

Last September 2020, I was asked to prepare a speech for the event “The Economy of Francesco” regarding the first chapter of *Fratelli Tutti*, “Dark Cloud over a closed world,” highlighting women’s perspectives about it. After analysing the first chapter, I realised how obscure, blurred, and sorrowful my analyses could be. However, a woman’s perspective made it hope-giving. Why? Because a woman’s perspective can clear out dark clouds from the world.

In his new encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), the Holy Father calls the world to a universal aspiration of fraternity, in which brothers and sisters colour our common home with the richness of their own beliefs and convictions. But before illustrating the aspiration of a just unity, the Holy Father dedicated the first chapter to the analysis of today’s issues created by “dark clouds,” because if we want to create a just and inclusive world, we have to face its obstacles.

As a member of the Women for Economy village of The Economy of Francesco community, I present an analysis of the first chapter of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* from a feminine perspective, pointing out the injustices that women are still facing around the world. The aim of this paper is to show how some female traits can help to restore our world from the individualism created by the dark clouds. Firstly, I analyse the sufferings and discriminations women encounter even today, pointing out how female traits can actually restore the balance of the world. Then, I focus on the labour discrimination against women and on the skill set that can make the workplace more interpersonally oriented.

Women’s Abnegations all over the World

21st Century: an era of progression, innovation, and all-out efforts to build a digitalized world to simplify living. And yet, an era in which a dark cloud hinders the development of universal fraternity to enhance individualism in the societies. An era where the words democracy, freedom, justice, or unity are constantly used to justify any action and thus become meaningless tags (FT, 2020:14).

As the Holy Father writes, “We are more alone than ever in an increasingly massified world that promotes individual interest and weakens the communitarian dimension of life” (FT, 2020:18). In this

world, there are reductive anthropological visions and a profit-based economy that disregards human beings who supposedly do not create fast-paced profits and/or are not worthy of any human rights. Among those penalised human beings are women.

There are many discriminations against women and one of them is female genital mutilation. Writing from a so-called developed country, it would be inconceivable to think about this discrimination as a present issue. However, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020) “at least 200 million women and girls, aged 15–49 years, have undergone female genital mutilation in 31 countries where the practice is concentrated”, without forgetting that there are nations where “female genital mutilations are almost universal with 9 in 10 girls and women who have been cut”.

Even more widespread are instances of abusive and violent relationships where most of the time women are the victims. This phenomenon has worsened so much that “by September 2020, 48 countries had integrated prevention and response to violence against women and girls into COVID-19 response plans, and 121 countries had adopted measures to strengthen services for women survivors of violence during the global crisis” (UNPD, 2020). On many occasions, Pope Francis strongly appealed to priests to collaborate more with the victims. To this point, Mazza (2019) signals out how these violent situations can change if every Christians, not only priests, feels obliged to pay attention and to welcome the victims’ stories.

One of the greatest challenges that modern society presents to young women is the career and family dichotomy. After years of studying and working, the majority of women have to abandon their work or switch to part-time. In Italy, mothers between 25 and 54 who take care of small children or dependent relatives have an employment rate of 57%, compared to 89.3% of fathers (Finazza, 2019). The main paradox is that a mother possesses the transformational leadership

skills to lead a company but lacks the opportunities to put them into practice. As Donnini (2020) remarks in her book, “women need to be supported, above all because mothers’ contributions are essential for the ability to think for complex systems”. This issue will be addressed in a later section of this paper.

Even though the Holy Father emphasizes the fact that all over the world men and women do not have the same dignity and identical rights (FT 2020, 23), there are several criticisms to statements like his, even inside the Church. Conservative entities tend to reject terms like “women’s emancipation” and “women’s empowerment” due to their early foundations associated with very radical feminism theories, and accuse women’s emancipation as causes of decreasing fertility rate, avoidance of getting married, and increasing number of separations. A strong objection to these conservative entities comes from Saint John Paul II (1995) who underlined those cultural conditionings that for centuries have shaped ways of thinking and acting, thus leading to the acknowledgment and misrepresentation of women’s dignity and prerogatives. This position is echoed by Pope Francis (2015) who tries to overcome the innumerable resistances that oppose a real gender transformation, declaring that “many believe that the changes that have occurred in these last decades were put in motion by the emancipation of women. But even this argument is invalid, it’s false, it isn’t true! It is a form of male chauvinism, which always seeks to dominate women”. At the same time, the Holy Father recognised that some ramifications of feminism theories tend to have arguable developments. On the other hand, he states that “we must nonetheless see in the women’s movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women” (2016).

Our history is founded on women’s abnegation, and this abnegation “has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity” (Francis 2015). We are heirs of a masculine tradition in all the subjects, where women

How Women’s Traits Are Going to Dissolve the Dark Clouds over the World

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abandoned, or were asked to abandon, their characteristics to comply with men's needs and perspectives. In contrast, the introduction of women's perspectives can enrich masculine vision. The sum of both perspectives, including their differences, can be an important asset to create, united by diversity, future generations.

Women's Talents for a Better World

Without falling into the stereotypes trap in which there are expectations for women and men to comply with the female and male tendencies and actions that are commensurate with their social roles (Skelly – Johnson 2011), what are those feminine characteristics that can help reduce individualism?

By discriminating against women, the world is depriving itself of the sensibilities and nurturing emotions that women have by nature. Empathy and solidarity, for instance, lead people to listen carefully to injustice. These features have been studied broadly. Scientifically, the Christov-Moore et al. (2019) study shows that “female brains differ from males’ by having higher activation in a sensory area of the brain associated with pain than their male counterparts”.

