LUDGER H. VIEFHUES–BAILEY
NO SEPARATION: CHRISTIANS, SECULAR DEMOCRACY, AND SEX. A CRITICAL NOTICE

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As far as it is a form of *self*–government, democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people. The redundancy of Abraham Lincoln's famous adage makes it clear that John Dewey (1939, p. 226) was close to the truth when he noted that democracy is less a political regime than a form of life: a certain way of being in the world and, above all, of being together on an *equal* footing. Because it is such an ambitious venture, it is no surprise that the democratic way of life is under constant pressure from outside as well as from within. These demands generally revolve around the question of who is entitled to belong to the citizenship: who are the people of whom, by whom and for whom democratic rule exists?

The question has the same kind of depth and urgency as identity issues have: who am I? Who are we? Who do we want/ought to be?

There is a core of *identity politics*, thus, in any democratic life worthy of the name. But who are the "people" today?

On the one hand, it is clear that the noun "people" has historically meant, from the very beginning, the weaker, more disadvantaged, less powerful part of the population of a city, a nation, a state. In this sense, inasmuch as equality is regarded as a value and not as a dangerous temptation to disorder and anarchy, self–rule always functions as an aspiration, an impulse to self–transformation. It is a concept at once telic, normative, experimental, even romantic — as long as the qualifier "romantic" is meant to indicate an impulse, which is, if not supererogatory, at least generous, idealistic in a good sense.

"Experimental" is probably the key word here: the property warranting the superiority of the democratic regime in the eyes of a pragmatist like Dewey. If democracy is always (at least in part) an experiment, this explains why "democracy" always happens in the plural.

Plurality means complexity and, in some cases, even confusion. There has been indeed plenty of confusion in the recent history of Western democracies and judgments about their health are far from unanimous or convergent. The point is not only that there is no consensus as to the supposed entry point or possible way out of the multiple crises facing liberal democracies nowadays, but also that the interpretative frameworks used to describe and make sense of the situation are very different.

In his book, Ludger Viefhues–Bailey focuses his attention on a recognizable pattern in North Atlantic democratic life over the past two decades. For he investigates the rise, in spite of the wave of secularization still taking place in the West, of a prototypical political Christianity that operates as the common ground for a relative majority of citizens who believe that they are reacting to a direct threat to popular sovereignty and thus to their right to self–rule, to be "masters in their own house," to take back control over their own lives.

The spontaneous, often extra–institutional, eclectic recourse to the Christian religious tradition — or what is taken to be the gist of Christianity — in a realm by definition secular such as the one demarcated by the republican goal of non–domination (Pettit 2002) is a remarkable element as such. Viefhues–Bailey, however, does not merely record it, but he analyzes three different instantiations of it (respectively, the case of Germany's islamophobic *Leitkultur*, of French Catholic "republicanism," and of the American Protestant Right) and constructs an original theoretical framework to account for such a distinctive and enigmatic socio–political dispensation.

In what is left of my critical notice, I will leave aside his informative and instructive descriptions of the relevant case studies and instead focus on his overall explanatory framework. Precisely because he takes the self–understanding of modern advocates of democracy at their word (I mean, he takes the republican ideal of self–rule seriously without undermining it with a chain of qualifiers and restrictions, as is often the

case in mainstream liberal theories of democracy, which, at the end of the day, regard modern democracy as a mixed government), the most original aspect of Viefhues–Bailey's account is that it sheds light on a hidden side of it underscored especially by Michel Foucault — a thinker who, in other respects, did not have a particular inclination toward the republican idea of freedom. What I am gesturing towards here is that, since he does not dismiss the image of the democratic *body* politic as metaphorical, he is driven to ask whether it is not precisely the question of its physical reproduction that mobilizes today's burgeoning thymotic passions, what he calls *animus* and others more conventionally picture as the "populism" of angry white men around Europe, the United States and Australia. To be more specific, Viefhues–Bailey investigates the "libidinal underpinnings of the democratic project" (p. 30), the "libidinal substructure of political belonging" (p. 28), its "libidinal undercurrent" (p. 100) or "foundation" (p. 163), shedding light on the often overlooked link between "secular democracy" and "sex," as the book's subtitle recites[1].

