

REWIND 012

Miriam Mafai

Women's Body between
Freedom and Law

Fondazione Antonio Ratti
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Miriam Mafai: I hope to stay on schedule and after I hope that there will be the possibility of a conversation, if not a debate. I want to say something as a preface at once. When we set the theme of this lecture, *Women's Body between Freedom and Law*, I could not imagine, no one could imagine, that the theme would be placed before us in such a dramatic way, embodied in the image of Eluana Englaro. The theme was dear to me. I perceived its importance, but I did not imagine that it would be embodied in this female figure. In recent weeks, it has been discussed and decided who has power over the tormented body: herself, the doctor, the magistrate, and the politicians. The question would have arisen naturally anyways, I think, even if that body had been the body of a man, as young as Eluana was at the time of the accident, or condemned to a vegetative state for as many years as Eluana. But it was the body of a woman. And this—in my opinion, perhaps I am wrong, at least I experienced it this way—gave this story a particular intensity. I believe that it was like that for many of you. It certainly was like that for me. Because it seemed to be the symbol of the violence that has always been practiced on the bodies of women everywhere, in all cultures, and all religions.

You see, I wanted to start—while the emotion of the story of Eluana Englaro was not yet as strong—with a very famous Locke's statement that says, "every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any right to but himself." So I thought I would start this talk this way. Because Locke's statement, on which the condemnation of slavery and habeas corpus are based, historically applies to everyone, but not to women. Because the woman did not always have—still does not have even today—and does not have the property of her own body anywhere. Indeed, I would say that this right of the woman on her own body is recognized only in a few countries, only recently, and all in all never fully shared or accepted. I would say that it is constantly put in doubt. Think about the importance of the three great revealed religions, none of which recognizes the woman for the right and the power of her body. I do not intend to talk now—I believe one day we should do so without arrogance and shyness—about the relationship between Islam and the women. An important problem, not only the issue of the veil, the hijab, and the burqa. An important problem now. Because it does not only concern the Islamic world, but it is also present in many European countries that have strong immigration and are confronted in different ways. In France, England, or Holland, to mention only three European countries in which Islam is strongly prevalent. I would like to say that we have not even been confronted with this problem yet because of our extraordinary ability to avoid any problems that are too severe or to find solutions from time to time and from place to place, or rather some accommodation that is convenient for that moment. I think that this problem should be confronted because there is a problem with our country and its relationship with Islam. Take into account the statement by an Islamic scholar, Fatema Mernissi, who claims that the Muslim order sees the infidel as its enemies outside and the woman as its enemy inside. But, when it comes to women and religions in general, nobody is safe.

I, for example, cannot but remember the morning prayer of the Jews, which I did not know until racial laws were introduced in our country. Until then - it was 1938 and I was 12 years old - I didn't realize that I was different for being Jewish. But at that moment, realizing this fact, I began to attend—I who never attended either the parish or the synagogue—I began to attend the synagogue and also to study a little bit—just a little bit—the rules of my religion and a few of the first words of our religion. I am not saying that as if it was like a trauma, but it was a significant emotion when I heard the verse that is recited in the morning that says, "I thank You Lord my God making me a man." But I was not a man of course. And women were reserved for the resigned verse: "I thank You Lord my God for making me according to Your will". What were we supposed to do? On the other hand, if it is true that—I think you are mostly Catholics here—if it is true that Christ affirmed in his preaching a sort of revolutionary universal equality, it is true that Christianity did not and does not question the subordination of women.

Indeed, we are here in the presence of a sort of metaphysical misogyny that explains the inferiority of the woman with the fact that at the moment of creation, as you all know, first Adam was created, according to God's norm and likeness, then, only later, the woman. Says the Bible, when a corresponding help to him was not found, and then she is created from his rib—Eve. Therefore, according to the writing, Eve is created to bring help to men, and therefore, somehow it is already subordinate in function to bring help to a man. But that is not enough. As we all know, Eve is also the one who

transgresses. Having been told that she should not taste the tree of the fruit of good and evil, which is the fruit of knowledge, she yields to the temptation of the serpent. She tastes the forbidden fruit. And so it is thanks to Eve that you—or you wouldn't even have understood her—know what good is and what evil is. Now, in my opinion, this should be considered a credit to Eve, but no. As we know, this is blamed on her. And what does the father-in-law say? "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor, you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." This is in the scripture. But there are many things in the scripture that we no longer perceive as norms and discipline. However, the subordination of women is confirmed by the Doctors of the Church. We could mention dozens and dozens. I will limit myself to remember St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians when he repeats, "a husband has authority over his wife...then she should cover her head with a veil". So, see that this story of the veil and the covered head is not only of Islam. "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God". St. Augustine even explicitly states "the woman is an inferior being that was not created by God in His image" and St. Thomas defines a woman as "an error of nature". And there are dozens of other statements and affirmations that represent before us today—we certainly remain a little incredulous—but they represent a real wound.

