this latter matter is something that is still present in today's educational scenario (Blau, Kahn, 2007: 9). The second factor was considered as the most relevant in the discourse of "gender-specific" factors discriminating

women in the workplace: indeed, work experience proved to be more influential on the gap between women's and men's work remunerations. Traditionally, women moved in and out of the labor market based on family considerations: before World War II, most women left the labor market permanently when they got married and had children. However, after the two wars, a pattern arose whereby older married women returned to the labor market after their children were in school or grown. But in the last few decades, an increasing number of women started staying in the labor force continuously even when they had small children at home (Blau, Kahn, 2007: 10).

Besides qualification, the second factor at the basis of the gender pay gap is linked to discriminatory measures addressed to women such as, for instance, the occupational differences between genders. Indeed, men are more likely to be in blue-collar jobs and to work in mining, construction, or durable manufacturing; on the other side, women are more likely to be in clerical or professional jobs as well as to work in the service industry. To conclude, women face more barriers to enter into certain occupations compared to the facility men have to insert into any occupational field (Blau, Kahn, 2007: 12).

Another problem linked to the workplace sphere is that, as in the past, women are still much less likely to be in positions of power in the workplace than are men. Of course, these sexual differences in power in the work setting recently have been found to be an important factor generating inequality in earnings between men and women (Wolf, Fligstein, 1979: 236).

First of all, census data indicate that women are much less likely to be in major occupation group, such as managers and administrators. Secondly, although women are highly represented in certain professional occupations such as nurse, social worker, school teacher, librarian, men are overrepresented in the higher level positions within these same professions: this means that even in the sectors of the labor force where women predominate, men tend to be in supervisory roles (Wolf, Fligstein, 1979: 237).

In Europe, the lack of women in high positions as well as authority positions is an enormous problem. Having women in higher-ranking positions is extremely important for a nation, because these females become role models for other women. Through their status, they can show what women can achieve and that it is possible for them to follow their chosen careers. This is an important point because most women in managerial positions are working in traditionally male spheres with male-oriented norms that define what constitutes "leadership qualities" (Holst, 2006: 123). Thus, the lack of female figures in high positions also limits the

development of norms and practices that differ from the current ones, led by masculine and patriarchal views.

Finally, one of the biggest problems women have to face when entering the working world is that their potential for maternity often affects their workplace opportunity. Indeed, even though legislation has given women more control over their earnings, better protection at work, pension rights, equal rights of property, income, divorce, childrearing and domicile, fundamental shifts in attitudes and practices were far slower. In the patriarchal Contemporary Era, domesticity as well as the household and the family continue to be considered as prerogatives for women, things that have to come first to anything else (Simonton, 1998: 187).

Thus, women still continue to be seen as the supporting columns of their family and this, in turn, means that they are considered as the only responsible for their family's health, progress and wellbeing. The problem of identifying women with housework and rising standards of domestic care means that, in many cases, their possibility to affirm themselves in the working and social sphere, since they always have to think and take care of other people, such as their partner and their children.

This still contemporary view of women as the pillars of the family and the household thus reflects a penalizing factor for women's true emancipation and their possibility to fully enjoy their willingness, rights and freedom.

IV.1.4 Women and the Catholic Church in the Contemporary Era

Within all these troubles and concerns, I want to highlight and deepen one of the biggest challenges women are still facing today, that is the females' difficulty in fully enhancing their reproductive rights. Reproductive rights include the legal right to contraception, abortion, fertility treatment, reproductive health and full and true access to information about one's reproductive body. Many of the limitations to these women's rights come from the patriarchal and misogynist society in which females live; however, part of the discrimination women are forced to experience in regards to their reproductive sphere of life comes from the Catholic Church's teachings and traditional beliefs, handed down from century to century.

The Roman Catholic Church has always had a problem with women's reproductive rights, due to the Christian assumptions about gender and sexuality. Indeed, the foundational thinker to Latin Christianity, Saint Augustine, in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, established certain assumptions which are still plaguing Catholicism and its institution, the

Catholic Church. In addition to the traditional view of women as subordinated human beings, since only men represented the appropriate image of God, of rationality and of spirituality, St. Augustine's view of females was complicated by his attitude towards sex and reproduction. According to him, in the original state of innocence, humans would have procreated without concupiscence or sexual pleasure; however, the fall into sin had distorted human sexuality, making every sexual act become concupiscent. This means that, according to Augustine, every single sexual act is objectively sinful, although it is forgiven or allowed within marriage for the sake of producing children. However, even sex within marriage, if it is not practiced for reproductive purposes, it is considered sinful or "mere fornication" (Radford Ruether, 2008: 185). Thus, being Eve, a woman, the author of the sin and fall of man, this means that women and women only are considered the cause of sinfulness and the only temptresses into sexual sin.

This Catholic view is linked to the first reproductive issue linked to women in the context of the Catholic Church: the legal right to contraception. Indeed, this Catholic view mentioned before makes any form of birth control considered as sinful (Radford Ruether, 2008: 185).

For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church has always expressed itself against the implementation and ratification of the laws permitting women of being under birth control. In June 1963, Giovanni Battista Montini became Pope Paul VI. In October 1965, this new Pope spoke before the United Nations and referred to birth control as "irrational". Moreover, on 25 July, 1968, he issued his birth control encyclical, the so-called *Humanae Vitae* (Baker, 1970, 145). According to this encyclical, marriage has three different purposes: love, unity and openness to life; thus, marriage, conjugal love, the meaning of sex and the procreation of children are at the basis of marriage. Moreover, it also highlighted that, according to God's moral law, it is not permitted to directly interrupt the life already begun as well as to willfully procure an abortion; it is not permitted the sterilization, either temporarily or permanently, of both men and women; finally, it is not permitted to use artificial means to render the sexual act sterile (Baker, 1970, 146).