If one makes the comparison with perhaps the most influential twentieth–century philosophical endorsement of the republican view of freedom — Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* — the scope of the change is easy to measure. For Arendt (1958), the modern obsession with biopolitics is a symptom of a non–accidental sovereignist degeneration of the republican construe of the *Öffentlichkeit*. Precisely because they are not satisfied with the distinctively fragile goods made possible by the disclosure of a genuine public realm, most modern democrats end up demanding from politics what politics cannot give (i.e., a complete emancipation from necessity, including those forms of necessity originating in bodily determinations). However, such a stipulative conception of what politics is prevents Arendt from doing justice to the expressions of new political needs that emerge historically precisely because of the non–contingent success, better, the intrinsic worth of the public happiness experienced by the people at moments of highest democratic effervescence, whether revolutionary or pararivolutionary. As Viefhues notes in a key passage of his argument: "*The political* is not simply given, but we speak it into being, like any other social

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(1) Page numbers included in parentheses in the text refer to Viefhues–Bailey (2023).

formation. Contrary to Schmitt, I will argue that in a democratic state, it is constituted through sexuality, through decisions about who reproduces the People and how that happens. Consequently, what is at stake is not only what defines them in contrast to others — their outer boundaries, as it were — but also how the People are internally structured in ways that enable our desire to be with one another, to care for each other, and to have a future together" (p. 35).

The ambivalence of these new political needs is worth of mentioning, of course. For, in the cases studied by Viefhues–Bailey, the "people" stand out as a profoundly ambiguous entity from a moral point of view as a result of glaring and outrageous power asymmetries.

Probably those who study religion on a daily basis and are used to its manifold expressions are more willing to come to terms with the structural ambiguities and threats that characterize all the three examples of moral failures discussed in the book: Islamophobia, majority's self–satisfied blindness, and the cynical claim of a historical privilege. Come to think of it, these are all socio–historical circumstances in which popular sovereignty displays a hardness of heart and deafness to the reasons of others that makes one despair about the future of humanity. However, resisting the temptation to surrender to disillusionment, Viefhues–Bailey uses the insights extracted from his case studies to articulate an idea of democratic self–rule that goes beyond the logic of "abjection," the monsterification of otherness, and instead relies on mutual care to translate into less masculine terms the democratic ideal of a life form based on genuine equality, that is, on the radically transformative experience of standing on an equal footing with anyone else. It remains to be established, however, whether his claim to conceive differently of the People and envision a community of care "without reinscribing the heteropatriarchal, racist, ethnocentric, and anti–Muslim discourses and practices that produce the Cultural Christianities that we have examined in this book, and that this type of religion sustains" (p. 225) is successfully met or not.

Clearly, the notion of epistemic success in this field is far from self–transparent. As Charles Taylor (1983) noted many years ago, the only reliable yardstick in the human sciences lies in the self–clarifying and transformative potential of their best accounts of the *explananda*. How then are things in the case of Viefhues–Bailey's BA?

On the one hand, his claim that cultural Christianities reveal "a truth about democracies: they need border work and a particular cultivation of erotic desires, and they attend to practices of reproduction" (p. 226) seems plausible enough and is the main evidence of the heuristic fruitfulness of the framework of analysis employed in the book. More controversial, by its very nature, is his further claim that the way cultural Christianities translate this truth about democracies into practice is "incompatible with the creation of free selves" and that the "logic of abjection in which these Christianities are embedded disables a subjectivity that can shape itself positively." What is problematic is not just the strongly evaluative and judgmental character of this statement. The problem is that it presumes an answer to the question of what is reasonable to expect from politics, and more particularly from modern democracy. In conclusion, I will therefore devote some thoughts to the idea of "democracy in the optative" as opposed to the negative, disempowering example of cultural Christianities, around which an important and disturbing current of contemporary populism has built its electoral success. Personally, I find Viefhues–Bailey's reasoning most convincing when he steers clear of what I would blithely call "Agambenian" overstatement, that is, the tendency to radicalize beyond measure insights that are in other ways illuminating.

The danger of such overstatements (e.g., "we must think democracy otherwise, or leave it behind," p. 239, or: "religion in general, and Christianity in particular, function as dispositives to a particularly contemporary urgency: the problem of how to produce the People", p. 100) is that they foster frictionless thinking. How, then, do we prevent "democracy in the optative" from turning into a mere expression of wishful thinking?

A step in the right direction seems to me to be the recognition of the residually "tragic" dimension of politics, which we find at the end of the book. This realization does not mean opting without qualms for a variant of cynical political realism, but coming to see that, while "we can understand the nation–state as a socioeconomic structure that enables the production of the resources required for the establishment of functioning networks of care, friendship, and love. At the same time, it is a structure that acknowledges the limits that these resources impose

on our ability to expand them to include all that could be our lovers or friends" (pp. 255–256). The realm of self–rule — that is, the scope of popular sovereignty — is residually tragic as it often happens that "others are not reached by the network of friendship, care, and love because of our limited ability to love" (p. 256). The consolation is that "such an acknowledgment of tragedy and limitations will engender discourses and practices that differ substantially from the dehumanization that characterizes democracies of abjection" (p. 256).