The subordination of women, however, has very ancient origins and is explained by a rich literature both females and feminist, philosophers, anthropologists who investigate these causes, from Engels to Bachofen to De Beauvoir. Recently, just the day before yesterday, flipping through a newspaper, I read that it came out, but it is not yet in bookstores, a very ponderous work of an American scholar who says that there would have been in prehistory—often we speak of prehistory—in which there was a mythical Golden Age and Equality, of which there would perhaps be a memory in the legend of the Amazons, until, always according to this American scholar, men understood the importance between the sexual act and pregnancy. Before then they did not understand why so much blood came out of women's bodies every month and they still did not die - because if so much blood came out of a man's body, then they would have fainted, especially then, now maybe it can be cured - so this remained mysterious, and at a certain point they understood - says this American scholar - the link between the sexual act and pregnancy. And as a result, the god to worship became the male and his phallus.

This is something that Ida Magli loves and on which she wrote books and the woman is reduced to a pure biological container. In my opinion, I am neither a philosopher nor a historian nor an anthropologist, but I am convinced on my own that here lies the knot. It is motherhood that for us can be a source of satisfaction and pride, but it is also historically the reason for the subordination of women to men and society. In the sense that in all societies that we know, the woman—and I come to the precise theme of this lecture—has never really fully responded to her body, which is defined, and is in fact, the vessel of the male semen, which is why she does not have it at all. The principle is as if it was destined to preserve this seed, to make it grow, and then of course to give birth to it. And this principle is confirmed over the centuries by religion...religions, laws, and cultures, from the low to the high, and is handed down in a way now cultured, now vulgar, in history, in fairy tales, in legends, and in proverbs until a period very close to us.

Reduced to this precious function as a vessel of the male seed, women have represented, in various ways throughout the history of mankind, capital to be spent in power relations, an object of exchange between families, tribes, and powerful people. In fact, the historian tells that their fathers and brothers gave them and their husbands took them. It was not the women who decided. The body of women in all civilizations of all ages, from prehistory to the present day was at the disposal of the victor; for example, the advancing armies are always entitled to the women of the vanquished. It happened—you don't have to go very far in the times—it happened to the Italian women in the region of Frosinone, raped en masse by the Moroccan military. It happened in Germany by Soviet troops. It happened even more recently in Bosnia, not to mention what happens almost before our eyes and not infrequently with the complicity or silence of the blue helmets in tribal wars in Africa. The woman, in other words, is always the prey of the army of the winner.

More generous were the first Romans, you remember...after having kidnapped the Sabine women, who were a few kilometers away, they

married them, because the marriage, as Cicero said, is the first nucleus of the city and the seedbed of the state. The Sabine women had to procreate and so they did. The seedbed...So the woman's body is reduced to her uterus and the woman is reduced to her ability to procreate, to be exalted, or condemned, always to be controlled. Because whose child will be born from her uterus if it is not constantly controlled? Her ability—privilege, and condemnation—that destinies her to reproductions has been her destiny for centuries, from which she could not escape other than choosing the path of chastity, as the nuns have done for a long time. So there will be others. There is always the father, husband, and brother... And in some societies, it is the brother of the husband who controls them if the husband fails. In other societies, actually, as in the Roman one and also in the Greek one, there is a curator of the womb who has her and her body if she remains widowed. In short, for centuries, until an era that is very close to us, this rule applied. And from this subordination, she is able to free herself, even slowly and with difficulty, only when and where she is able to control her own reproductive capacity, and therefore her body.

I don't want to bore you now and I don't want to make a history of the liberation or emancipation of women in the centuries that are closer to us. However, from the great French Revolution that liberates the third state, but does not liberate women, until the time in which we live, as if to say a progressive improvement in the condition of women, but not an effective and complete liberation. I only remember the famous statement of Olympe de Gouges, who rightly said that in the French Revolution women have the right to go up to the guillotine, but not the right to go up from the tribune. And from the French Revolution to the day when French women, and even Italian women, will have the right to climb the grandstand, if I am not mistaken, 150 years will pass. However, even when they manage to get up to the tribune, in our country the end of the war and with our Constitution in 1945 and on the same date also French women, in my opinion, this still does not represent a complete liberation for them. It still does not mean that they have the full availability of their own body because this is still subject to a series of norms, rules, prejudices, and taboo.

I want to open a parenthesis: the twentieth century, which many historians have described as a century of abominations and horror - and indeed, it was not a pleasant century. It is the Century of the Gulag, the gas chambers, concentration camps, and extermination of Jews and entire populations. However, it is also the century that, with the end of the Second World War, recognizes the freedom and rights of women. From this point of view and also the century of the end of colonization of women, this is true for us, for this part of the world, for the world governed by democratic and liberal rules. Because at the same time we still have millions of Chinese women who are forced to walk with their feet bandaged and awkwardly swinging, while we have Indian women burned at the stake where their dead husbands are burned, and hundreds of thousands of girls still undergoing genital mutilation. In short, when we speak of women's liberation, of women's progress, we must bear in mind that this concerns us, that is, a still limited part of the female universe.

