



## Liberté, égalité, laïcité Gender issues in the actual Romanian society

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### Abstract:

*In 21th century, in Romania, we live in a decadent patriarchal system, haunted by medieval beliefs and superstitions as well as by the demons of a rough capitalism: the consumerism and the harsh and often dishonest competitive confrontations. The uncertain status that the laicism has in this country - with a fragile and young democracy - makes possible the occurrence of a series of discriminations and abuses towards different categories of people: women, non believers, atheists, homosexuals etc. By this article I discuss various types of pressures, abuses and discriminations that certain people are submitted to in a cultural environment deeply influenced by traditional and religious views and also predisposed to certainties and totalitarian convictions. The Romanian society hasn't come to achieve a culture of diversity and it doesn't seem to be open in this respect either. Unfortunately, the type of problems I discuss in this paper, cannot be solved but in a context wherein the public consciousness accepts the laicism as rational encounter-space between everyone and everyone, as quintessence of democracy and of the ethics of the human rights. The first question that worth to be arisen is: might a country, with a strong cultural sense of tradition and with prevalent conservatory values, turn into a laic society, ever? It's obvious that most laic societies descend from powerful multinational and multiethnic cultures (excepting the case of the Scandinavian cultures). **The diversity of references, customs and values is the one that generated the laic spirit and not the laic spirit was the generator of diversity.** All those societies (most of them postcolonial) have been supposed to assimilate a plurality of religions, faiths, beliefs, customs and cultural models. This is a serious problem in the case of Romania, because we didn't come across this type of plurality. It's not a hazard that the nations the most predisposed to dictatorships and the most prone to produce (even on a*

*democratic path and by democratic means) totalitarian systems \*(of all kind) are, usually, nations with a unitary population that embraces a single religious cult and a small variance of values and moral views. Most contemporary dictatorships exist in such countries and cultures.*

*Taking in account the parameters of the problem, I will discuss the critical elements, of cultural and religious provenience, that conserve and perpetuate misogynist and sexist mentalities in Romania. On the other hand, I don't have a clear vision of a possible way out of this problem, because, as we know, it never occurred so far a sudden mutation or a moral revolution (that can be understood as axiological evolution) in the collective consciousness of a very homogenous population from a traditional society. Why would question or try to conceive in relative terms its own values a community satisfied with its convictions and customs and rules? Like in the paradox of the Baron von Munchausen, it's not possible to take yourself out of a swamp by pulling up you own hair... A monolithic culture is very grounded, inert and conservative, is self-sufficient and, to use a metaphor, has much "weight". There is no anti-gravitational force to defeat this weight. The most enforced democracies are within those multiethnic societies because of the heterogeneity of the cultural and religious models. This heterogeneity produces models of coexistence, but it is not the case of Romania. In the history of the Scandinavian countries the religion has been forcefully imposed and this happened later, historically speaking, than in the other European countries. Therefore it didn't achieve so much force and cultural ramifications.*

*Personally, I am sceptical. I doubt that those democratic and laic models of societies could be "adopted" or "imported", however, in an honest, conscious and not only in a formal way in a pro-traditional and pro-conservatory, nostalgically conservatory society like the Romanian one.*

**Key words:** Gender equality, secularism, democracy, human rights and dignity

*I understand feminism as a species of elementary humanism, therefore a radical one: first of all women are human beings so the human rights are theirs too.*

## **Introduction**

The Romanian feminism has always been discreet and prone to compromise with the dominant cultural models. It has

been rather a pragmatic orientation than a theoretical or philosophical one, a feminism that criticized in the first place the unfortunate consequences of the fatherland upon the existence of women and that avoided to approach directly the roots of the patriarchy which are to be found in the customs, beliefs and religion. In other words, this feminism has been focused on certain rights of women, but ignored other rights such as the one to *a dignified image*, for instance. In a society wherein the orthodox religion is extremely powerful, the feminism is meant to fail if its demarches are not associated with a constant claim for laicism. The extreme hostility towards the feminist issues comes first from this contradiction between the religious dogmas concerning the “right behavior of women” and the main expectances and aims of the feminists. In Romania, the common sense doesn’t take in account the existence of a feminist man, and this is already disquieting. O reform of the orthodox doctrine is not only impossible, but also undesirable. The dogmatic spirit is the contrary of the freedom of thought and the roots of all humanist doctrines are grounded in this freedom. I see feminism entirely as a particular case of humanism and, the humanism was conceived, from the beginning, as “a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity”, according to American Humanist association. Most dictionaries envision humanism as **“a philosophy that places faith in the dignity of humankind”** in the spirit of illuminist ethics. "Humanists" typically believe in the perfectibility of human nature and view reason and education as the means to that end. Many early doctrines calling themselves "humanist" were based on Protagoras' famous claim that "man is the measure of all things." In context, this asserted that people are the ultimate determiners of value and morality— not objective or absolutist codices.

The movement's central themes are:

1. The value of human life as the central value, above money and power etc.
2. Equality of all human beings. No human being above another
3. Freedom of belief and ideas.
4. Development and creation of alternative economic models to the current neoliberal one.
5. Methodology of active non-violence<sup>1</sup>.

Humanism is a philosophy, an attitude, or way of life centred on human interests or values; a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason. Many philosophical approaches assimilate the humanism with the secularism, because the main current of thought descending from the humanist ethics is the ***secular humanism***. Therefore, I consider that, as a species of humanism, the feminism is meant to militate for laicism and secularism. In a laic society the feminism can adopt different orientations and can find a path of cultural influence, succeeding to prevent discriminations and abuses of all kind against women. Socially speaking (I mean on social level) the religions represent the patriarchy, because the transcendental side of religious thinking is mostly relevant on individual level.

### **The moral features of the exponents of the “inferior castes”**

**The term *rankism* has been coined by the physicist, educator and diplomat Robert W. Fuller.** It is referred as an "abusive, discriminatory, or exploitative behaviour towards people because of their rank in a particular hierarchy".<sup>2</sup> In his

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism>

<sup>2</sup> Fuller, Robert W. 2003. *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.

book - **“Rankism, a social disorder”** – Fuller talks about axiomatically claimed *first rank* and *second rank* human beings. In a rankist conception the world is divided into “somebodies” and “nobodies”. Francis Fukuyama, professor of International Political Economy at Johns Hopkins University and author of *The End of History* states, commenting the book: “The quest for recognition, especially by those who lack status, has long been seen as one of the driving forces of human history. *Somebodies and Nobodies* explains how recognition, or its absence, affects your life, and what we can all do to make sure that we treat each other with the dignity we each deserve.” The patriarchy is an elitist social system that considers men to be human beings of first rank and women as human beings of secondary rank.