Thus, by publishing this encyclical against the laws on birth control, what Pope Paul VI did was to condemn the use birth control, as it is a temporal way of sterilization of the woman's body; the use of the condom, since it is an artificial way to sterilize the sexual act; finally, it condemned the practice of abortion.

The discourse about the Catholic Church's attitude towards women's legal right to contraception is linked to its view of abortion. Indeed, as already stated in the Third Chapter, the early Christian community's teaching on abortion developed in a context where two commands of the Old Testament were considered as fundamental: the first one was the one of loving God with all your heart while the second one was the one of loving your neighbor as yourself. In summary, these two commands represented the self-sacrifice of Jesus, which had to be projected in everyone's life by following the maximum that a person had to sacrifice his or her own life for another (Noonan, 1967: 88).

Following this path, the Catholic Church has always seen itself in opposition to the legalization of abortion, limiting women's rights in this field. Indeed, in 1588, Sixtus V's Bull made the penalties for homicide and abortion identical, regardless of the age of the fetus. Even though this decision was then dismantled by the next Pope, Gregory XIV, who repealed the penalties except those applying to the ensouled fetus, fostered an absolute prohibition on abortion developed in the Church (Campbell, 1980: 373).

Another way in which the Catholic Church discriminates women is through its abolition of any fertility treatment. According to the Church's view, *in vitro* fertilization processes and practices are to be condemned because they do not represent the natural, and thus orthodox, way of procreation. This Catholic belief is strictly linked to its traditional view and control of family, sexuality and fertility (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2018: 981). However, this Catholic view limits women who suffer from infertile issues to become mothers and to join their freedom and right of maternity.

All these limitations put forward by a patriarchal and misogynist society as well as the Catholic Church's activity itself had enormous consequences not only on women's access to their reproductive rights but also to their reproductive health, since they since they do not have the full and true access to information about one's reproductive body. Thus, since sex and reproduction have always been considered as taboo issues by the Church, the society has developed little attention to education about sex and reproduction, limiting women's reproductive rights.

IV.2 THE INFLUENCE OF THE NEW CONSERVATIVE WAVES IN THE WESTERN WORLD ON WOMEN

New conservative waves in the political scenario of various Western countries, thus both on the European and on the American soils, are starting to threaten, one again, all the rights and achievements women have enhanced throughout the last decades.

In this concluding part of my Thesis, I will focus on the comparison of different Western areas of the world, also highlighting how a more or a less engagement of the Catholic Church in the social, economic and political spheres of some of these countries has led to different levels and protection of women's rights and entitlements.

IV.2.1 The European Union

The European Union is represented as a normative power, that is it considers itself as the main protector and exporter of universal human rights and democracy inside and outside Europe. Within all the fundamental rights it supports, the European Union also fosters the implementation of gender equality as one of its foundational norms, advancing gender equality laws and policies. Indeed, under international and European human rights law, women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are regarded as human rights and they are conceived as a vital aspect in order to achieve gender equality. Thus, what the state members of the European Union demand the Council of Europe to enhance the respect and protection of women's sexual and reproductive human rights by ratifying international treaties like, for instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). By ratifying these documents, it means that all the European Union's member states are obliged to comply with these standards by providing all women with accessible, affordable and good quality sexual and reproductive health care, services, education and protection.

However, over the past decade, the European Union has been facing overlapping and ongoing crises due to the social and political effects of the 2008 economic breakdown, which has provoked changes not only in the economic sphere but, of course, also in the political and social ones. Indeed, one of the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis was the suspension, in the following years, of the discourse and policies about the issue of gender equality as a social and political goal, in order to focus on the recovery and stabilization of the economic problems inside the member states (Vida, 2019: 13).

As a consequence of the de-democratization of the European Union's issues, the member states of the organization have turned away from the EU's social-democratic tradition.

As a result, a lot of EU member states have witnessed the rise of conservative populist right-wing movements inside their nations. These are, very often, anti-gender movements united by a common goal: the mobilization against the so-called “gender ideology” across and beyond Europe. In the view of these movements, being against the “gender ideology” means to support the opposition to progressive women’s and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and all the other LGBTQ members’ rights as well as the scholarship deconstructing essentialist and naturalistic assumptions about gender and sexuality.

These movements are the responsible for the propagation and mobilization of hate by framing progressive ideas about gender values, human rights and equality as a threat to those actors and institutions whose traditional position and identity become challenged by the transformative goals of feminist politics and the gender equality project (Vida, 2019: 14).

Anti-gender movements are emerging across Europe both in democratically and well-developed Western European countries, such as France, Germany, Austria and Italy, as well as in post-socialist countries, such as Hungary and Poland, where the economic crises are coupled with weaker democratic structures.

IV.2.2 Eastern Europe

As already stated before, some areas of the Eastern Europe, are more affected by these new conservative waves. Indeed, in 1989, throughout nearly all of Eastern Europe, revolutions put an end to the forty-five years of communist subjection. As a consequence of these revolutions, a new journey toward freedom began and religion played a significant role. In most of these countries, the Catholic Church, the one available channel for dissidence, served as the catalyst that would eventually make the whole communist system crumble (Gagnere, 1993: 859).