Let's also return to our own story. We conquer as we all know the right to vote in 45, and then, gradually other rights, including that of access to a number of professions. I always remember that in 1945, in the debate that took place in the Constituent Assembly, it was discussed at some point whether women could access what appeared to be the top of the top, which was the judiciary. However, there were strong consolidated objections. I remember—then he also apologized, "yes, I said it but I regret it"—but in short, I have repeated it many times but I repeat it here too only because it is too funny...as funny as it is dramatic...One of the most illustrious constituents, a very famous Law professor, who would also become the president of the Republic, President Leone, claimed that women could not be magistrates because on some days of the month they...and so they would not have the lucidity. I must say that, since I always said it, Leone knew it because I had said it in some university lecture hall and then he said "I have repented" and I said, "it's alright. I forgive you". He had so many things to be forgiven for that this was perhaps not the most serious one. But I also want to remember on that occasion, in that Constituent Assembly, in that commission that discussed this matter, it was our women deputies, all of them, Communists as well as Christian Democrats and Socialists, who protested. And they studied a stratagem, the chamber's role was only to study these stratagems, but the problem was left unresolved. Our women deputies, and even the Honorable Christian Democrat Federici, wanted that access to the judiciary

was open to men and women. This was not possible because these men of the magistrature did not want it. However, a glimmer was left open, because it was stated that access to the judiciary would be regulated by the appropriate laws. So from then on, since 1945, the battle began, and every now and then a few outstanding female students who graduated in law would apply for access to the magistrature. This was rejected, the following year other graduate girls did the same thing, many then appealed to the consultant, fought for everything well, but their appeal was always rejected. Until finally in 1963, if I am not mistaken, the first women had access to the judiciary. One of them is Livia Pomodoro, who today is president of the Juvenile Court of Milan. However, they passed the tune of almost twenty years.

Then after that, some of you may even remember the photographs of "the first woman who led a train," "the first woman who led an airplane," to "the first women who also entered the armed forces." It happened at last. But I think that all this is not really enough to guarantee women's freedom. I do not underestimate the help that has come to the liberation of women from other tributaries. For example, from Coco Chanel. In my opinion, Coco Chanel is also important because she taught women how to cut their hair and take off their corset. Then, another fundamental contribution came certainly from psychoanalysis, because it freed sexuality from the sphere of taboo and repression. But in my opinion, a fundamental help—which is what marked, in my opinion, a breakthrough—was that doctor named Pincus who invented the birth control pill. Because in this way, with the pill, and then later with abortion, women took the control of procreation. It freed women from unwanted continuous pregnancies, widening the spaces of their freedom. Only those who belong to my generation know and remember what was the torment of a woman's life and the fear, the terror of pregnancies before there was the famous birth control pill. Everything changed afterward or at least it changed a lot with the conquest of the birth control pill.

And this freedom has begun to emerge concretely in fact with the control by every woman of her ability to procreate. The woman's ability to procreate and to carry another creature within her, to be somehow two in one for a long part of her life - because she is two in one when she carries a child - has constituted and still constitutes, even in the Western world in our country, the pretext or foundation for culture or legislation that restricts her freedom. Because it does not recognize her full right to dispose of her body. Because she disposes of her body and at the same time as another that is inside her body. From this point of view, I believe that the real turning point was law 194 on abortion. Because law 194 recognizes the woman the moral capacity to decide about herself and her creature. The importance of the law that was passed in 1978 lies in this: that she is recognized for this ability...this full mastery. It is only to her...the law says the last decision is up to her. This is something that has also been disputed for a long time, which is extraordinarily important. With this law and only with this —much more than with the law about divorce or even with the very important new law about the family right of 1975—it is only with this law that the woman is recognized for the full possession of her body, the authority, and the moral capacity to decide for herself and for the other one in her womb.

You see, the point of women's freedom is not only the landing point of a thirty-year process of economic and social advancement —the recognition of a series of individual and social rights. It is not something that happens only in our country almost miraculously, but it is the result of an impetuous movement for civil rights that took place throughout the western world. More or less in the same years the abortion law - which is not really a law, it is a judgment, but it does not matter to us because it is considered a law - it is enacted by the American Supreme Court. In Italy, it is the result of the encounter between the feminist movement and the 68 movement, among other things, that is so demonized.

Excuse me for opening a parenthesis: Sarkozy, who in my opinion is a swindler...But he is a talented swindler and then—by the way he has such a beautiful wife—did his whole campaign saying that it was necessary to end with the 68. But if there had not been '68...according to you, a man who had been married twice and had children could go up to the Élysée? In the Élysée, there were always some impeccable characters who had only a wife and her own son. Sarkozy used 68 to bring Cecilia, who in my opinion is perhaps even more beautiful than Carla, to the Élysée first, but in short, this does not matter. He was already married first, then he married Cecilia. He brought his children and Cecilia's children to the Élysée, then he left Cecilia.

He married Carla: could you be more 68 than that!

Now, this was a parenthesis. It is certain, however, that our laws are also the result of this fruitful encounter between the feminist movement and the entire movement of 1968. In a country like Italy that had been impetuously invested by a process of secularization, to which not even women and Catholic movements were alienated, this process of secularization followed the Second Vatican Council, which had raised and nourished hopes in a position as advanced as ever - It is therefore in this climate in which the extremism of youth movements, the anxieties of grassroots Catholic communities, the conciliar pressures and the unscrupulous initiatives of the Radical Party, and all the manifestations of neo-feminism coexist. It is in this singular climate that our abortion law can be discussed and passed, thanks also to the forgotten but providential absence from the Chamber of a dozen Christian Democrats.