The misogynist convictions will never be overthrown by neutral sexist visions and conceptions. No matter if the sexism is rooted on hierarchic or non-hierarchic patterns it is what feeds the discriminations of all kind. The same is available in what concerns the racism. An attempt of valuing the „feminine” traits cultivated in the patriarchal cultures (no matter in which terms they might be coined and envisioned) perpetuated the sexual rankism because the whole suite of qualities attributed to women by tradition represent the arsenal of a subordinated being, of a dominated and conditioned human, as Foucault would have said. The morals associated to the woman kind is the ethic of slaves, Nietzsche would have stated. Perhaps, if being our contemporary, Nietzsche would sympathised the feminists, because it’s the portrait of the traditional woman that he hated so much... Discovering other type of women (with other type of passions, interests and way of thinking) he would appreciated them for those qualities that he used to admire in men in his time.

In the book „Racism, sexism, power and ideology”, **Colette Guillaumin**, a leading figure among the francophone sociologists, provides a brilliant attempt of deconstructing the

notions of ‘race’ and ‘sex’.” She argues<sup>3</sup>: “The relations of sex classes and the ‘ordinary’ relations of classes bring into play different instrumentalities. If slavery and serfdom imply being reduced to the state of a thing, of a tool whose instrumentality is applied (or applicable) to other things (agriculture, machinery, animals), sex, age, like house-slavery, concerns reduction to the state of a tool whose instrumentality is applied in addition and fundamentally to other human beings. In addition and fundamentally, because women, like all dominated people, of course, carry out some tasks which do not imply a direct and personalized relationship with other human beings; but always they (and only they nowadays in western countries) are dedicated to assuring, outside the wage system, the bodily, material, eventually the emotional, maintenance of the totality of social actors”.

### **Preconceptions and discriminations**

The feminism of the „difference” that many contemporary fellows seem to embrace is, essentially, a form of sexism, one that intends to value and to treasure the gender stereotypes without establishing any hierarchy between them. No matter if these stereotypes are old or new “models”, the sexism is still present in the mentality that promotes and praises them. It’s quite disquieting to know that this kind of “feminism” became so widespread in the western world. It is grounded in a new wave of sexism and it represents a fierce attempt of launching on the ideas’ market another series of gender patterns. This attempt is synonym with a new tentative of conditioning the formation of women and men’s characters.

The misogyny had to do, somehow, with everyone’s freedom of speech, with everyone’s right to hatred and dispel. We are not morally allowed to banish it, to appeal to a sort of inquisition of thought in order to restrict it... In basic lines, the

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<sup>3</sup> Guillaumin, Colette. 1995. *Racism, sexism, power and ideology*. Routledge.

misogyny is an inflammation of the sexism, an acute form of such views, an “infection” occurred in the mind of someone who trusts the usual gender stereotypes... The roots of misogyny have to do with a dualistic vision of the human condition, with the preconception that between each man and each woman on the earth there are more significant ontological differences than between each woman and each woman or between each man and each man. From this perspective, the human condition of a savant women is considered to be closer and more similar to the one of a bigot illiterate woman **than** with the human condition of a savant men. In other words, in a sexist paradigm, all human qualities of a person are axiomatically subordinated to the presumptive gender qualities. The irrational fundamentals of the sexist views are obvious: these views aim to reduce the whole potential of a human being to the gender condition or, anyhow, to consider the gender characteristics (no matter which they are claimed to be) as prevalent and dominant in the constitution of the human nature, all the other attributes of this nature (that men and women have in common) beings considered of secondary importance. The sexists appeal to rankism in what concerns the human features, qualities and attributes. The sentiments, the courage, the sense of justice, on short the moral characteristics that men and women have and prove in the same measure are considered less relevant in the sexist views than the presumptive gender features. In this “less relevant” is the source of rankism.. The gender gains in this perspective first rank in the frame of human qualities; it becomes what the logicians usually call the ***strong criteria of definition*** for the human nature.

Someone who is not sexist considers, by the contrary, that there is no logical, psychological or ontological determinism between the sex of a person and his moral and intellectual virtues and also that these virtues are more relevant than the gender particularities of a person. Personally, I am convinced that the correspondence between

the sexual condition of someone and his (her) gender is either totally preformatted in a cultural lab, either arbitrary. The gender mystique is most often projected upon the sexual condition of the human beings and almost never questioned, in spite of contradictory evidences.

In a certain measure the sexism is similar to the nationalism. Both ideologies are, apparently, not prone to put a stigma upon a certain category of people, but they suggest the existence of a strict determinism between the gender or the nation of someone and his (her) behaviour, way of thinking, life style and values. As we are more and more indoctrinated and intoxicated (especially through the influence of mass media) with gender and national stereotypes (which are never questioned or doubted), we tend to turn into adepts of xenophobia or misanthropic (we start despising both men and women), because it is impossible to love a sum of clichés, a schematic-human, the mummified image of a series of values among which many are really dubious. The men and women, such way they appear to be in the light of stereotypes, are deplorable figures, looking almost like androids. They are never breaking the rules, they are never expected to behave in contradiction with the generalities ascribed to them by those clichés, or, at least, somehow distinctively. The reductionist views and language that feed these stereotypes are so simplistic and rudimentary that nobody, with a certain amount of intelligence, can be satisfied with such monolithic representations. In addition those who are aware of the clichés are prone to reject them entirely and those who are not aware are prone to project their discontent upon real nations and real men and women.

We cannot combat xenophobia and sexism and racism by changing the existing stereotypes with others, by trying to replace “negative” prejudices with a “positive” set of generic features. The generalities are the source of sexism, not the “negativity” of its depictions and verdicts. For the ABSOLUTE

exception represented by the INDIVIDUAL all generalities and stereotypes are unfortunate and damaging. The image of the individual could be severely affected by each one of these clichés. In the name of this absolute exception (the individual) we must deconstruct the stereotypes... We have to reject all reductionist representations for the sake of this exception, because the individual has the right to define himself in his own words and acts. The gender of each individual is, essentially, a personal matter and here I am talking about gender in a holistic sense: someone could consider himself never belonging to a gender, but only to a genre and not only.

