



# Introduction

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In a global context marked by democratic crises, the resurgence of authoritarianism, growing social inequalities, and identity-based polarizations, political sociology is called upon to renew its interpretative categories and deeply question the dynamics that structure power asymmetries between individuals, social groups, and institutions. The idea of founding a new scientific journal stems from the urgency to create a space for critical reflection on these issues, an arena for scholarly production that deeply explores the connections between power relations, ideological constructions, and the transformations of democracy from a gender perspective.

Gender, ideologies, and democracy are three interrelated conceptual axes that, when examined with rigorous tools, allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which inequalities are consolidated or transformed. Gender issues are central to deconstructing the architectures of power and critically analyzing the mechanisms that legitimize norms, roles, and hierarchies. Ideologies are not merely worldviews; they act as structuring devices of beliefs, institutional practices, and subjectivities. Democracy, finally, is considered not as a fixed concept, but as a contested process, continually redefined through struggles for recognition, representation, and equality.

Gender, understood as a social and political construct, is not seen here as a niche topic, but rather as a privileged field of symbolic production and thus a valuable analytical key to understanding the production and reproduction of inequality and social order. One of the main goals is to foster dialogue among scholars, researchers, activists, and professionals who share an interest in investigating power rela-

tions, locally, nationally, and globally. In this light, **Power asymmetries** aims to become a reference point for analysing the forms, rhetoric, and practices of power, with particular attention to its symbolic, discursive, and material dimensions.

The journal welcomes empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions, also with an interdisciplinary approach, and seeks to promote both scientific rigour and the social relevance of academic research.

This first monographic issue aims to offer a collective reflection on power asymmetries related to gender, with a particular focus on their representation in institutional, media, and legal contexts. The five contributions presented provide a critical reading of the forms of legitimization and reproduction of the unequal power relations between women and men that represent the basis for gender-based violence and, more broadly speaking, for systemic inequality. In particular, they analyze the cultural, discursive, and symbolic narratives that operate in often implicit but deeply rooted ways within contemporary social structures.

Male violence against women, recognized as a violation of human rights by the Istanbul Convention, is the central theme around which the articles in this volume revolve. Starting from the understanding that such violence is not an episodic event but a structural phenomenon, the contributions explore how it is narrated, represented, and regulated in the public sphere. What emerges is a complex and multifaceted picture, in which the cultural and symbolic dimension of violence plays a role as decisive as the material one.

The essay by Flaminia Saccà and Maddalena Carbonari analyzes how Italian newspapers represented gender-based violence cases from 2020 to 2023, drawing on a broad corpus of over 28,000 articles published by 16 national dailies. The study, conducted within the PRIN 2020 project entitled *Stereotype and prejudice: the social representation of gender-based violence and counter-strategies ten years after the Istanbul Convention*, and part of the activities of the STEP Observatory, highlights the recurring use of stereotypical narrative frames and a tendency to minimize male responsibility through rhetorical strategies of victim-blaming and the shifting of accountability. The adoption of the category of *himpathy*, coined by philosopher Kate Manne, helps to focus on the perverse dynamic that transfers empathy from the victim to the perpetrator, thereby reinforcing power imbalances even within journalistic storytelling.

Closely related to this theme is the contribution by Luca Massidda and Fabrizia Pasciuto, which addresses the legal representation of violence against women through the analysis of 348 rulings issued by the Court of Tivoli between 2020 and 2022. The Tivoli court is presented as a virtuous example of best practices in judicial handling of male violence against women. The rulings are notable for their legal language, which rejects sexist stereotypes, clearly assigns responsibility to the perpetrator, and fully recognizes the victim's status. The essay offers an important reflection on the performative function of legal discourse and its role in shaping (or dismantling) socially shared narratives. One of the most innovative aspects of this analysis is the possibility of transferring virtuous legal discursive models to the media sphere.

The third article, by Rosalba Belmonte and Lucia Pelle, focuses on a widely publicized news case: the gang rapes in Caivano. Through a critical analysis of media coverage, the essay shows how the public narrative of the event erased the gender dimension, opting instead for a securitarian interpretation centred on the "deviance of the peripheries." Social marginality is used as a narrative device to explain the violence, producing a collective displacement of responsibility that obscures the patriarchal matrix of the crime. The contribution underscores the need to reintroduce a gendered lens in journalistic accounts of violence to avoid naturalizing and rendering invisible its structural causes.

The monographic issue concludes with two articles that shift the focus from the narrative to the institutional and political dimension. The first, based on qualitative research, analyses the role of Anti-Violence Centres (CAV) and LGBTQ+ Anti-Discrimination Centres (CAD), with particular attention to the centre in Reggio Calabria. The study highlights best practices in prevention, education, and awareness-raising, showing how these centres can serve as essential community-based resources in combating gender-based violence and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, even in complex territorial contexts.

Finally, the last essay explores the relationship between gender rhetoric and the communication strategies of the Italian radical right, with specific reference to the 2022 electoral campaign and the political program of Fratelli d'Italia and Giorgia Meloni's public discourse. The article shows how gender-related themes (violence, LGBTQ+ rights, affective education, ecc.) are used strategically, often with regressive and normative intent, to reinforce a conservative and nationalist identity project.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue construct a critical dialogue on the ways in which gender intersects with power, public narrative, and institutions. They offer theoretical and empirical tools to better understand persistent gender inequalities and to imagine alternative forms of representation, justice, and democratic participation.