And I like to remember that the Radical Party voted against it. They voted against it, not because they were against the abortion law, but because they considered it too limited. They wanted it to be even more liberal because the law says that abortion should be done in a hospital, but they wanted it to be done anywhere, in a clinic, and, why not, at home. You come to me, you do the abortion and etcetera. From this point of view, one of the standard-bearers of this movement was—sic transit gloria mundi—our Eugenia Roccella, currently under the secretary of Health or Welfare as they say today, is one of the most fierce...fiercely fierce in accusing father Englaro of being a murderer or a little less. My opinion is that one can change one's opinion, but in short, respecting a little bit the opinions that were once yours and respecting a little more those who think differently today.

I see that I am talking too much, but now I will conclude. I want to say that since the law of 1978, 30 years have passed and many are the signs of a radical change in the political and cultural climate, almost a counter-offensive, by virtue of a contradictory process. That is, the woman's body, now freed from any hindrance, is more and more exhibited and enhanced by advertising, fashion, and entertainment. Freed from every hindrance...And I would say also from every veil. But, at the same time, on the woman's body, an open battle has been fought for many years in Italy between the church, secular thought, and the outcome of this battle, in my opinion, has not yet been decided. Recently Natalia Aspesi, a journalist I love very much, observed with a finesse that if Islam enslaves the woman's body by hiding it, wearing her veil or burqa, the West humiliates it by denuding it. And this is also true in my opinion. And I cannot help remember, however, that if Islam conceals the woman's body even against her will, the woman's body is completely revealed and exhibited in the West with the consent of women. And I can't help but remember that many years ago - maybe 30 years ago - the American feminist movement took its cue from an ironic bonfire of burned bras in a square in Los Angeles or New York. Today, on the contrary, even teenagers often ask for intervention as a graduation gift to get one, two, three, even four sizes more, now we have arrived at absolutely monstrous sizes in my opinion. At least, I find them monstrous! Maybe it's because I've always had the complex of having a size that was too big. So much so that some time ago, in the government, it was even thought of a measure that forbade the intervention on the breasts of girls if they were not yet 18 years old.

I think that then nothing was done about it, but in short, it is also true that the exhibition of female bodies now spreads in an increasingly embarrassing and vulgar way on the pages of magazines, in commercials up to a poster...I do not know if it was posted here too...but in Rome, it was posted and then withdrawn, in which it was staged with rare bad taste violence against women operated by two policemen who poked two girls under their skirts. The poster was put up, then it was withdrawn and then protested because it was withdrawn. The poster was signed of course by one of the greatest Italian photographers who is Toscani, who protested about the censorship of his work. The problem exists. I tell you the truth...maybe we should reflect more, but in front of some of these posters, I am tempted to say that it is time to end it. It is also true, however, that there is not only the exhibition of the female nude, because by now, for example, by Dolce and Gabbana there is also a very crude exhibition of the male body, which now appears to be stripped naked, ripped and so I do not know. However, it is a theme...a problem that, in my opinion, we as women, as a women's movement, perhaps we should propose ourselves. I want to say that another game is also played on the body of women, in my opinion, in the West, even in our

¹ "End-of-life", in Italian "fine-vita", was a long parliamentary debate in Italy regarding the acceptance or refusal to use biomedical and biotechnological discoveries in the last stages of life.

country.

I go back to the beginning of my conversation at the last act of this game. And I go back to the beginning of this conversation: during the last act of this game—we witnessed in the course of the story of Eluana—is it possible that the church would have had the same attitude even if it was a man? I do not know. The fact that it was about a woman made the story more dramatic from an emotional point of view. I leave aside the statement of our President of the council who— talking about Eluana in those conditions—said that she could even give birth. I don't know what he would have said if it was about a boy, maybe "he could still go play soccer". I don't know what to say about a statement of this kind, for which Berlusconi even apologized at one point. At least he tried to apologize as if he had been badly informed. But of course, for one of us... for one of us, a woman who had, without having seen her because of course, I have not seen her as you have not seen her, but who can easily imagine what a woman is - we kept saying a girl, never was Eluana even a girl anymore because, for 17 years, she was lying down with a tube, cured, clean, no doubt, but without the possibility to perceive the world... what is called in a permanent vegetative state. The idea that one could somehow say "but could still give birth" is only one thing that upsets us. I believe, all of us, whatever our orientation is on the living law, I want to say, however, that the violence that has been exercised on the body of Eluana—that has also been exercised by our Prime Minister, even if he then said that he had been badly informed—and the violence that he has exercised in a shameful way by Minister Sacconi, from whom we expected a more reasonable position, or by Senator Quagliariello, who I heard claiming in the Senate "Eluana has not died...it is you who have killed her". All these forms of violence are the last act of a battle that has been conducted for years now between the church and secular thought. And the outcome of this battle has not been decided yet. I want to remember, for example, the shameful law on assisted fertilization that forces the implantation in the woman's uterus of sick embryos, allowing at the same time, if desired, to abort after two months. This is an extreme abomination because you implant the sick embryos and then you allow her to abort when they have already grown and they are already part of her body, only after two months a woman has the right to perceive them as a part of herself and her future.