In this passage, I will especially focus on Hungary and Poland and the situations women are forced to interface in these countries.

In 1989, the fall of the Communist Party in Hungary and the subsequent extreme rejection of the previous political and social structure meant that there was no left-wing political force still active. In regards to women, the shift from a right-wing to a left-wing government did not mean a transition to a more open access to political and social rights: indeed, also in this new context, words like solidarity and equality were still not really accepted (Adamik, 1991: 166).

All the crises faced by the European Union since 2008 made Hungary, as a post-socialist country, to develop more strong and powerful conservative right-wing positions. In 2010, the coalition created by the conservative right-wing Fidesz and the Christian Democratic Party took power in the country and, since then, the Hungarian government has been fostering nationalist and conservative ideas about the family to attack women's sex and reproductive human rights as well as minorities' rights (Vida, 2019: 14).

Since the beginnings of its operations, the new government sought to limit women's rights, including their entitlements above their sexual and reproductive rights. Indeed, in 2012, the new government amended the Hungarian Constitution by including a sentence on the protection of the fetus from the time of conception, by stating that: "Everyone has the right to life and human dignity, the life of the fetus is protected from conception". In addition to this amendment, the government also issued, in the same year, a new Family Protection Act, which reinforced the previous amendment by adding a new heteronormative conception of marriage, which implied that the school curriculum should prepare children for later family life.

Moreover, in the last few years, the government has launched the new national consultation on the protection of the family and children in order to boost the birth rate and to further promote heteronormative and conservative ideas on the family. This consultation asked the nation to be parents and encouraged young Hungarian women to leave their workplace in order to be full-time mothers with the promise of eliminating taxes for mothers with four or more children, also assuring a reduction of mortgage and car payments, introducing new loans for families and increasing day care places.

Thus, the Hungarian government's political agenda on sexual and reproductive rights of women is influenced by nationalism and conservative ideas. Hungarian women are primarily seen as wives and mothers, regarded as reproductive citizens of the nation against the demographic deficit of the country and in favor of the traditional Christian family values (Vida, 2019: 15).

The second Eastern European country that I want to analyze is Poland, one of the most Catholic nations of all Europe. This Polish religiousness is one, along with others, of the causes of the nation's backwardness in the field of female rights.

Also in the context of Poland, the systemic transition of 1989 was of particular importance because this year marked the nation's entry into the European Union as well as the growing influence of the Catholic Church in Polish politics during the following years. In this context of transition, various issues appeared on the public scene, which concerned many areas

including the medical, moral and legal spheres, but also the concept of citizenship, the nation, the state and the role of the Catholic Church in the Polish state. Indeed, the Catholic Church's sphere of influence and the weight of its moral guidelines on politics, on laws and on the lives of ordinary people (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2018: 980).

The situation women are living in Poland is ridiculous: the word "feminism" is, of course, linked to bad connotations being, for a long time, mocked in the Polish mass media, something that it is still going on in the present day. In general, the emancipation of women is seen and it is associated with the overthrow of the regime and many are advocating for a return to the old values, to the national and religious traditions. In this context, a model of the perfect Polish woman has developed in the country: she is a victimized, self-sacrificing woman devoted to her family and her homeland, who doesn't know her own happiness or pleasure, indeed who was taught that she has no right to be happy as an independent individual, but only in relation to others, namely her family and her husband in particular. The actual problem is that this feeling is deeply imprinted on the minds of many women (Jankoswa, 1991: 175).

The Catholic Church still has a fundamental role and influence on the sexual and reproductive rights of women. Indeed, the government gave over some ministries to Church control. For instance, the Ministry of Education was one such department ceded to the Church. Moreover, sex education was removed from the school curriculum and it was replaced by the introduction of religious education (Gudorf, 1995: 104).

The Catholic Church has also a great influence in new and contemporary social questions like, for instance, the debate about in vitro fertilization. Indeed, in 2010, Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, an important player on the spiritual and political scene in Poland, stated that "Life born from a test tube is the result of manipulation, and is not the work of nature. Love is not confessed at a store counter. [...] The development of nonorganic methods of conception can lead to a future, in which we will order children with specific traits. [...] They will be like the creators of Frankenstein. What else is the literary imagining of Frankenstein, a creature called to life in spite of nature, if not the blueprint for in vitro? This is a gruesome perspective, but it exists. [...] Couples who decide on in vitro prefer to buy a child rather than adopt one. They don't want an adoptive child because they desire "their own" child. This is the logic of commodities, not that of gifts." (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2018: 979). Thus, it is clear how the Catholic Church still has a powerful voice in political and social issues as well as how it still strongly influences the gender inequalities in the Polish nation.

Thus, to conclude, it is obvious how various Eastern European countries, especially Hungary and Poland, the two most Catholic nations in this area, are strongly subjugated by the Catholic Church's thinking and belief; this can be clearly seen in the implementation of human rights, especially those of women, which are highly limited by this religious ideology.

IV.2.3 The United States

Finally, due to the recent circumstances, I want to underline the influence the new conservative waves that have developed on the United States' soil in the last few years.

The abolition of the federal right to abortion was regarded as a certainty by reproductive rights advocates with the Donald Trump's accession to the presidency. However, at the beginning of his mandate, nothing seemed to change: the gradual erosion to abortion rights was felt mostly by people who were already living in poor conditions, further victimized by racism. However, everything changed with the *Dobbs* decision discussing a Mississippi law that effectively banned abortion. It holds that *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision establishing a federal right to a first-trimester abortion, was wrongly decided. Moreover, this draft is far more radical because it holds that this case was part of a wrongly decided chain of decisions on the right to privacy, dating back to *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965. These decisions and principles also established the right to privacy in all senses including the right to sexual privacy, same sex marriage and contraception (Compton, Greer, 2022: 1).