### **The “savant” and sober sexism and the jokily misogyny**

Emil Cioran used to say that « women are delightful nullities ». No matter how offending and upsetting this sentence would seem, it is more inoffensive in my opinion, less violent or indecent, less hurtful towards the human condition of women than assertions from the kind of those religiously rooted sayings, such as: “the women think with their hearts and the men with their brains”, “the women are irrational, but pacifist, while men are rational, but combative”. Why? Because after an affirmation like « women are delightful nullities », one can put a coma and add: “and men too” or even, more aggressively: “and men are **undelightful** nullities” (and in this case we have to do with a sexist statement, which is worse). The comparative term represents an aggravating circumstance in expression. What I am to prove is that sexism is worse than misogyny and misandry<sup>4</sup> first because it is their source and, secondly, because it is promoted as a cultural “truthful” and worthy heritage.

Obviously, every misogynist is also sexist, but, semantically speaking, one can be ironic or even sarcastic towards a human category, making recourse to an anecdotic language, or talking in the spirit of the pamphlet, with a note of

cynical humor, knowing that he (she) is overbidding. One can exaggerate in purpose, intending to shape a caricature, being aware that each anecdote represents such a disproportion and deviation from reality (Karl Kraus used to say: “every anecdote is either a half of a truth either a truth and a half”) without being as morally “guilty” towards the real members of the “incriminated” category as someone who is speaking with sobriety and certainty, with the pretention of right measure... The misogyny is such an exaggeration, an obvious one, a grotesque caricature. Its “monstrous” character reveals the aberration of its fundamentals, its lack of truthfulness and reasons, the irrational premises that feed it. The sexism, by the contrary, is usually covered by the presumption of seriousness. It is mostly emphasized in boringly serious terms, even dogmatic. It is infused everywhere: in the views of psychologists, in the arguments of sociologists, theologians and philosophers, and it is approached like an axiom or like an obvious matter, while it is not obvious at all. The misogyny is passionate, purulent, aggressive, cynical, full of ardor and hate, while the sexism is promoted in apparently neutral terms and it serves as background for many social ideologies and doctrines, for many philosophies and cultural theories and for all patriarchal religions. The sexism itself is no more than a social ideology, a fundamental one, extremely exploited, and this fact makes of it a severer issue compared to matter of misogyny. The sexism is more contagious than the misogyny especially because of this apparent character of moral, scientific and social neutrality. The morgue and the mystique of those “scientific”, religious and philosophical conceptions that envelop, in fact, sexist ideas and the cultural sobriety of the mentalities of this kind invest, eventually, the sexism with a false degree of truthfulness and pertinence.

Romania is not so contaminated by a misogynic spirit as it is touched by a huge wave of sexism. The gender stereotypes

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<sup>4</sup> Hate pointed against men, the reverse of misogyny

(either of old or new generation) are widely promoted, and not only in mass media, but also in schools and public institutions and this is done with a certain “religiosity”.

Analyzing the first sample of sexist thinking from those ones mentioned above (see “the women think with their hearts and the men with their brains”), the first observation I’d make is that women are conceived as not being able to use the main organ destined to the function of reasoning, in other words they think in a weird, inappropriate way. No matter how flattering would appear to be the performance of thinking with an organ destined to other functions, the clearest suggestion of such statement is that the women’s reasoning is altered, deviant... On the other hand, the idea that men wouldn’t be able to think with their “hearts” suggests, injuriously this time for men, an emotional insufficiency. The most upsetting fact with these clichés is that they their audience does not find them upsetting. It’s true that most people don’t treasure the reason in rationalistic terms, they don’t appreciate the reason as being the most valuable human good and this can explain why **most people also can see in relative terms and invest with relative value the rational and the irrational products of the mind...** Most people consider the rational thinking as being equally worthy with any other type of thinking (as if there could really be other!).

I don’t want to be misunderstood. I don’t militate for a rationalistic cult or for the fact that everybody should cherish the reasoning above all other human qualities (such an axiology is risky and doubtful), I am stating that one cannot really **think** but with his (her) mind and that the so called “reasoning of the heart” is a metaphor, so, if women are associated with an impossible type of reasoning, it means that they are not truly able to think properly.

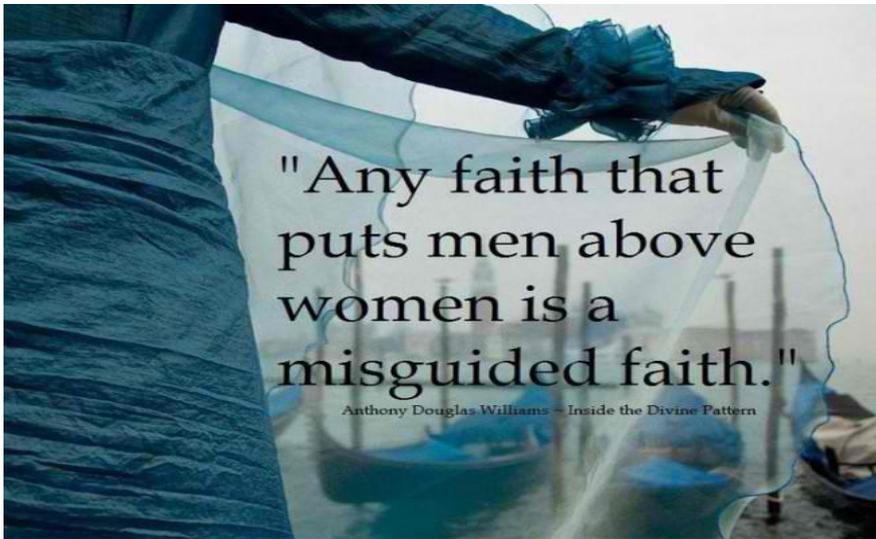
The conceptual sexism is, basically, meant to put in an inferior position the women-kind, but it also has implications and meanings that offend the men-kind. The preconception,

according to women are more sensible creatures, insults most artist men of the world, for instance. As David Hume would have said: “it’s obvious that the water is wet and the fire is burning”, it’s also obvious that the artists of both sexes have a superior sensibility that they process and transfigure aesthetically. If men are “less sensible than women” in all circumstances how comes that some of the most outstanding artists of the world used to be men??? Was Beethoven less sensible than a cold blooded women murderer just because he was man??? The most grotesque aspect of the sexism is that it pushes the generality to the limit of a totalitarian ideology. From “women are more sensible than men” to “all women are more sensible than all men” and to “every women is more sensible than every man” is only one step that most sexist are taking. The gender stereotypes are morally damaging especially because of this holistic, totalitarian character. They describe and also prescribe gender patterns and attributes and aim to predict gender behaviors.