Today, there is a similar battle about the "end-of-life" ¹, between those who want to deny the right of women, but also that of men, of course, to dispose of their bodies and those who believe that it is our right to refuse treatment, also according to an enlightening article of our Constitution. In fact, according to Article 32, the second subparagraph of our Constitution, it is our right to refuse treatment even if the cessation of treatment involves our death. The most sensational case is that of Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses, as you know, refuse the blood transfusion. It happened several times that the doctor was told "I don't want the transfusion" - "But if you don't accept the transfusion, you will die" - "I would rather die than have a blood transfusion". And in that case, the doctor doesn't do it. It is not clear why an Italian woman or man should not be allowed to decide the way they want to end their life.

A very last notation: I mentioned the law on Assisted reproductive technology (ART)...the fact that there is an attempt to regain full possession of women's bodies. Now, I cannot but mention rape. It is known and it is true that the majority of rapes happen inside the family. It confirms that they are the means by which a man, who has legally lost control over his wife and daughters, wants to regain possession of them by force. This right was once recognized by the law, but today the law no longer recognizes it to men, so they re-appropriate it with violence. But what struck me even more, was the case of a rape committed not in the family but in Guidonia near Rome. I do not know by whom. I do not remember because we are overwhelmed by this kind of news. I was struck by the fact that the inhabitants of this town organized themselves in patrols, shouting that they were looking for "who raped our women". But ours who, excuse me? Ours of whom? Here we really go back to the primordial era, so both those who offend, who are the rapers and those who defend, those who say "our women", turn out to be the bearers of a very ancient, primordial culture, the culture of caves or Romans when they went to kidnap the Sabine women. The Sabines would have been right to say "why are you taking our women?" But I wish this era was over. Thank you.

Mario Fortunato: By the way, what happened to this last news report you mentioned, they had organized some patrols—things that unfortunately are very fashionable in recent times—just to find out who offended our women and then to discover that maybe they were countrymen, and then came back. I think that's why.

There is a question I would like to ask you right away Miriam. You have rightly mentioned the very strong and inevitable intertwining that there is with the various religions, with religious beliefs that curiously from Hinduism to Islamism, Christianity, Judaism, etc... always converge roughly and in any case on the theme that the woman is considered in a more or less brutal more or less violent - you mentioned the Indian stake - as a minor figure, as support of the man. But how can this unanimity be explained in your opinion? That is, how is it possible that this vision and this idea of domination of the male body over the female one is so universal?

Miriam Mafai: I'm not an anthropologist, but I think it comes from the fact that the woman carries within herself another. And it is precisely the fact of motherhood that can exalt us. But the man cares about control, to be sure that the fruit of your belly is actually his.

Mario Fortunato: *Mater semper certa est, pater incertus.*

Miriam Mafai: Exactly. And this is transmitted, even from various cultures. Because this is an element that maternity is valid for all women, from the black one who lives in an African tribe to the Swedish one. But in both cases, there is this true thing that she procreates the child. It is the repository of the male seed from which the child that the father recognizes will come. I believe that this is the element that requires man to control this function, which is an essential function. The man recognizes the son and the inheritance. In all societies from the oldest to the most evolved, there is a problem of recognition by the father, up to a bourgeois society where the situation is complicated by the problem of inheritance.

Mario Fortunato: Of course, the transmission of ownership. Another thing you mentioned before and that seems to me to have a double face. The theme of the controlled or unveiled female body, similarly to the male one. You mentioned advertising, in which the male body also becomes a naked commodity or instrument, shown as an object among objects. This is not the other side of this extreme control that one wants to perpetrate on both male and female bodies as if to say...

Miriam Mafai: Mortifying it?

Mario Fortunato: Yes. it is the equal and opposite face of the problem of the "end-of-life". That is the control of the body both male and female by the politics of the state.

Miriam Mafai: I don't know. On the control of the female or male body in advertising, I rather see its absolute commodification, in a society that commodifies almost everything. This then— excuse me—is in contrast, or should be in contrast, even with teachings of the church. And it is astonishing that there is not, at least as far as I know, no stance on the part of the Church from this point of view. It is precisely a matter of commodification and of using both women's and men's bodies—and in a while also children's bodies—exclusively to sell...which is probably successful and which I find degrading...however, beyond a certain limit, and even more so for children. I was just saying that it was proposed to put a limit to the fact of cosmetic surgery on girls - I find it a bit grotesque. I am telling the truth - even if it is a measure that has been examined also in Germany, then I think that nothing has been done about it. I have to say that I would not hesitate to put a limit to the use of children in advertising, because I find it really deeply inappropriate.

Mario Fortunato: Then think about the whole theme of fashion, ultra young models, etc... And I was just asking if this could not be considered paradoxically the opposite side of what is today's theme that we are now discussing a law practically unique in the Western world in our country. A law—such that if a perfectly lucid person says I do not want to be fed because I no longer want to live because my life is reduced to almost nothing—is not granted.

Miriam Mafai: The incredible thing is that we don't realize—except here

someone who is not a doctor anyway who works near these sick people— what the vegetative state means.

Something that drives me crazy is when the church talks about natural death. Because there is nothing natural about it. Let me die, but let me die as one used to die, please. At the end of the day, it is only very recently that this possibility exists. Once, one died when one's heart stopped beating, when one was carrying a mirror in front of one's mouth, and when one's breath stopped coming out. The concept of death was changed when the possibility of transplantation intervened. Therefore, quite recently, I believe 30 years ago when the famous doctor...