On 24 June 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, abolishing the landmark decision that established a constitutional right to abortion before fetal viability. Since this day, half of Americans do not longer fully possess human rights to health and bodily integrity (Gostin, Reingold, 2022: 1). It seems unbelievable and grotesque, but it is reality.

The consequences of this decision will be enormously damaging for all citizens of the United States, not only for women who, of course, are the primary victims of this ban. It has been estimated that, being the USA a country with a maternal mortality rate that is outrageously high compared with peer nations, the maternal mortality will increase by over 20% now that bans on abortion are in place. Moreover, by banning the right to abortion, women with low incomes are now forced to choose between paying to travel to get an abortion versus adding another child to their lives, worsening their poverty in both cases (Compton, Greer, 2022: 1).

In response to this decision, many have tried to highlight other problematic consequences that will develop in the states that decided to apply this ban. Indeed, by banning abortion, people will not stop trying to do it, it only changes the way people will manage it.

Indeed, abortion restrictions drive women and girls toward unsafe abortions resulting in complications, even death. The American women that have lost their right to abortion now are forced to travel to states that permit abortions or access abortion medication through the internet or other sources. However, many will be unable to access safe, legal abortion due to economic reasons, and they may resort to unsafe, clandestine abortions without expert medical oversight (Gostin, Reingold, 2022: 1).

The Supreme Court's decision does not only limit to the ban of abortion, but of course it also applies harsh penalties on abortion providers as well as to "aids or abets" an abortion, including a maximum penalty in Texas of life imprisonment and 10-15 years in 11 other states. These threats of prosecution will undermine health professionals' ability to provide safe, evidence based care and may even discourage them from treating pregnancy loss, with devastating consequences for public health (Gostin, Reingold, 2022: 1).

To conclude, with the application of this ban, the United States, once a world leader in human rights, is now perpetrating violations of these reproductive rights. This decision poses a major threat to women's rights to health, bodily integrity and equality (Gostin, Reingold, 2022: 1).

IV.3 CHAPTER'S CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this fourth and last Chapter was, one again, on Western women's condition, this time concentrating on the Contemporary Era, the one we are all living today.

During the last decades, starting from the period after the two World Wars, women have both been the recipients of many enhancements and achievements in respect to their rights in all spheres, such as the economic, political and social ones. Indeed, for instance, nowadays the majority of the states in the world foster gender equality laws, which require both women and men to live under the same conditions, trying to combating the gender stereotypes and sexism, the violence against women, the enhancement of a balanced participation of women and men in both the political and public decision-making, as well as the support of an equal payment and salary for both sexes.

However, in various cases, the practice differs from the theory. Indeed, today women are still facing many challenges, especially in the workplace as well as in respect of their reproductive rights. Indeed, talking about the first aspect, women are still disadvantaged in the workplace because of many reasons: the gender pay gap, the occupational differences, the cover of higher positions in businesses and organizations and, finally, maternity issues.

On the other side, focusing on their reproductive rights, women are now suffering various discriminations in this sector, such as the legal right to contraception, abortion, fertility treatment, reproductive health and full and true access to information about one's reproductive body. Part of these limitations come from the patriarchal and misogynist society in which females live; however, on the other hand, part of the discrimination women are forced to experience in regards to their reproductive sphere of life comes from the Catholic Church's teachings and traditional beliefs, handed down from century to century. The Catholic Church, indeed, has always expressed itself against the abortion practices, as well as in vitro fertilization mechanisms and every single way in which procreation can be stopped.

New conservative waves in the political sphere of many Western countries, including the Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the United States itself, are highlighting how the reproductive rights of women are being undermined. Indeed, especially in strongly Catholic's nations such as Hungary and Poland, women's sexual and reproductive rights are threatened by the introduction of laws and limitations to the right of abortion, fertility and maternity. On the other side, the phenomenon of limiting the reproductive rights of women has also come to the United States, once the advocate of liberalism on all fronts, especially the individual's right of

freedom in every aspect of his or her life. However, by applying the ban on abortion, the USA are now proving their conservative turn as well.

In the next decades, women and girls will be forced to face new challenges and limitations, not only in the workplace or in their political sphere of rights, but especially in regards to their sexual and reproductive rights. Once again, women will have to fight in order to re-gain control over their bodies and over the decisions they could make about their bodies, something that should be managed by the individual itself, but which is now at the dependencies of outsiders and, in the majority of cases, of men.

CONCLUSION

At the end of my Thesis, I want to summarize the outcome of my analysis on the condition and lifestyle of women, starting from the Early Modern Age and coming to the Contemporary Era.

The Early Modern Age was inherently a religious period in which there was no sphere of life where religion was irrelevant. Indeed, in Europe, the Catholic religion was the most accepted source of knowledge, which explained every single phenomenon, from the natural to the social ones. As such, between others, the Catholic religion also justified social hierarchies: the gender inequality supported by the Church was founded on two Biblical episodes: the one of the Genesis and the one of the Fall.