Since the beginning of patriarchy the gender was a socio-cultural convention, a constitutive form of a caste-system in which the dominant caste (the men) was axiomatically (then illegitimately) invested with superior qualities. Colette Guillaumin discusses another sexist judgment, derived from the one mentioned and commented above. If women are “more sensible” and men “more rational”, then women are “closer to the nature” (the nature is sensible and has to do with the sensitiveness) and men are “closer to the spirit” (the spirit is traditionally associated with the reason). If so, it’s self understood, like in the biblical precepts, that men are meant and supposed to lead and to dominate women. The spirit is not only superior to the irrational nature, but also justified to give it rules: “The imputation of being natural groups is thus made about dominated groups in a very specific way. These dominated groups are stated to be, in everyday life just as in scientific analyses, submerged in Nature and internally

programmed. And environment and history are said to have no influence in practice over this. Such a conception asserts itself even more forcefully as the domination exercised gets closer to naked physical appropriation. In this conception an appropriated individual will be considered as having to do with Nature immediately, while the dominators are one step removed from it. What is more, the protagonists occupy different positions in relation to Nature: the dominated are within Nature and subject to it, while the dominators emerge out of Nature and organize it”<sup>5</sup>.

### **Moral abuses against women in religious terms**



We shouldn't avoid saying it: the patriarchal culture delivered detestable feminine models. In "Pure Lust" and in a series of interviews, Mary Daly stated: women behave miserably because they feel miserably and they feel like this because they are treated miserably. Someone accustomed with the railings tends to take them on at one moment. Orthodox

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<sup>5</sup> Guillaumin, Colette. 1995. *Racism, sexism, power and ideology*. Routledge.

priests use to say: “women achieved monstrous forms of selfishness and ardor” and they are probably right. After several thousand years of patriarchy women might have got tired of being insulted, marginalized and subordinated and they lost their temper and, also, their compass... The “despicable” women are perfectly mirroring the image of the women depicted by religious doctrines and misogynic philosophies. *Evil, stupid, revengeful, ignorant, prone to small taking, pathetic, liar, full of herself, delusional, indifferent, selfish, full of envy, cruel, superficial, coquette, hypocritical, unfair, harpy* and last but not least “*whore*”, these are the features of the biblical portrait of the “usual” woman. This “usual” woman is described by the “holly texts” as “a golden ring in a pig’s snout”, when she “lacks discretion” (Proverbs 11:22 NIV), like the “devil’s gateway” and so on. Even the most righteous of women has witchcraft, women cannot be instructed and their words cannot be trusted, is said in the Bible. How, on the earth, a religious woman can be proud of herself? A woman raised in a bigot spirit will start thinking all these about her if being a “true believer”. Of course, there are many religious women that are not so prone to take seriously all of the misogynic suggestions and verdicts from the Bible, but these women are not really involved into religious rituals and customs and their faith is rather “libertine”. If repeatedly telling someone that he (she) is guilty, although he has never done something wrong, and if blaming him (her) for an ancestral sin, that someone either will consider you nuts either will turn into one... The result of such “moral” education cannot be but the moral confusion. Paying or being punished for the sins of another (for the sins of the forefathers like the Bible states) is something so morally unfair for a normal human conscience with a normal sense of justice that the persons who force themselves to take seriously the “sacred blame” end by getting morally overwhelmed and confused... The first question arising from here is: How could someone that carries on an unjustified (in rational terms) blame strive for being a better

person, for being morally valuable? If doing nothing wrong he is to blame, then why making efforts to do something else then wrong things???

The punishment is, in terms of justice, a moral educational tool. It is meant to make someone act rightfully. A punished innocent will not understand so easily why she should strive to act rightfully if she is punished anyway.

I will discuss, by the following, the case of the aborting women in the eastern European countries with strong orthodox confessions. Statistically speaking, the most abortions are done in Europe in those societies that have orthodox religions. I often wondered how comes that. **The religion is blaming the abortion more than any laic ethics.** Paradoxically, exactly in the orthodox countries are the most aborting women. The only logical explanation I could find has to do with the moral sense that one achieves in contact with a religious training that stigmatizes innocent people for nothing. A girl raised in an orthodox spirit is told that she is “dirty” just because she belongs to the woman kind. She is told that God sees women as “evil” and fundamentally sinful and so on... In addition her self esteem is lowered and the trust in her moral capacities too. This is an elementary fault in any educational process. If telling a child he is stupid or unable to learn like the others, there are serious chances to turn him into lazy and less interested in learning... He (she) might even start hating school. The negative suggestions are most often discouraging for a child. The moral negative suggestions delivered to girls and women through religious education turn them into morally fable and not interested in striving for being morally worthy. They are told to be “immoral by nature” so why they would make any effort in proving moral virtues if, at the end, instead of being praised for this, they will still be considered morally inferior to any man? In moral matters, a system of recompense and punishment is essential. The moral goodness must be rewarded and the bad things must be punished... But in the religious spirit, no matter what a woman would do (for the better or for

the worse) she still has to carry on the STIGMA ascribed by the Bible to the whole woman kind. This is humiliating and unfair and a humiliated being has more chances to become morally irresponsible and recalcitrant than to achieve a fair moral sense. The negative suggestion, the unfairness, the abuses, the insults that women's dignity is submitted to in frame of the religious misogynic morals cannot be a "healthy environment" for their moral education. They are axiomatically blamed and morally condemned (on the basis of being women) and, then, they are expected to act rightfully. An "inborn" sinner has more chances to turn into a real criminal than an "inborn" innocent, this is what I mean. The abortion, in the case of religious women, is no more than just another sin... Since they are "sinful" simply because of being women (in the context of a very unjust moral) why would they strive to follow moral rules of any kind? If they are guilty of unreal and imaginary sins, why would they try to avoid committing real sins? It's true that the Orthodox Church incriminates the abortion as a serious sin, but the same church incriminates women as "inborn" sinners... If a moral is wrongful in some aspects and rightful in others is still not trustable. There are different types of morals in the world and the humanist ones, for instance, are not internally inconsistent, contradictory or absurd!