Mario Fortunato: Barnard.

Miriam Mafai: That's right, which by the way seems that he killed the one from which he took heart, because he was not dead, according to the rules of that time. To be a dead heart, it had to have finished beating, but if the heart had finished beating he could not transplant it. Then Barnard, because he was a very good doctor, decided that it was imminent death so he took the heart and put it somewhere else. Now the Catholic Church has quietly accepted—or not quietly had a debate—that death was ascertained in a different way. But death ascertained in a different way, that is with the end of the brain activity, means that you can live in a vegetative state even for an unspecified period. And the church and Cardinal Barragan know very well that hospitals, including Catholic hospitals, at some point, pull the plug, otherwise we would have hospitals full of the living dead...this is not admissible. Because they are dead and a part of the brain has finished working. And so it is horrible for those who are there, parents, children, and so on. Now, why ever there is this viciousness? Even if the position of the church was different before, but forget it. Anyway today, we claim the right to decide that at some point this poll is disconnected. And I think this is totally legitimate since it also fully respects a principle of our Constitution. We are no longer alive when we are in those conditions, unfortunately.

Question from the public: Let's go back to the game of powers between man and woman. The speech is that the woman, after feminism, both feels free to do what she wanted, without understanding that she was at the game instead of man, so much so that now the woman is treated as an object, etc... So, in what do we actually still have "power" apart from motherhood? What can we have power in?

Miriam Mafai: In ourselves. Since no woman is forced to be subject to a man. Actually, each of us is the fruit of a historical tradition, each of us is the daughter of her mother, granddaughter of her grandmother, and of your great-grandmother. The culture has been transmitted. A culture of submission to obedience is transmitted and each one of us to some extent is a victim of it. That is why the role of mothers is so important. I don't become tired of repeating this to my daughter-in-law. Let's say because she is the only one who listens to me, who has to educate her children to autonomy, to self-discipline. I have two great-grandchildren that I love madly. One of them is 6 years old. On Sunday, she tells me that there is a boyfriend of her in the first grade and she says "you know grandma? I got tired. He always asks me to sharpen his pencils with my pencil sharpener" and I said, "excuse me, but why?" "because he asks me" "what do you do?" "I do" "you do it? but I'll kill you if you do that to him!" The next Sunday I said, "Elisabeth, how did it go with that child?" "grandmother, I don't sharpen his pencil anymore!" Now, this is a small incident, but I wonder why in Elisabeth's head, who is an intelligent child, when the boy says, "sharpen my pencil" she does it and doesn't say "it is your own problem, dear". I am a beast, but I also know the story. Now, if for centuries women have been used to sharpen the pencil to prepare the dish and bring the soup to the table and so on, it is clear that there is a trace of all this. And obedience is considered a virtue of girls and women, while aggressiveness is considered a virtue of boys. Now, this is a process that does not end, I think—this I know well—in a generation. However, it is up to us, it is up to the women of the younger generation—I have tried to do my part—to educate the next generation to their own dignity and pride and strength. Otherwise, we will not go very far and I often see even today, in many girls a submissive or submissive attitude or pure and simple imitation of the more vulgar and more unnecessarily aggressive attitudes of the boys in school. This is not what we want. We want a godlike attitude of respect for the person. We do not want to have bullies together with bullies.

Question from the public: I want to pose a brief, more political question. I remember that the Catholic world, at least a good part of it, has moved against divorce, against abortion. Here I have not seen anything comparable. Why this very violent political battle, which to me seems more like a battle of hierarchy and power, was unleashed in the cold. I am not Catholic, but many of my Catholic friends have not heard anywhere, not even from the parish priests, a strong conviction to go to this battle substantially directed by the Vatican and some political forces. Nothing comparable to divorce and abortion. I wanted to ask you why, how do you explain it?

Miriam Mafai: I agree. In this sense, we are in a rather curious situation. Because, even in comparison to the battles on divorce and abortion, we do not have a side that is a liveliness of battles of Catholic movements supporting the positions of the Vatican, just as we do not have movements and groups and circles instead of supporting secular positions. It is like, to put it in a somewhat crude way, if the dispute was between Cardinal Barragan or the Pope and Italian politics, without real participation of Catholics in Italy. This would be— but I say “would”—confirmed by a series of surveys that say that in reality even in the Catholic world there is no adherence to these extreme positions presented by the hierarchies. So we would actually be in the presence of a process of secularization of this country that is going on, despite an apparent greater vivacity of the Catholic world. In fact John Paul II behaved differently. He was certainly not a member of the Democratic or Radical Party, but he approached these problems with greater delicacy and sense of responsibility. It is undeniable that at the time of his death, he said a very beautiful phrase. He refused to return to the hospital Gemelli, where he had already been many times, and said “Let me go” and that is basically what we also ask.

