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The volume on “Washing up Ladies” is a bold step of empathy, self-reflection and reaction to given relations and frames of power and authority between the genders in modern-era society. Despite declarations to the opposite, the frames (economic, social, educational, cultural and political) that determine relations between the genders, the rights and society’s expectations from man and woman remain patriarchic, in the sense that biological differences are outfitted with social meaning that restricts the role and place of woman compared to that of man.

Such a rationalization of differences against women rests on the propagation of the stereotype that women being biologically different by nature, are also destined to assume different roles, and specifically those of the wife and mother and, why not, that of the sex object.

They must therefore leave the other professional, vocational and greater social roles to men and, consequently, to “subscribe” to the terms and criteria for the evaluation of their value, as these were proposed in the historic evolution of societies through the one dominant gender-defined culture whose models bear the characteristics of male identity. This dominant culture wants women to be “judged” with criteria that are mostly based on appearances, are sexist, emotional, relate to charity and social work, to those sectors, that is, that were accorded to them, as the most fitting for the role that they “must” play in an, as a norm, paternalistically structured society.

In holding that patriarchal relations are structural ones, we mean that they are inherent in institutions and social practices in society and cannot be explained by being simplified with reference to the intentions of particular individuals. They are more relations of authority and power which are manifested by, but also established in, the prevailing practices, for example with respect to promotions, scholarships, working hours, as well as the rhetoric of the Mass Media, the different programs, plans, notices and manifestos and in all representations of every form of art and communication.

The deconstruction of such representations brings to light forms of social organization whose effects are evident in all sectors of human activity and which are established as naturalization processes, become acceptable and no longer sound strange. Thus, for example, it is considered natural for a woman-mother to abandon any plans she may have made regarding a job, education or careers, as it is evident from official statistics across Europe and Cyprus, where the percentage of women employed decreases while they have children, contrary to what happens with men. Furthermore, the largest unemployment percentage in women is observed in the 25-54 age group, while poverty is also of the feminine gender and is cemented on the practice for women-mothers to be financially dependent on the man. The non reconciliation of employment and life-long learning with family and the structures that force mothers to a sole role in the house, limit women’s capacity to be further educated and stake their claims, as is demonstrated by statistics that

show that women over 40 participate in training and education programs at a percentage three times smaller than that of men.

At the same time the much-publicized standard of man-master, who must have the first and overbearing role in public political and social life, contributes to the increase of incidents of all kinds of violence in a tolerant society, the European one, but also specifically in Cypriot society which has one of the lowest percentages of convictions for violence against women, despite the fact that such cases have more than doubled in the last decade. Hence, the issue of equality is not only an issue for society, but also for the state which may proceed with regulation, every time it is so compelled by the European Union, but which remains impassive to issues, not just regarding isonomy, but also regarding actual equality, as is demonstrated by the non-recognition of matrilinear refugees in a European country in the 21st century.

The issue of the oppression of man himself, who must behave based on the stereotypes of a violent, aggressive standard, exhibiting superiority complexes against women, is also an opportune gender issue, since the victimizer finds himself enclosed in stereotype perceptions for a given role which, on many occasions, are as oppressive. However, this dimension must not suppress the dominating, against women, behaviors in a society whose frameworks, as well as its perceptions, marginalize women in the decision making centers, the Media, the academic institutions, the research centers, the political rostrums, but also the private and family life, where she is deemed good only when working for everybody else, and from where she finds herself in prison, for family debts, after the dissolution of her marriage.

Through various theories on gender relations, changes of terminology for the deconstruction of linguistic stereotypes and the different meanings of the terms and the language we use, such as, for example, the differences in the content of the terms woman-man, female and male and the relations they imply, we end up in the self as a social structure which is continuously shaped and reconfigured, with language serving as the dominant tool. From Freud to Lacan, from Derrida and Cixous to Julia Kristeva, to cite but a few, the terms of the construction of the social identity and roles, that perpetuate the negative discrimination between the sexes, are constantly being sought and interpreted.

Washing-Up Ladies travel together on these quests and fight through Art to wash away the ideas that want the relations of dependence and power against women to drag on. They make a statement with their artistic representations in "*Sorry to burst your bubble but gender issues still unresolved*" (2010), aiming to transcend negative stereotypes against women and to break the structures that reproduce them, through the symbolism of the bursting of pink balloons-bubbles by the girl's high heels stepping on them. They convey messages deconstructing the established profile of the composed woman that longs for equality: they practice self-sarcasm, promote the negative standards and impugn with the act of its destruction. Their art is not a protestation but a Happening with multiple symbolisms.

The UNESCO chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at the University of Cyprus contributes with this publication to the promotion of the ideas and actions by the Washing-Up Ladies art group of Cyprus, thus fulfilling the key objectives of their activities.



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