**In the patriarchal societies, the original sin is not done by a woman, but against the womanhood. The sin is this ontological stigma projected upon every real woman.**

I am not discussing here the abortion from the perspective of human rights, but from a religious perspective. If the priests really want to raise moral womanly characters, the, they shall stop blaming women for noting, they shall stop projecting the stigma upon them.

Not the humiliation but the human pride is the clue of the true faith, I'd say: the pride of being created upon the image

of God, the pride of not being sinful, the pride of being loved by God, the pride of imitating the model of Christ, the pride of being morally capable and not morally handicapped. The pride of being *free* to love, the pride of being *free* to choose to do the right thing, the pride of being *free* to give life, to create and procreate...

The Christian traditional confessions (orthodox and catholic as well) stigmatized not only what really deserved to be stigmatized, but also the most natural, genuine and harmless things. If the sexual practices for the sake of the sex are sinful, if the usage of condoms is sinful (see the catholic claims) than why would someone rational trust any other moral verdict deriving from religious doctrines and dogmas? Like in the story of “Peter and the wolf”, if the wolf is not coming trice, the next time, when he really comes, who would believe? The abortion might be a sin, but, if giving birth to a child makes the women “dirty” and undignified to be touched by a man or a priest (according to the orthodox dogma), if knowledge and the wish of knowledge are “sins”, if the modern sciences are sinful and the astrology is a sin and, last but not least, the atheism is a capital sin, then why would someone rational take seriously any other religious warning, including the one concerning the sinful nature of the abortion? Another example: there is no biblical commandment against violence and not even a biblical advice or parable to suggest that violence would be sinful or forbidden by God. Instead, the sexuality expressed out of marriage is considered to be a “sin”, so the lovers are “sinners” (love could be, thus, a sin!), but the domestic violence inside the marriage is tolerable, acceptable (because the divorce is forbidden) from the dogmatic perspective of this religion of “love”: “God orders to the married couples to never separate. If the divorce has been pronounced anyway, the woman must remain unmarried or to come back to her ex husband” (in Romanian: “Dumnezeu poruncește celor căsătoriți ca să nu se despartă. Dacă totuși

divorțul a fost pronunțat, femeia trebuie să rămână nemăritată sau să se întoarcă la fostul ei bărbat”) (1 Cor. 7:10, 11.).

If, as the Catholics consider, an aborting girl (violated by her incestuous father) is “a murderer” then what is Stalin? Do both of them deserve to be called in the same way?

In a book of dialogues with the catholic cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, entitled “In cosa crede chi non crede”, Umberto Eco analyzes the issues related to the status of women in the catholic church and doctrines and he comments the interdiction of entering the altar or preaching imposed to women: “I am not satisfied with the symbolical argument, neither with the archaic argument according to women are “dirty” because in certain moments of their life their bodies have “impure” secretions. Why would be a menstruated or a postpartum woman more “impure” than a priest that has AIDS, for instance”?

The original version of the text: “L'argomento simbolico non mi soddisfa. Né mi soddisfa l'argomento arcaico per cui la donna in certi momenti della sua vita secerne impurità (anche se l'argomento è stato sostenuto in passato, come se una donna che ha le proprie mestruazioni o partorisce nel sangue fosse più impura di un sacerdote maschio con l'Aids) »

This is the point of view of a laic conscience and, I'd say, the only justified and reasonable one, in humanist terms.

A very important question that Umberto Eco arises concerns the contradictions existing between the status of women in the Evangelical texts and their statue in the texts of the Old Testament. How is the church managing to clear or to dry out this contradiction? In Eco's interpretation, Jesus is a “heretic”, someone who contested in a certain measure the morals and the religious customs of the antique Judaism. Although in The Old Testament the women are considered to be “culpable”, “unclean”, “sinful” beings that belonged to the men

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<sup>6</sup> Martini, Carlo Maria and Umberto Eco. 1996. *In cosa crede chi non crede?* Liberal Libri.

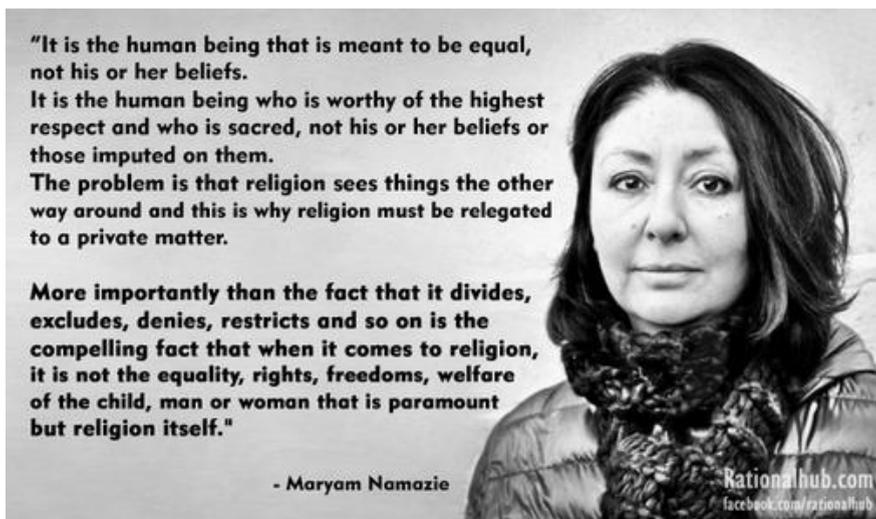
like properties and were supposed to be submissive, Jesus stated: “there will be no man and woman in My Name”! Umberto Eco argues: “There is no doubt that Christ sacrificed himself for both men and women and that, defying the customs of his time, he offered high privileges to his womanly disciples and companions. We know that the only creature that was not touched by the original sin was a woman and that, after His resurrection, she was the first one to see his face and not a man. Aren’t not all these a clear sign that Jesus was polemic towards the laws of his time and, as much as he could be disobedient in a rational way, he gave strict indications regarding the equality of the sexes, if not in front of the historical customs and laws, however in what concerns the Redemption plan?”