A strong and deep argument to enhance women's traits was explained by Pope Francis (2019), according to whom women have the irreplaceable contribution of building a fair world: “Women make the world beautiful, they protect it and keep it alive” and “Peace, then, is born of women, it arises and is rekindled by the tenderness of mothers. Thus the dream of peace becomes a reality when we look towards women”. Concluding “If we take to heart the importance of the future, if we dream of a future peace, we need to give space to women.” (Francis 2019).

There are many psychological, behavioural, organisational, and social studies that may support the caring and giving features of women, but simpler and more extraordinary is the newness demonstrated by Jesus Christ regarding women. He moved away from the functional role of women (exclusively in the home) and showed much more appreciation for Mary's interest to sit at His feet and listen to His word (Lc 10:38-42), which in Israel was a privilege reserved for males. “To put it in contemporary terms, in this short episode Jesus frees women from their gender assignment [...] What he says is an explicit refiguration

of female emancipation” (Pedotti 2020, 124). Jesus cared about women so much that He wanted to reward them for their loyalty and love by letting them announce His Resurrection, the same task as angels.

Women's Interpersonal-Oriented Leadership

Moving specifically into the working field, in some parts of the world, the role of women in the professional environment has been improving. However, as previously stated, the dichotomy between family and career is still very strong, resulting in the paradox of a woman with the potential to exercise excellent skills at work, but who is often reduced to make very little use of her abilities by habits and environments that neither recognise nor encourage her growth (Vitullo – Zezza 2014). As a result, according to the latest studies in Social Science Research (2020), women have been penalized with lower wages and lower benefits.

Fallouts have hit women even more during the pandemic from the point of view of livelihood and employment. In fact, women have had to re-organize their routine according to homeschooling and householding care with the risk of mental breakdowns. Moreover, it has been assessed that females lose jobs 19 % more often than males, because women are disproportionately represented in sectors negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis, such as hospitality and food service, tourism, and art and recreation (Madgavkar et al. 2020). A sad scenario has occurred in Italy where, according to up-to-date Italian statistics, out of 100 jobs lost, 98% are women's (ISTAT 2021).

The tragic effects of the pandemic towards women and minorities in their workplace, however, is juxtaposed to outstanding results in female national leadership regarding the management of the COVID-19 crisis. According to the Garikipati and Kambhampati (2020) recent study, “female leaders reacted more quickly and decisively in the face of potential fatalities” resulting in “significantly lower numbers of deaths in their countries”. Their results come from caring and nurturing features of the leaders in which the attitudes to risk and empathy mattered, as did clear and decisive communication.

Nonetheless, a thorough analysis of the most effective measures to manage the pandemic crisis requires a very com-

plex intersection of factors and long-term consequences.

Overall, evidence suggests that leadership styles were somewhat gender stereotypic, with men likely to lead in a ‘task-oriented’ style and women in an ‘interpersonally-oriented’ manner. A woman's leadership gives power, instead of dominating; she inspires and leads her followers to enrich their abilities; she aims to create bonds and to take care of the others (Vitullo – Zezza 2020). Therefore, even though it is difficult to evaluate exactly to what extent gender affects how people lead, “The fact that men and women differ in perception, communication, self-efficacy, attitude towards success, relationships, and morale is unquestionable” (Gorska 2017).

The President of the Foundation for Labor Consultants Studies states that «Women make a significant contribution to employment in terms of qualification and competence,» specifying that in the intellectual professions 54% are women (Consulenti del lavoro 2020). Nonetheless, still today the so-called developed countries seem to not understand the importance of women at work and women's discrimination persists at all levels. For instance, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) reports that “across five regions, 82 % of women parliamentarians reported having experienced some form of psychological violence while serving their terms”. Specifically, 44% of them received various forms of discrimination from their male colleagues.

The Holy Father says that an economy that favours productive diversity and business creativity needs to be promoted. So why don't we restructure the working organisations so that women can grow professionally and at the same time raise their family? Why don't we restructure the working organisations so men can spend more time with their children instead of leaving all the childrearing to mothers? The Holy Father urges «to affirm the irreplaceable role of women in the family and in the education of children, as well as the essential contribution of working women to the construction of economic and political structures rich in humanity” by identifying “concrete suggestions and positive models to harmonize work commitments and family needs, in the context of today's dichotomy between family life and work organization” (Radio Vaticana 2015).



Final Statement

“We live in a world that is largely deaf” (FT 2020, 48) and judging by the statistics regarding discrimination against women in society and in their workplaces, it seems that women are quite unheard. And so, to enhance the dignity of women in the workplaces, “we need to develop the grace of complementarity between man and woman, so that, by working together, they can complement each other” (Ricatti 2021). Women are not stating to be better than men, as well as men should not state to be better than women. Women want to support an interdependency and complementary fraternity with men. Similarly, women want to be heard and to underline the still existing inequalities in society.

The change regarding gender inequalities is one of the topics proudly carried on by The Economy of Francesco community through its commitment n. 12:

“Economic organizations and civil institutions do not rest until female workers have the same opportunities as male workers because, without an adequate presence of female talent, businesses and workplaces are not fully and authentically human and happy places” (The Economy of Francesco 2020).

Young men and women of The Economy of Francesco are working to concretely develop proposals to raise awareness on this issue and to overcome the gender gap in working places.

To conclude, a lot of work needs to be done together to fight discrimination, not only against women, but against all human beings. In the spirit of Saint Francis (FT 2020, 49), we all should open our ears, activate our hands, and act, inspired by the hope of a more fair, just, and inclusive world.

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NOTE

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