Question from the public: I would like to thank you, first of all, for your testimony. I am a woman of 46 years old. I am a physiotherapist and I have two teenage children. I tell you this because, being from the 60s, 1962... anyway, I am a woman who has enjoyed the achievement of the struggles that your generation has carried on. As a physiotherapist, I have been working for years with people’s bodies and I have children and so also in this sense, I compare myself. And I realize that in reality this relationship with the body is not so free and liberated and above all, there are few spaces in which one expresses oneself freely with respect to it, and one speaks about it. I also realize that despite the work I do, the fact that I have a special relationship with the body of freedom and also of awareness, with my daughter facing certain discourses is not easy and there is resistance. And therefore, I think it is extremely important that, precisely on the part of women, there is the memory of the testimony and the request that these issues are also introduced inside the school. When my children were in elementary school, I always tried to participate in their school life and I realized that, for example, the teacher who dealt with scientific themes almost avoided dealing with the discourse of sexuality. And in that moment, I said, “very well it may be that a teacher is not able to address these themes, let’s find a way to talk about them and make sure that children can talk about them”. I faced very big difficulties from the other parents who, in front of this willingness to look for somebody that would eventually address these subjects, declared themselves disagreeing, because these were issues that had to be discussed at home. Well, a whole series of things, in reality, is not enough for a fight, but it is really necessary continuous work because otherwise we face a risk.

And I would like to talk about another situation that I experienced at work. I worked for some years with girls and women in schools. So, I discussed with them about the body and their freedom to expose themselves. We talked about sensuality and I just tried to make them understand the movement of the pelvis or what it means to move the pelvis... How many difficulties are in these...how many difficulties in freeing them to express themselves with the body. Such difficulties belong to us. Much more than in other cultures where the body is a means of communication. Thank you very much.

Miriam Mafai: This is true, because historically women are either forced into the burqa or belly dancing. There is no way to express ourselves, or rather we are not educated to express ourselves, to a way to move our bodies that is not in the burqa in belly dancing. I have nothing against belly dancing, but I think I can say that women, in general, do not have total physical mastery of their bodies. Even from this point of view, education would be necessary. It is not only sex education that should be done in school. I think there is some improvement in the sense that today even respect—I mean compared to 20 or 30 years ago when I had my daughter in school—there is perhaps a greater

possibility to do sports. In Rome, no doubt that there are now a much larger number of swimming pools than before. But, for a girl, the occasion to fully unfold the possibilities of a woman's body is still quite elitist, while a boy has it. He has a capacity for movement and expression of the body that women are not yet given.

Mario Fortunato: Yes, this is very interesting. In the meantime, can I ask you one more thing? About the generation of the 68 and what happened afterward. Is it my impression or is it true that the capacity of awareness and consideration for one's own conscience, precisely between the 60s and 70s, was very large, disruptive, especially in the female world. Today, it is ossified, so to speak.

Miriam Mafai: My judgment on 68 is a little bit complicated, like yours, I think. In reality, it is singular because in Italy there is not a shared study of 68. There are a series of books, from those of Capanna to those of someone else- but they were not so much about 68 but about terrorism. More books have been written on terrorism than on 68 in Italy, I believe. Because 68 was then a very rich and also very diversified movement. I do not believe however that in 68, women had an important and significant place. Some feminist struggles were intertwined with those of 68, but within 68 I do not believe that women had a place in front.

Mario Fortunato: But let's say that since that moment there has been progress.

Miriam Mafai: The 60s were extraordinary years. It started with the famous Parini's investigation. This is when girls still wore black aprons to school, and then it was intertwined with a movement that was charged with another push - then you remember when "the Angels of the mimeograph". In short, it did not seem to me that women in 68 had an exceptional role of importance. Paradoxically, perhaps they were more present, *uti singuli*, at the time of terrorism. But I would say that women took a different path. They began a process of reflection—feminism—which started from there, from that unripe group, that and then went into another direction. I think there would still be a lot to study, to work on those movements. Also, to understand how they are intertwined and then how they separated. And then how they gave rise to a series of laws, which I believe a lot. Because I, as a reformer, believe a lot in laws and its fallout. But it is also true, I realize, I believe, that we are in a phase of uncertainty. Here - I do not feel a movement of women who are the protagonists today. I see forces, women, but unfortunately I do not believe that there is a movement that is in the square, I mean symbolically, and I believe that this is a danger. It is a very confusing situation because instead I see a particular aggressiveness of the hierarchies, even if I do not see an aggressiveness of the grassroots Catholic movements, so it is a situation that seems to me curious enough, complex enough, confused - from which women can come out even as winners. I do not even exclude that from this debate that is being conducted in Parliament about the "end-of-life" can produce a positive outcome. Of course, this is a verbal battle for women and for men. But I feel for example that there is a movement. Let's forget about Giuliano Ferrara who did his campaign, of which I was happy about because he was convinced with that campaign against divorce to have at least 5 and 6% of the votes. He himself told me this during a debate. Luckily, he was totally defeated. Even this is not without meaning. It seems to me that we are in a situation of great uncertainty, of possibilities, and also of failures. They are all to be decided.

Mario Fortunato: Honestly, I thought that the Ferrara movement would not have a great electoral result when Berlusconi refused the appearance.

Miriam Mafai: Of course. But the curious thing was that Ferrara was convinced of having success. Maybe someone.... I don't say guaranteed him, this would be a vulgarity... but Ferrara must have had somehow perceived, not a guarantee of the Catholic world because I do not believe that this is it, but he had considered that the Catholic world would have mobilized in support of his thesis, which was then for the outlaw abortion, to put it very simply, was the moratorium. Instead, the Catholic world did not move at all. So, that was a serious failure for him, but it is a confirmation that not all Catholics in Italy are in these extremist positions. As you can understand if you go on the web to see a whole series of blogs, opinions also of the Catholic world that have many reservations about these positions even of the current pontiff.