Thus, as seen throughout the first Chapter of this Thesis, Christianity and its institution *par excellence*, the Catholic Church in Europe, have operated as factors of discrimination during the Early Modern period. Indeed, in addition to perpetuating the idea of the blaming of women stated in the Sacred Scriptures, the Catholic Church also became the spokesperson of the historical and traditional discourse supporting the inferior qualities of women, both their physical-sexual weakness and their moral-intellectual one. Women were also considered as less owners of firmness, both physical and moral, as people with lack of decision; moreover, the weakness of her body and of her willingness, the lack of control of her passions, her easier predisposition to madness and mental illness made the woman in need to be protected during her entire life, because she was not capable of dominating her life and, of course, that of others.

As a consequence of both the consideration of women as the cause of the decline and the difficulties men have been relegated to during their lives on Earth as well as their inferiority because of their lack of intelligence, self-control, control of her passions and so on and so forth, women's lives during the Early Modern Age in Europe were characterized by strong discriminations in the social, economic and political spheres.

However, during the Early Modern Age, not only the Catholic Church acted as a discriminatory factor in regards to women in the social, economic and political spheres, but it also influenced the creation of a distorted narrative and ideology about witchcraft and the role women had in this activity. During the early modern period, the Church fomented the witch hunt which resulted in the creation of an actual internal war against women, with the institutionalization of the use of the Tribunal of the Inquisition.

Indeed, during the Early Modern Age, the Catholic Church made itself the pioneer in the fight and internecine war against witchcraft. In fact, what the Church wanted the most was to impose itself as the only source of wisdom and knowledge of the time, wiping away and Christianizing all other beliefs, particularly the Ancient Roman and pagan ones. In order to achieve this aim, the Church condemned every ritual, faith and ancient tradition including witchcraft.

During the Early Modern period, with the development of an actual war against the Devil and its followers, the witches, an invaluable number of women were persecuted, condemned and then burned at the stake. For centuries, women had to live on a razor's edge because, for any and less predictable reason, they could be persecuted and then killed, just because thought and assumed they had sold their soul to the Devil, receiving hideous and terrible powers in order to cause damage on the environment and, of course, on other human beings.

Thus, the historical discourse about women's inferiority and then, throughout the centuries, the work of the Catholic Church, have led to the horrible preconceptions and prejudices about women, about their sinful soul and, in general, about their inferiority compared to men.

The Modern Era can clearly and confidently be described as the age of revolutions for Europe; starting from the Scientific Revolution, on which grounds was developed the Industrial Revolution, culminating with the French Revolution. Women participated actively to all these new and exciting scenarios; however, their contribution, even though it was fundamental, was not rewarded as females had hoped. Indeed, even though women started working in new specific and more complex fields, they were still considered as second-level workers, inferior to men; and even though French women had fought by the side of men during the Revolution of 1789, they were not granted the same rights men achieved after this struggle.

However, even if these negative outcomes, thanks to all the changes developed in the Modern Era, new ideas began to spread throughout all Europe, especially above women: the first feminist ideas, such as all those ideas that recognize in an explicit way that women are subordinate to men and seek to address imbalances of power between the sexes, started to proliferate and expand above the European female population. Women began to be more aware of their value but, especially, of all the injustices that they had to be victims of in the traditional patriarchal European society.

As a consequence of this realization, during the eighteenth century women started to gather together in a movement called Feminism. This movement called for equality between men and women as well as the recognition of women's rights in every kind of sphere. Indeed, since the most ancient times, females have been considered as inferior to men because of their "flaws" in both the physical and psychical fields. The first question feminists tried to oppose was indeed this same idea of a natural and, thus, inevitable, subordination of women in the society, affirming that this subordinate position was only due to cultural and patriarchal constructions.

In the end, the feminist's critique has also touched various subordinative behaviors put forward by the Catholic Church. Indeed, throughout the decades and centuries, this religious institution has developed many patriarchal and misogynist beliefs about women, especially in building gender inequalities within the Church itself as well as by creating difficulties for women to embrace their own sexual and reproductive life.

Finally, during the last decades, starting from the period after the two World Wars, , women have both been the recipients of many enhancements and achievements in respect to their rights in all spheres, such as the economic, political and social ones. Indeed, for instance, nowadays the majority of the states in the world foster gender equality laws, which require both women and men to live under the same conditions, trying to combating the gender stereotypes and sexism, the violence against women, the enhancement of a balanced participation of women and men in both the political and public decision-making, as well as the support of an equal payment and salary for both sexes.

However, new waves of conservatism in various Western areas of the world are posing new challenges to women, especially in the workplace as well as in respect of their reproductive rights. Indeed, talking about the first aspect, women are still disadvantaged in the workplace because of many reasons: the gender pay gap, the occupational differences, the cover of higher positions in businesses and organizations and, finally, maternity issues.

On the other side, focusing on their reproductive rights, women are now suffering various discriminations in this sector, such as the legal right to contraception, abortion, fertility treatment, reproductive health and full and true access to information about one's reproductive body. Part of these limitations come from the patriarchal and misogynist society in which females live; however, on the other hand, part of the discrimination women are forced to experience in regards to their reproductive sphere of life comes from the Catholic Church's teachings and traditional beliefs, handed down from century to century. The Catholic Church,

indeed, has always expressed itself against the abortion practices, as well as in vitro fertilization mechanisms and every single way in which procreation can be stopped.

To conclude, in the next decades, women and girls will be forced to face new challenges and limitations, not only in the workplace or in their political sphere of rights, but especially in regards to their sexual and reproductive rights. Women, once again, will have to fight in order to re-gain control over their bodies and over the decisions they could make about their bodies, something that should be managed by the individual itself, but which is now at the dependencies of outsiders and, in the majority of cases, of men.