“Visto che è indubbio che Cristo si è sacrificato e per maschi e per femmine e che, in spregio ai costumi dei suoi tempi, ha conferito privilegi altissimi alle sue seguaci di sesso femminile, visto che la sola creatura umana nata immune dal peccato originale è una donna, visto che è alle donne e non agli uomini che Cristo è apparso in prima istanza dopo la sua resurrezione, non sarebbe questa una chiara indicazione che egli, in polemica con le leggi del suo tempo, e nella misura in cui poteva ragionevolmente violarle, ha voluto dare alcune chiare indicazioni circa la parità dei sessi, se non di fronte alle leggi e i costumi storici, almeno rispetto al piano della Salvezza?”<sup>7</sup>

**Democracy and laicism. The status of free thinkers in a religious society. The intellectual agnostic or atheist woman, an isolated person in a culture full of certainties.**

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*



One of the most outstanding contemporary Spanish philosophers of the moment, Fernando Savater, discusses largely and with much accuracy the problem of laicism in the actual world and the correspondence between the laic spirit, democracy and the respect for human rights. In the book of philosophical essays entitled "The eternal life" he clearly affirms<sup>8</sup>: "the laicism of the democratic state is primordially funded on the institutional freedom from any theocratic instance or judgment, it is entirely rooted in civic reasoning and morals, deliberated and verified by the free will of the citizens". Savater also considers that the claim of many catholic priests for a "comeback to our values" is illegitimated, because these "values of ours", might be considered those ones derived from democratic principles and illuminist, humanist morals and not from the theocratic dogmas. In Savater's view, it is an abuse to consider a child belonging to a religion, although the parents have the right to raise their children in the spirit of their own religion, because a child was not able to decide, to give his (her) consent and so on. "The old Christians", he argues, that used to wait for someone to reach the age of maturity in order to be

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<sup>8</sup> Savater. Fernando. 2010. *La Vida Eterna*. Editorial Ariel.

baptize him, proved to be more liberal in their way of thinking than their descendents. Fernando Savater is very critical towards the actual world concerning the management of laicism. He sustains that the contemporary societies, even the western ones, turned into less and less interested in defending the laic spirit and values. After a very complex analysis, his conclusions are bitter and pessimists. Reproducing the words of Santayana, the Spanish philosopher, he says: “there is nothing worse than the tyranny of a retrograde and fanatic conscience oppressing a world that doesn’t understand all things in the name of a world that doesn’t exist!”<sup>9</sup>.

Of course, there are misogynists, racists and homophobes among the members of all human categories, communities and groups. That’s a fact. Personally I consider their convictions despicable, but in the same time these convictions are the expression of someone’s right to free speech and thinking. They could be morally offensive and upsetting, but they are not abusive as long as they are shared in quality of opinions or visions and no more. It’s easier to confront and to contradict, rationally, a personal point of view, no matter how aggressively sustained, than to oppose the reasons of a human conscience to the aberrations claimed in the name of a superhuman consciousness and vision. It’s always easy to confront and to contest the simple opinions of a man. A good reasoning can make “miracles” in these circumstances, but when we are supposed to contradict the “ideas” of God, the “God’s mind” or “voice” things are getting harder and more difficult to handle. The religious norms are dogmatic: they are not presumed to be simply human moral commandments or conceptions, they are not considered “cultural constructs”; they don’t belong to the species of human thinking. Religious people will never accept that the religions themselves are a humanly creations and affairs. Each cult is invested with the credit of “divine dictate” and of “revealed knowledge”. This fact turns

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<sup>9</sup> *Dialogues in Limbo, with Three New Dialogues*, 87.

their doctrines into non-opposable, all rightful, unquestionable and perfect. When confronting the opinions of a religious man, first of all he will not admit the personal nature of his views. Secondly, she (he) will not be open to any rational negotiation of his her convictions. Upon him, someone who contests his views contests God Herself. The believer is just a carrier of “divine message” in his mind, and, in the worst cases, a true advocate of God. Thus, the religious people make recourse to **the argument from authority** (in Latin: *argumentum ad verecundiam*). “Because the argument from authority is an inductive-reasoning argument — wherein is implied that the truth of the conclusion cannot be guaranteed by the truth of the premises — it also is fallacious to assert that the conclusion *must* be true<sup>10</sup>”. The contesteer of a religious man’s ideas and convictions is, from his perspective, the contesteer of God Himself (thus of an absolute and totalitarian power) and not the adversary of a simple human judgment. Someone who dared to be in contradiction with a religious conception is, upon the believer, in straight conflict with the Supreme Will and Wisdom. When speaking, the religious people do not speak as ordinary human beings and therefore they reject the need of argumentation, they don’t strive to be reasonable or logical or coherent, they don’t justify their views, because they are talking “in the name of God”. In fact they enounce their own judgments (or the ones of the priests) as if speaking God’s mind. The religious people believe in “revealed knowledge” and in the perfect correspondence between the object and content of their faith and the real existence, will and manifestation of God so, in their eyes, an atheist or an agnostic is not a human being with rights, needs or freedoms, moral imperatives etc but a recalcitrant rebellious creature deserving to be moralized for “disobedience” and, eventually, to carry on the anathema of being “the enemy” of God. An atheist or agnostic man (woman)

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<sup>10</sup> Gensler, Harry J. 2003. *Introduction to Logic*. New York, NY: Routledge. 333–4.