Question from the public: I basically agree with your ideas, I read your articles and your books. I would like to hear your opinion on the pink quotas, which is the only one I feel. Because, to me, there should also be an intelligence quote or a capacity quote and everything else. Pink quotas is something that I do not like. I wanted to hear your opinion.

Mario Fortunato: Maybe then you can tell us something about the gray quotas, of which we talk about recently.

Miriam Mafai: On pink quotas, the subject is controversial. I have never been an enthusiast of the pink quotas, in fact, I think I have never written on this subject. But I have often been accused by my party companion of having in this matter an aristocratic position. It is not an aristocratic position. I just think that the positions that are granted to you can be taken back when the one who has given them to you is fed up with you. I am convinced that politics is a very difficult profession, of tears and blood and also of honors, of course, and also of money in some cases. However, it is not an easy profession. One does not enter politics even on behalf of women. You enter politics, when you enter it, when you are able to enter it as a representation of interests. Some lawful, but others not so lawful. Now, I'm talking about those women who enter politics in defense of the interests of those who were once called "disinherited", and among them are also women. Now if we do the names... but what does Santanché represent me? But what does Marianna Madia represent to me? You don't even know who she is, but look at her. She is a very pretty girl, blond, and so on, who was elected in the group, to which I belong. She has never been in a party section. She has never had what was called a "block meeting", she has never gone to a market to distribute flyers. And suddenly she is projected in Parliament as the leader of the Democratic Party list in Lazio. They tell me that "there are quotas". But what quotas? Be patient, the problem is not that with the quotas you take some pretty graduated women who can talk. The problem is to raise women who are capable of politics. I repeat. It is a very hard job. A woman who is capable of politics, who in my opinion would also be able to be the secretary of a party, one is Rosi Bindi and the other is Anna Finocchiaro. The others are good as well, but the problem is not to enter by the virtue of a pink quota, but to enter by the virtue of a political battle that you give in your party, if you are able, which is not easy. But this is the way to enter politics. After that, it's always difficult. But I have some images of political women that I like very much. I don't know her, but, for example, I like the Spanish Minister of the Armed Forces very much. It's a beautiful image, because with a huge belly - she would have been eight months pregnant - she was reviewing the armed forces. At the time, the idea of a lady with a belly like that, who was reviewing the Spanish Armed Forces with her belly, seemed to me a spectacle like saying that the image physically represented a radical change in the conscience both of Spanish women and of those soldiers who I do not know how they would have judged this thing. Then I want to say that we must have women who are capable - then, women who are in charge of the Ministry of Equal Opportunities are fine, too. But, I'm tired of women who have the Ministry of Equal Opportunities. Carfagna is such a nice person, but I want to see women in other roles, and I am convinced that, for example, I am convinced that Rosi Bindi could hold the Ministry of Health very well as she has already done. I want to see women in roles of responsibility. The pink quotas are a hypothesis that is now over. Thank goodness. I don't know how the next European elections will go and I don't know how the next local elections will go, which are also important. For example, we have a president in the region of Piemonte, the mayor of Genova, and the president of Umbria. These are the ones that I have in mind, that are women absolutely exposed in the front line and it is not that they have come out with the pink quotas.

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Miriam Mafai

Miriam Mafai (Florence, February 2, 1926 - Rome, April 9, 2012), was an Italian journalist, writer, and politician. Politically engaged since a very young age, she participated in the anti-fascist resistance in Rome and after the war, she joined the Italian Communist Party. Only in 1994, after joining the Democratic Alliance party, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Mafai was an important figure in Italian journalism in the second half of the twentieth century: in the 1950s she was correspondent for the weekly magazine *Vie nuove* in Paris, then for *L'Unità*, between the 1960s and 1970s she was director of *Noi donne* and then a correspondent for *Paese Sera*. She contributed to the birth of *La Repubblica* in 1976 and became its editorialist. From 1983 to 1986, she was president of the National Federation of the Italian Press. As a militant feminist and careful observer of the condition of women, she was the author of important essays such as *L'apprendistato della politica. Le donne italiane nel dopoguerra* (1979), *Pane Nero. Donne e vita quotidiana nella seconda guerra mondiale* (1987); *Il lungo freddo. Storia di Bruno Pontecorvo, lo scienziato che scelse l'USSR* (1992); *Le donne italiane. Il chi è del '900* (1993), *Botteghe Oscure addio. Com'eravamo comunisti* (1996); *Forget Berlinguer* (1996); *Il sorpasso. Gli straordinari anni del miracolo economico 1958-1963* (1997); *Il silenzio dei comunisti* (2002).

Rewind

The temporary closure becomes an opportunity for the Foundation to reactivate its archive. Over the past 35 years FAR has presented numerous conferences, workshops, seminars and publications inviting thinkers from different fields: contemporary art, textile history, anthropology, literature and more. Our Rewind project aims to spread and share this amazing resource.

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Looking back, re-hearing, re-learning become strategies to move forward and the archive is activated as a fundamental tool to imagine ourselves in the future.