RIASSUNTO

L'influenza della Chiesa Cattolica sulle condizioni e stili di vita delle donne in Europa Analisi storica a partire della Prima Età Moderna

Il presente elaborato ha come scopo l'analisi e lo studio delle condizioni a cui le donne sono state sottoposte e delle quali sono ancora tutt'ora vittime. Alla base di questa discriminazione vi è la forte influenza svolta da parte di una società internazionale caratterizzata dal patriarcato e dalla misoginia.

Ovviamente, la storia dell'inferiorità e della subordinazione delle donne all'uomo non è un fenomeno esclusivamente occidentale e moderno; la questione ha radici molto più profonde e complesse, che possono essere rintracciate già dai primi secoli della storia dell'umanità e che intercorrono in ogni singolo territorio, in ogni singola società. Dopo aver dichiarato la realtà e complessità dei fatti, voglio però precisare che questo mio elaborato si soffermerà sull'analisi e sullo studio delle condizioni di vita delle donne occidentali ed europee. Inoltre, tra i molteplici fattori che hanno e stanno ancora influenzando la diversità tra generi e la subordinazione della donna nei confronti dell'uomo, ho deciso di soffermarmi soprattutto sull'influenza che la Chiesa Cattolica e i suoi principi, le sue tradizioni e le sue credenze hanno avuto nel fomentare questa situazione di inferiorità femminile nel corso dei secoli.

Quindi, nella stesura di questo elaborato mi sono focalizzata sullo stretto legame esistente tra tutte le discriminazioni e ingiustizie sofferte dalle donne europee per secoli e la propagazione e sostegno di insegnamenti cattolici fortemente patriarcali e misogini, a partire dalla Prima Età Moderna e concludendo con la situazione attuale dell'Epoca Contemporanea.

Durante la Prima Età Moderna, le condizioni delle donne erano fortemente influenzate dalla dottrina cristiana, la quale si basava su dei concetti ben precisi nei confronti della popolazione femminile. La donna, infatti, era rappresentata come l'incarnazione di Eva in terra. Ciò significava che, visto che la Chiesa Cattolica basava e tutt'ora basa la propria conoscenza e sapienza su quanto riportato all'interno delle Sacre Scritture, la donna era inevitabilmente considerata come peccatrice e inferiore all'uomo. Questa immagine della donna peccatrice si basava soprattutto sull'interpretazione di due passaggi fondamentali della Bibbia, rispettivamente l'episodio della Genesi e quello del Peccato Originale. Nell'episodio della Genesi, le Sacre Scritture narrano la nascita dell'uomo e della donna: dopo aver creato l'universo, Dio decise di creare l'uomo, Adamo, a sua immagine e somiglianza. Dopo aver creato l'uomo dalla polvere della terra, Dio si accorse di quanto Adamo fosse infelice e, per

questo motivo, decise di prendere una delle sue costole e formare la donna. In questo passo è quindi contenuta, secondo la Chiesa Cattolica, la motivazione dell'inferiorità femminile rispetto all'uomo: in primo luogo, solamente l'uomo è stato creato a immagine e somiglianza di Dio, mentre la donna a immagine dell'uomo; secondariamente, Eva nacque dalla costola di Adamo, un osso curvo, indice di imperfezione. Dall'altra parte, il secondo passo evangelico che, secondo la tradizione cristiana, confermerebbe la subordinazione femminile è l'episodio del Peccato Originale: secondo i Vangeli, Eva disobbedì a Dio, tentata dal Diavolo sotto forma di serpente, e mangiò il frutto proibito che cresceva sull'albero della conoscenza del bene e del male. A sua volta, Eva tentò Adamo, il quale mangiò anch'esso il frutto proibito. A seguito di questo tradimento, Dio decise di espellere sia Eva che Adamo dal Giardino dell'Eden, il Paradiso. Dunque, da ciò che si deduce da questo episodio, Eva e, di conseguenza, tutte le donne sulla terra, iniziò ad essere rappresentata come la causa di tutti i mali e delle sfortune dell'uomo, nonché figura peccatrice e tentatrice.

Molti scrittori e pensatori cristiani hanno perpetuato questo pensiero come Sant'Agostino nel 400 D.C. circa o Tommaso D'Aquino nel tredicesimo secolo, fino ad arrivare all'epoca Prima Epoca Moderna, dove tale ideologia venne rinforzata dall'elaborazione di modelli cattolici di educazione e di vita femminili. In tutti questi modelli, le ragazze e le donne venivano rappresentate come entità sottomesse all'uomo, prima al padre e poi al marito dopo il matrimonio; la loro educazione consisteva nello studio e nella pratica di discipline in preparazione della loro futura vita da madri e spose obbedienti e devote al soddisfacimento delle volontà delle figure maschili all'interno della loro vita. Oltre all'educazione, i principi cristiani regnavano anche nella sfera della sessualità femminile: essendo le donne l'incarnazione terrena di Eva, esse rappresentavano una continua tentazione per l'uomo e, per questo motivo, dovevano essere rilate all'interno della casa, senza poter uscire se non con il permesso di una figura maschile o per andare in Chiesa.

Tuttavia, la donna, secondo lo storico e tradizionale discorso iniziato sin dai tempi più antichi con Aristotele e inglobato e successivamente perpetuato dalla Chiesa Cattolica, era anche rappresentata come un essere inferiore all'uomo per via delle sue "naturali disabilità", le quali comprendevano la considerazione della donna come una creatura non in grado di autogovernarsi per via del suo temperamento impulsivo, dispettoso, compassionevole, incline alle lacrime, geloso, lamentoso, bugiardo e ingannevole. Dunque le donne non potevano godere di nessun diritto legale e giuridico, poiché naturalmente prive delle capacità necessarie al conseguimento di questi diritti.

