

Let's talk about work with Barbara Leda Kenny

I am Barbara Leda Kenny. I am a gender expert for Fondazione Brodolini. I also coordinated gender issues web magazine that it's called in genere.it (in genere.it in Italian) and I'm based in Rome.

What do the data tell us about the employment situation of women? Why is there still no equality?

In Italy, the labor market is still very unfair for women. We are celebrating the most women employed in Italian history, and we're still talking about just a little bit more than one of every two women that are in the labor market. So our employment rate, it's still very low, but that's not the only problem.

We have a problem of quantity, but we also have a problem of quality. So the conditions in which women work in Italy are of low quality and they have worse contracts. They have involuntary part-time jobs.

And I think the core problem it's care. We still have a structure of the family of welfare that relies on women's unpaid work for caring for family members, elderly persons, children, and also persons that are not self-sufficient.

So I think that's the paradigm that we should change if we want to achieve equality. We have to rethink care in order to change the labor market.

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In which field are women most employed?

Women in Italy work mostly in fields that we can relate to care. So if we look at the stem field, we will find them in medicine, in biology.

If we look at a education, services. So we have what we call a vertical segregation and we also have an horizontal segregation. So we have fields that are women dominated and in those fields women are not leading but men are leading.

In fields that are women dominated salaries are lower. and working conditions are worst.

How unequal is the proportion of men and women in positions of power?

I don't know exactly the statistics, but we do know that power is still a male um prerogative, whether is the government or the economic power or the cultural power, the top positions are still a male domain.

And that has changed a little bit over the time, but has changed slowly. And we have also seen that since let's say we have a far right government, positions are retrenching. So, we are losing power.

Why are you so passionate about this field?

I self-declared myself as a feminist when I was 13 years old.

And I come from um a traditional family and my grandmother asked me to clean the kitchen with her at at the same time, she told my two male brothers that they could go and play games. And I got very very upset.

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I locked myself out of the kitchen saying that I was on strike and that I was a feminist and was not going to do any job my brothers weren't supposed to do. So um I don't know.

It was um I think an inner an inner will for justice in in the first place for myself, but then I met the feminist movement and it became my life.

I think it's it's a struggle for justice but it's also acting acting in collective dimension where I really enjoy about seeking for justice through feminism.

What is the biggest challenge facing feminism today?

For a long time whenever somebody asked me about the women's condition, I would answer we have never been better and not only related to formal achievements like rights or power.

But related also to how we think think about ourselves, the freedom that we experience in deciding for ourselves.

And I think to a certain extent that it's still true, but we are facing times of I wouldn't even say backlash, but this uprise of the far right in several places of the world and the aggression towards rights, policies, funding and all the the tools and the achievements that we made towards gender equality really worries me in this moment.

We've seen American women dropping out the labor market. We are seeing in Italy how the government implements policies only for mothers.

We are seeing how the far right it's working for achieving and an economic and social model where women stay at home and the public sphere it's just for men and and that it's really starting to worry me.

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What will be the biggest challenge for feminism tomorrow?

I think that we um have as main challenge to preserve our knowledge and our institutions and uh really uh receive Because when the far right rules, we often speak about polarization, but they are determining the also the the agenda and the discursive fields in which we move and I think that they shift everybody towards the right.

So to maintain um our vision we will need resistance skills. We will need to defend our knowledge and our institutions and try to be as independent as we can.

Three names of women who, in your opinion, have made feminist history.

Um When I, I mean, I don't know if I can name three feminists because I think that when you define yourself as a feminist, you choose your feminist, let's call them mothers even if it's not the proper or the the word I would choose.

But um It can be women that you met in your life. It can be women of your family that led by example. It could be thinkers sometimes, you know, it's a book that changes your view.

So, um as feminism is global and there are so many feminists around the world, I wouldn't like to name three three persons, but instead I think I would like to acknowledge the fact that for example Argentinian feminists with non una ni una menos non una di meno in Italian had you know accesso la miccia with in Italian had like spark feminism throughout the world in a global movement or that Polish women are like giving us the example on how to resist the far right.

So let's say let's acknowledge feminist movements and also I think it's very interesting to see the uprising of feminist economics throughout the world thinking about an alternative to uh the capitalist model. So yes, I will say this three things.

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Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't asked you about?

Yes, there is one thing I would like to add.

Uh, I think that we have an amazing opportunity of linking, sharing, and getting to know each other through platforms virtually, but I also like to remember that it's so important What we can achieve in changes in our relationships.

So our bodies matter and it's important that our family's politics is rooted also in our bodies and in real life relationships. Thank you.

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