never talks from equal positions with a religious: the second has a whole army of saints, fathers, believers and theologians in his back to give him right and, above all, God Himself. The atheist is alone: he is defending, with or without good reasons, a simple human perspective, while the religious is always talking about things that cannot be submitted to a human critical judgment, due to their presumptive superhuman origins. In his famous book, « Surveiller et punir » (in English – « Punishment and Discipline »), Michel Foucault affirms: « Devant la justice du souverain, toutes les voix doivent se taire » (in English: Before the justice of the sovereign all the voices must keep the silence”. The religious always “KNOW” more than what a regular human intelligence can afford to know, their judgments and precepts are above the human reasoning, feeling or logic. Another aspect of the issue, even more important, I’d say, is tied on the **collective nature** of beliefs. The mutual, widespread beliefs are privileged and credited with the presumption of “normality” in spite of their irrational basis, while the minority irrational beliefs or the personal ones are rejected and considered aberrant. In other words **the number makes the rule...** In fact if a large amount of people put their trust in an absurd or impossible matter this group gains the power to proclaim its belief more justified than a smaller group with a similar, but different belief. The “legitimacy” of the more popular belief is based, in this case, on what is generally called an **argumentum ad populum** (Latin for "appeal to the people") which is a fallacious argument that concludes a proposition to be true because many or most people believe it. In other words, the basic idea of the argument is: "*If many believe so, it is so.*" This is, metaphorically speaking, a natural democratic manifestation in a domain that shouldn't take in account democratic exigencies: the Logic. We cannot democratically chose to sustain that if  $A=B$ , then B is not equivalent with A, for instance, just because most people agree with such illogical statement. Let's say that 99 percent of the

earth population considers that 1 + 1 makes 3 or the planet to be flat... It doesn't mean they are right, even though they are so many to believe so. The planet is still a sphere anyway. On the other hand, at the level of human interferences, the ***argumentum ad populum*** works in spite of the lack of rational and logic legitimacy. In the frame of social confrontations, a collective illusion is privileged compared to a private illusion or one embraced by fewer people. Such collective illusions gain not only respect, but also the credit and the presumption of normality, while the private illusions are blamed and treated as ridiculous. If someone claims that he saw a flying pan is usually considered lunatic or worse. Those who believe in the repeated visits of the extraterrestrial beings on earth are considered, most often, psychiatric cases, because they are a minority... But those (in large number) who believe in all religious nonsense and contradictions are considered above the rules of human judgment. The majority has always the power to impose different matters, views, ideas, convictions, faiths and this power is, most often, abusively used... If an atheist contradicts a religious man with rational arguments and the believer calls him names (*heretical, Satanist, apologue of blasphemy, fool, sinner* etc), it's fine, it is a democratic polemical encounter, a basic expression of the human rights. If an atheist calls a religious man delusional, in most cases he is considered an aggressor, an abuser of the human right to a faith. In the core of all religious cults and beliefs lays the hatred and the stigmatization of the atheism... So, in all circumstances, the religious men have the right to insult an atheist (being given their right to any faith) while the atheists (that have no faith) become moral criminals if criticizing or judging a believer. This is the main problem concerning the religious faiths: none of them is friendly, understanding or respectful towards the atheism or agnosticism.

I will give the example of an encounter that I had with a religious musician. She used to know I have a philosophical

training so she used to know that I put much faith and value in the human thinking. Otherwise, why I would have chosen this path? She told me that the truth and the knowledge are not in the power of human thinking, they are only revealed to some exquisite humans by God Himself. In this case, I've said, if I claim that God revealed me that Beethoven's symphonies have been composed with only three notes then I might be right... She felt offended by my joke and she found me rude, while I was supposed to not be offended and to simply accept that human reasoning and logics are good for nothing and that I strive for nothing with my passion for philosophy...

The atheist or agnostic persons could be, of course, misogynists, homophobes or racists, but would never invoke a superior power than the one of their own minds to justify or cover these convictions. If they find "appropriate" to stigmatize a human being or category they do it in their own name. They would enounce in their own name that they detest the biological or the ontological condition of the exponents of a sex or of a race. But the religious people have a cover up for dispel: "it's God's Will". God is The Supreme Sexist, Racist and Homophobe, God and only God is responsible for their faith that misogyny, racism and homophobia are justified, dignified and even moral. There are priests of our times claiming that "the equality between people is the work of the Devil", because "God didn't make us equal, but made us gifts". Let it be as they say. Maybe God instilled in some minds the gift of atheism. Who are them to judge God's Plans and Will?

In the frame of Romanian culture, the atheist or agnostic perspective is minor and suffocated, marginalized and even censured. In the educational field and institutions is almost inexistent and deliberately conserved in minority. The dominant mentalities are sliding among the human rights and, hilariously, these mentalities complain about the few minor and fable opposing currents of thought. The Romanian orthodox militants, believers and priests as well, don't cease to complain

about the three atheists and four agnostic that are, by chance, Romanian citizens and public voices. Let's defend the numerous, powerful and noisy believers from the few, weak and quiet atheists... That's democratic, isn't it?! Let's close the mouths and the emission channels of the unbelievers because they bother us terribly! Now, leaving the irony aside: with whom are fighting the huge majority of believers in Romania (almost 98 percent, as they appear to be after the last statistics), with the 2 percent of people without religion? With the 0,2 percent of self declared atheists? Where is the *atheist danger*, I wonder?!

One of the most popular websites of orthodox militantism is called "War for the Word of God" (Război întru Cuvânt!). As far as I'm aware the Christian doctrine proposed a form of "PEACE in the name of God". Then how comes that the most ardent defenders of "Christianity" are involved since millenniums now in all kind of wars in the "name of Christ"?

The religion is infused nowadays in all capillaries of Romanian society. Since the fallen of Communism the religion became almost synonym with the "public morals". In laic and legal terms, an explicitly racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic or misogynist message promoted by a political organisation, by a civilian group or by a religious minority would be the object of a huge social scandal and the responsible organization would be immediately banished. By the contrary, a misogynist, homophobic or anti-Semitic message transmitted through the means of the dominant religious cult (with a heavily tradition and heredity) is considered, according to the actual legislation and civic rules, as legitimate as possible. This wouldn't even be that serious if, in the background of the collective consciousness, this synonymy between the MORAL itself (thus the one universally available) and the morals of the orthodox doctrine was not established so clearly.