Oltre alla sfera sociale, educativa e giuridica, le donne erano considerate come inferiori anche nella sfera economica: il loro lavoro era prettamente legato alla casa e al mantenimento della famiglia; potevano svolgere lavori al di fuori della casa stessa ma solo perché complementari a quelli dell'uomo, l'unico in grado di poter sostenere economicamente la sua famiglia.

Tuttavia, durante la Prima Età Moderna, non solo la Chiesa Cattolica agì come fattore discriminatorio nei confronti delle donne nella sfera sociale, economica e politica, ma l'istituzione cattolica influenzò anche la creazione di una narrativa e un'ideologia distorte sulla stregoneria e sul ruolo delle donne in questa attività. In questo periodo, la Chiesa fomentò la caccia alle streghe, la quale sfociò successivamente nella creazione di una vera e propria guerra interna contro le donne, con l'istituzionalizzazione dell'uso del Tribunale dell'Inquisizione.

La credenza nella malvagità della stregoneria e la conseguente caccia alle streghe durante la Prima Età Moderna fu la manifestazione della miseria del tempo: l'uomo, ancora incapace di domare la natura, trovò nel regno del soprannaturale una spiegazione per tutti quei fenomeni catastrofici avvenuti durante la Prima Età Moderna: epidemie, cattivo raccolto, morti inspiegabili, sventure; tutto ciò era collegato all'azione del Diavolo nel mondo. In questo fertilissimo terreno legato a queste tetre narrazioni, l'incontro tra l'idea storica e tradizionale della donna e delle sue naturali incapacità e difetti rispetto all'uomo, il cambiamento repentino dello scenario climatico e naturale dell'epoca, nonché la nascita di una imperfetta rivoluzione medica, furono alla base delle vere cause dell'inasprimento della tolleranza alla stregoneria, sfociata in un vero e proprio scoppio di una guerra contro coloro che erano considerate le artefici di tutti questi mali, le streghe.

Mediante la pubblicazione di ciò che viene considerata "La Bibbia del cacciatore di streghe", il *Malleus Maleficarum*, ad opera di due frati domenicani, Henrich Kramen e Jacob Sprenger, vennero elencate le tre ragioni che portavano le donne a intraprendere il sentiero della stregoneria in un modo più facile degli uomini: in primo luogo, le donne mostravano una credulità molto maggiore rispetto agli uomini, cosa che Satana conosce perfettamente quando si rivolge principalmente a loro. In secondo luogo, le donne sono anche naturalmente più impressionabili e quindi più malleabili dalle lusinghe del diavolo. Infine, le donne sono molto loquaci e non possono evitare di parlarsi e di trasmettere la loro conoscenza dell'arte della magia. Pertanto, la loro debolezza le costringe a usare quei segreti per vendicarsi degli uomini attraverso maledizioni e pratiche malvagie.

L'ideologia cristiana, però, non si fece solo artefice della propagazione di un'idea distorta della donna, ma la sua istituzione, la Chiesa Cattolica, si investì anche del ruolo di esecutrice stessa di queste entità, mediante l'utilizzo del Tribunale dell'Inquisizione, un tribunale ecclesiastico con il quale i chierici condannarono migliaia di donne al rogo perché, essendo considerate streghe, esse dovevano pagare per questo loro crimine spirituale.

Per secoli, quindi, le donne hanno dovuto vivere sul filo del rasoio poiché, per qualsiasi e meno prevedibile motivo, potevano essere perseguitate e poi uccise perché considerate streghe. Quindi, lo storico discorso sull'inferiorità delle donne e successivamente, nel corso dei secoli, l'opera della Chiesa Cattolica, hanno fomentato la perpetuazione di orribili preconcetti e pregiudizi sulle donne, sulla loro anima peccaminosa e, in generale, sulla loro inferiorità rispetto agli uomini.

I profondissimi cambiamenti strutturali dell'Epoca Moderna, ovvero la Rivoluzione Scientifica, la Rivoluzione Industriale e la Rivoluzione Francese, non trasformarono solo l'assetto della società in generale, ma mutarono soprattutto la mentalità femminile: per la prima volta, le donne iniziarono a sperimentare un nuovo stile di vita, più moderno e progressivo, e cominciarono ad acquisire maggiore coscienza e consapevolezza di se stesse come individui indipendenti, slegate dalle figure maschili a cui erano state sottomesse sin dalla nascita. Grazie allo scoppio di questi eventi storici, nuove idee si diffusero in tutta Europa, soprattutto tra le donne: per la prima volta, la popolazione femminile iniziò a considerarsi uguale alla controparte maschile, sia nel campo del lavoro – come lavoratrici – ma anche in quello giuridico, come cittadine. Così, per la prima volta, le donne cercavano la possibilità di poter spezzare i legami economici e simbolici di dipendenza che le legavano al padre prima e al marito poi.

