

Review of books

Sartori, M. G. (2010). *Dalla psicologia sociale ai diritti umani. Scritti 1985-2009 [From social psychology to human rights. writings 1985-2009]. Roma: Armando Editore.*

Femininity: from mythology to modernity by Marta Codato¹

In her fascinating book *From Social Psychology to Human Rights. Writings 1985-2009*, Maria Gabriella Sartori confronts many issues from a psychoanalytic, psycho-social and political perspective, including the difficulty of female affirmation within a patriarchal society, which has defeated the matriarchy and is characterized by a schizophrenic split between activity and passivity, male and female, *nous* (mind) and *soma* (body).

Sartori leads the reader along an adventurous path of knowledge, open to the future and, in the meantime, deeply rooted in ancient mythology, through various symbols that have the power to connect the person in the here and now to the human community of origins.

It emerges how woman, mythologically represented by the moon, who conditions the sea, fertility and the cycle of the seasons, must be able to make her own peculiar voice heard, in order to harmoniously intertwine with the masculine one, giving rise to a fruitful and nourishing collaboration for society. In the myth of Adam and Eve it is really the voice of Eve which induces the man to dare to undertake the challenge of knowledge, symbolically represented by the serpent, whose beneficent venom involves the transgression of the Laws of the Father, in exchange for the assumption of a new "skin".

Overcoming the resistance to change, often embodied at the family level, is a necessary condition for the development of self and society as a whole. As the author states, biting into the inviting apple of the tree of knowledge

¹ Ph.D in Pedagogical, Educational and Training Sciences. Social Psychology lecturer and Research Fellow at the Department of Applied Psychology of Padua 8 Venezia street, 35131 Padua, Italy. Tel.: 0498276646. Email: marta.codato@unipd.it.

implies the courage to face the strong sense of guilt and deep fear of death linked to desire and the disobedience of traditions. Galileo, Copernicus and many others have paid with their lives for such courage.

Sartori focuses on how fear of change leads to a halt in childhood and hence a lethal regression, highlighting how necessary it is to break away from the family of origin, to mourn the separation from the object in order to give life to creative responses and innovatory combinations between elements of the real. In symbiosis, nothing is created when one is completely saturated by the family. In fact one starts to destroy...one's own life and that of others, as in the case of drug-addicts, of whom Sartori – who was a group psychologist within the therapeutic community of Treviso – narrates the life-stories, from an involving psychoanalytic point of view. The beginning of a group therapy, for many of these people, represented the access to a path of meaning in terms of their complex experiences.

The ability to give sense to suffering fragments of life, personal and collective, often in advance of social understanding, is typical of the artist. Among the artists cited by Sartori the passionate Frida Khalo emerges who, in a famous painting (the two Fridas, 1939), depicts the threefold abuse suffered: of a sexual type, during childhood; of a type inflicted by life, in the bus accident that maimed her; through the work of her beloved Diego Rivera who betrayed her in general and cheated on her with her sister.

Frida transforms and transcends her own suffering through works of art, amongst which the *Self-Portrait of Tehuana, or Diego in my thoughts* (1943) stands out, in which she appears dressed as a Tehuana. Frida and Diego loved the Tehuana, those strong, dignified Mexican women, who expressed their freedom by working a lot and by taking loving care of their children.

Sartori observes how women of today often do not manifest this freedom at all and eventually fall ill from the continuous effort to respond to multiple social pressures. They tirelessly strive to be beautiful, to be good mothers and to establish themselves in the workplace, to the cost of their own psychosomatic health.

It is a portrait of a multifaceted woman that is put forward by Sartori, concretely outlined by multiple social, work and family activities that take shape thanks to her contribution. The ambivalence characterized by the two opposite poles of “passivity” and “change” underlies this multifacetedness. Passivity concerns the social will to place women inside roles and stereotypes derived from the patriarchal culture. Change has to do with the production of evolutions and modifications in reality, starting from feminine feeling. This implies the feminine ability, even in suffering, to narrate and talk about oneself, reaching the depths of feelings and intentions that drive one's own life and that of others. This ability to penetrate the human being, this invisible –“lunar” – strength, which strongly influences the surrounding environment, will allow woman to return to her origins, becoming what she really is and not what one would like her to be.