Theoretically, a secular state is the one wherein the social morals are independent from the religious morals,

wherein the laic norms of “good behaviour” are different from the norms imposed by a certain religion. The Romanian state is, unfortunately, not a secular one and not even the cultural mainstream is quite laic. Upon Fernando Savater, the only true humanist and secularist society is the French one. I’d also add: the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish societies. The Romanian world is very far from understanding the principles of laicism. Whenever falls the Easter time, everybody says to everybody in the street: “Jesus was resurrected” and everybody is supposed to answer: “Indeed”, in other words everybody is expected to confess his (her) faith in the miracle of resurrection, even the atheists, the Muslims, the agnostics, the Buddhists. This social custom is exactly the opposite of the laic spirit. What an atheist is supposed to do in these circumstances? To make a fool of himself lying and saying the words - to betray his convictions for the sake of politeness - or to start confessing his lack of faith to everyone, at every corner of street? This might seem comical, but for the poor man or woman it is an issue. In this **not laic** society all young women are submitted to a perpetual verbal harassment by all neighbours and acquaintances (that don’t know them as persons at all) concerning the popular fetish-subjects (with religious background): “when are you getting married?”, “when do you plan to make children” as if it is self understood that all girls and young women want to get married and to have children. These standard questions are residual contents of a **totalitarian** moral, a patriarchal one. The diversity of perspectives and of “feminine” vocations and destinies are not admissible or possible in the ethics and epics of the dominant mentalities from Romania. A “normal” woman is not expected to have another life option than being a wife and a mother.

Most Romanian citizens cannot overcome the totalitarian views and ideas. What happens when this totalitarian species of thought, administrated by the dominant mentalities, tries to put order in society? It initiates what we

can call, without doubts, **the though police**. The suspicion of Satanism or “spiritual handicap” ascribed to any atheist, agnostic or free thinker is the direct consequence of this cultural totalitarianism. “If you are not one of us you are, surely, against us”: this is a sample of totalitarian “reflection”. “If you are not like us, you are suspicious”. “If you are suspicious you are dangerous”. “If you are dangerous you cannot be trustful and you also can be harmful”. “If you are potentially harmful is better to keep your mouth shut and, if you won’t do it voluntarily, we will do the job for you. We will annihilate your voice and we will retire you the rights, just to be sure you have no power at all”. This is how the police of thought acts. It is always prone to tax and to forbid whatever slips through its fingers. What the totalitarian thinking cannot dominate and control is “wrong”.

In a patriarchal society with such traditional mentalities a woman cannot be but “spoiled”, “mean”, “aberrant”, “delusional”, “dubious” or “misguided” if she doesn’t aim to get married and have children, if she is not believer or if she doesn’t go to the church. If you are such a woman, plenty of preconceptions, superstitions and fears are projected upon your image. You turn into a scapegoat... The most fanatic people even put the blame on you for the misery of their kind: “God is mad on us and punishes us with troubles because we let you live and think like this”. In his famous book, “The scapegoat”, Rene Girard demonstrated how the exponents of cultural minorities or the “odd” people were persecuted as “carriers of evil” in those societies dominated by monolithic thinking and faiths. Not only once we heard, here in Romania of 21th century, that all the troubles and misfortunes, following the fate of the Romanian nation, are God’s punishment for the numerous abortions done by Romanian women. This kind of superstition feed the benevolent acts of the policemen of thought.

A similar thesis was developed by Jean Delumeau, the famous French historian, specialized in the study of religious beliefs and practices, in the book “Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe-XVIIIe siècle”<sup>11</sup> (translated - *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of the Western Guilt Culture, 13Th-18th Centuries*). He provides a very elaborated and documented study on the womanly condition in the frame of this historical times, and argues that, especially after the Great Plague from the late middle ages, women have been seen, alike Jews, as “dangerous agents of Satan” and suspected of potential witchcraft, because the clerics tried to exorcise people’s fears by guiding this to the image of a serious sinner, a scapegoat, responsible for the collective sufferance. In their preaches, the figure of God became one of a terrible punisher, an image created by *the terror felt by most of the spiritual consultants of the Catholic Church* (in French version: (...) « la frayeur ressentie par la plupart des directeurs de conscience de la catholicité. »)<sup>12</sup>.

I will conclude with Umberto Eco’s reflection on religious and laic morals: The point of view of any religious confession always aims an optimal life style, clearly specified in dogmatic terms. There is no “moral” alternative to this recommendation, because it is coincident with God’s will. The laic point of view should consider **optimal** any life style resulted from a free choice, as long as this choice doesn’t interfere in a negative/restrictive way with the choises of the others<sup>13</sup>.

## Conclusions

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<sup>11</sup> Delumeau, Jean. 1983. *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident, XIIIe-XVIIIe siècle*. Paris : Fayard.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> Martini, Carlo Maria and Umberto Eco. 1996. *In cosa crede chi non crede?* Liberal Libri.

Nowadays the whole occidental world faces a decline of the moral and humanist „revolutions” of modern ages. More and more extremist groups are arising apparently from nowhere, more and more so called „humanists” are prone to elude and neglect in their arguments and theses the human rights, more and more dogmatic convictions are exposed in the spotlight of the cultural mainstream, and the forms of religious fundamentalism turn into more and more virulent. This decline of the humanist values touched the feminist movements too. There appeared many types of eccentric, misandronist<sup>14</sup> or sexist forms of feminism during the last decades. Most men of the occidental societies tend to hang on the dyeing cultural body of patriarchy like the survivors of a shipwreck hanging on the putrid remains of the ship... They seem to be open to various forms of enrolment (mental and institutional, vestimentary and behavioral as well). The Dandyism of the intellectual men from the XVIII century (the modern practice of dandyism first appeared in the revolutionary 1790s, in London and Paris) could be definitely seen as an emancipator movement of men, both cultural and psychological. The dandyism occurred before the first feminist ideologies and social movements so we can state that men were the first members of a sexual category to seek the emancipation from the strict and autocratic patriarchal norms, customs and rules. This need of emancipation and liberation, that both sexes resented few centuries ago, seems to be less obvious in our times. The microbe of a new wave of sexism attacks the vulnerable consciences. The **genders anarchy**<sup>15</sup> and its consequent social utopia seem to be, in this moment, an abandoned ideal, a failed project. There was not enough cultural energy and there were not enough models to sustain it.

A society becomes civilized and tolerant as it accepts the relativity and the plurality of values, opinions, beliefs. **A laic**

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<sup>14</sup> A person who hates men

<sup>15</sup> A cultural and educational system free of gender stereotypes

**society is a civilized on.** In this type of society the women, like all other citizens, have the right to a dignified image and the right to find their happiness in they own way, by their own means, and not by following a given pattern.

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