Il movimento femminista chiedeva l'uguaglianza tra uomini e donne e il riconoscimento dei diritti delle donne in ogni tipo di sfera. Fin dai tempi più antichi, infatti, le donne sono state considerate inferiori agli uomini secondo la convinzione che esse fossero “difettose” sia in campo fisico che psichico. Durante la Prima Ondata del Femminismo, le donne, spinte da questo nuovo sentimento di consapevolezza della propria inferiorità nei confronti degli uomini, iniziarono a tentare di sovvertire la visione tradizionale e patriarcale della società. La popolazione femminile cercò di smantellare antiche e consolidate credenze che “dimostravano” la subordinazione femminile lottando per il raggiungimento dei propri diritti e per una più equa e giusta considerazione e rispetto nella società. Una delle prime rivendicazioni mosse dalle femministe fu proprio l'opposizione all'idea di inferiorità naturale e, di conseguenza, l'inevitabile subordinazione delle donne all'interno della società, affermando che questa

posizione subordinata era dovuta solo ed esclusivamente a costruzioni culturali e patriarcali, non a delle reali carenze nella figura femminile.

Infine, la critica femminista durante la Prima Ondata toccò anche diversi comportamenti subordinanti avanzati dalla Chiesa Cattolica. In effetti, nel corso dei decenni e dei secoli, questa istituzione religiosa aveva sviluppato molte convinzioni patriarcali e misogine sulle donne, fomentando le disuguaglianze di genere all'interno della Chiesa stessa e creando difficoltà per le donne ad abbracciare la propria vita sessuale e riproduttiva. Infatti, tra i fattori discriminanti individuati durante la Prima Ondata del Femminismo, le donne iniziarono fortemente a criticare la criminalizzazione dell'aborto da parte della Chiesa Cattolica, sfociata poi in un totale divieto da parte dell'istituzione. Ciò che le femministe rivendicavano alla Chiesa era il suo totale divieto di tale attività, considerato immorale nei confronti dei diritti del feto; il movimento femminista, invece, si concentrava maggiormente sui diritti della donna stessa.

Infine, nell'ultimo capitolo della mia Tesi, mi sono soffermata sulla situazione contemporanea vissuta dalle donne, sempre nell'ambito Occidentale ed Europeo e sempre considerando la Chiesa Cattolica come uno dei principali attori che ha influenzato l'inferiorità femminile.

Sia durante l'era moderna ma soprattutto in quella contemporanea, le donne hanno ottenuto risultati importanti e fondamentali e il divario di genere è progressivamente diminuito. Oggigiorno la maggior parte degli Stati nel mondo promuove leggi sulla parità di genere, che richiedono a donne e uomini di vivere nelle stesse condizioni, cercando di combattere gli stereotipi di genere e il sessismo, la violenza contro le donne, il rafforzamento di una partecipazione equilibrata di donne e uomini al processo decisionale sia politico che pubblico, nonché il sostegno di una parità di retribuzione per entrambi i sessi.

Tuttavia, in vari casi, la pratica differisce dalla teoria. Infatti, nonostante tutti i traguardi ottenuti dalle donne, la figura femminile è ancora priva di vari diritti e della piena uguaglianza con l'uomo. In primo luogo, le donne devono ancora affrontare moltissime sfide sul posto di lavoro poiché esse sono ancora svantaggiate a causa di molteplici ragioni: il divario retributivo di genere, le differenze occupazionali, la copertura di posizioni meno alte nelle imprese e nelle organizzazioni e, infine, la maternità.

In aggiunta, le donne sono tutt'ora ancora discriminate nei confronti dei loro diritti riproduttivi, come per esempio nel caso delle limitazioni al diritto legale alla contraccezione, all'aborto, al trattamento della fertilità, alla salute riproduttiva e al pieno e vero accesso alle informazioni sul proprio corpo. Parte di queste limitazioni provengono dalla società patriarcale e misogina in cui le donne sono sempre cresciute e vissute; tuttavia, d'altro lato, parte delle

discriminazioni che le donne sono costrette a subire in merito alla loro sfera di vita riproduttiva deriva dagli insegnamenti e dalle credenze tradizionali della Chiesa Cattolica, tramandate di secolo in secolo. La Chiesa, infatti, si è sempre espressa contro le pratiche dell'aborto, così come i meccanismi di fecondazione in vitro e ogni singolo modo in cui si può fermare la procreazione.

Nuove ondate conservatrici nella sfera politica di molti paesi occidentali, tra cui l'Europa sia occidentale che orientale, nonché gli stessi Stati Uniti, stanno evidenziando come i diritti riproduttivi delle donne siano messi nuovamente a dura prova. Infatti, soprattutto in nazioni fortemente cattoliche come l'Ungheria e la Polonia, i diritti sessuali e riproduttivi delle donne sono minacciati dall'introduzione di leggi e limitazioni al diritto all'aborto, alla fertilità e alla maternità. Tuttavia, il fenomeno della limitazione dei diritti riproduttivi delle donne è arrivato anche negli Stati Uniti, un tempo lo stato fautore del liberalismo su tutti i fronti, in particolare nei confronti del diritto alla libertà dell'individuo in ogni aspetto della sua vita. Tuttavia, applicando il divieto all'aborto, anche gli Stati Uniti stanno dimostrando la loro svolta conservatrice.

Nei prossimi decenni, donne e ragazze saranno costrette ad affrontare nuove sfide e limitazioni, non solo sul posto di lavoro o nella sfera politica, ma soprattutto per quanto riguarda i loro diritti sessuali e riproduttivi. Ancora una volta, le donne dovranno lottare per riprendersi il controllo del proprio corpo e delle decisioni che potrebbero essere prese sulla loro persona; l'indipendenza ed emancipazione guadagnate dalle donne durante le loro lotte e sconfitte degli ultimi decenni, stanno tornando a essere fortemente minacciate da parte di estranei e, nella maggior parte dei casi, da parte di uomini.

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