In this residually tragic space, religious imagery can play a positive role by enhancing the "truth about the workings of democracies that the cultural Christianities […] bring to the fore. Democracies, as the rule of the People, require border work. This work, however, is not the defensive practice of abjection, but rather the constitutive practice of uprooting and of stitching together identities" (p. 241). In particular, "changed religious discourse must be part of the process of imagining an alternative to the passionate politics of enmity that characterizes the resurgence of democratic exclusionary populism on a global scale" (p. 256). In this way, democracy in the optative can be the expression of a sensible hopeful thinking and not of a delusional wishful thinking in promoting "an adequate vision of democracy [...] where the People are bound together in practices and desires that enable the creation of these free selves. This, in turn, means that we must reenvision the People as bound together through care for one another" (p. 250). To return to Dewey's insight, the task of democracy understood as a form of *life* "is not connecting isolated omnipotent sovereign individuals into bonds of friendship, but rather cultivating the relationships within which we grow and live into friendships of equality" (p. 254).

Certainly, the risks of a mildly despotic or even tyrannical degeneration of democracies (Taylor, Calhoun and Gaonkar 2022) do exist and are in some cases impending. I have strong doubts, however, that interpreting them in light of a "metaphysical framework in which the self/other distinction is a vertigo–inducing problem" (p. 235), equated with "the democratic logic of democracy" (p. 237) as such, will lead us to a vision that stands at the right distance from the phenomenon investigated. And by "right" I mean here the distance enabling both the clarification and a change for the better of the human practices of

self–government that exercise so much the curiosity of social theorists, including religiously musical social theorists, these days. To this end, something akin to a conversion of the gaze is required. And if, indeed, "being human means becoming [...] A free self is, therefore, one that becomes a new self. If we conceive of democracy as the self–governance of free selves, then its libidinal foundations must enable the formation of this kind of freedom to become (i.e., to uproot and traverse boundaries)" (p. 242). That such an outcome is possible regardless of "stable boundaries of existing communities" or "transcendental structures of language or speech" (p. 244) is the resilient belief around which Viefhues–Bailey's long argument revolves. His book is the product of a noble and compelling effort to demonstrate its plausibility notwithstanding "the inconvenient truth of citizenship in liberal democracies: it is performative in nature and lacks a stabilizing rationale" (p. 191).

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INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS DEHUMANIZATION
A POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO THE TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN

Elena Cuomo

ABSTRACT: The denial of humanity about women victims of trafficking, in Europe as well as in other countries questions the crisis of Western democracies and spreads violent codes, degradation, and weakening of human rights.

This work explores the connection between philosophy and life (Cavarero 1999) and analyses how this erodes the human substratum of Western countries through the conditioning of biopower, logic of visual hypercontrol and commodification of relational capacity.

From various philosophical–political and anthropological perspectives, an extremely worrying picture seems to emerge unexpectedly for the conservation of the root of mankind, and how this appears to be undermined by democratic societies. In a context of inclusion-exclusion dynamics, a significant reduction in freedom is reported and apparently exist not only for trafficked women.

Paradoxically, gender discrimination only seems to enhance the gravity of the ongoing process of "nientification".

This revolves around indifference or the inability to react in the face of a portion of humanity deprived of all subjectivity, where humans are transformed into socially dead beings (Butler 2019).

La negazione di umanità delle donne vittime di tratta, in Europa come in altri paesi, interroga la crisi delle democrazie occidentali e diffonde codici violenti, degrado, affievolimento dei diritti umani. Questo lavoro parte dal nesso tra filosofia e vita (Cavarero 1999), si interroga sulle ragioni che erodono il sostrato umano dell'Occidente attraverso i condizionamenti del biopotere, logiche di iper–controllo visivo e mercificazione della capacità relazionale.

Da diverse prospettive filosofico-politiche e antropologiche, emerge inaspettato un quadro estremamente preoccupante per la conservazione della radice del genere umano, minata dalle stesse società democratiche. In un contesto di dinamiche di inclusione ed esclusione si evidenzia una riduzione significativa di libertà non solo per le donne traffícate, ma a partire da esse. Paradossalmente, la discriminazione

di genere potenzia soltanto la gravità del processo di "nientificazione" in atto. Esso ruota intorno all'indifferenza o incapacità di reazione dei più, cittadini-spettatori dinanzi a una porzione di umanità privata di ogni soggettualità, trasformata in esseri umani già socialmente morti o non degni di lutto (Butler 2019).

Keywords: Nexus in modern political life, Indifference to dehumanization, Trafficking of women, Contemporary democracy

Parole chiave: Nesso politica vita, Indifferenza alla disumanizzazione, Donne merce, Nientificazione, Democrazia contemporanea

1. Introduction

Indifference to dehumanisation is one of the most serious symptoms of the contemporary anthropological crisis in democracy. This article recognises the connection between philosophy and life according to Cavarero (1998) and investigates factors that erode the human substratum of the West, which is conditioned by biopower, the logic of visual hypercontrol and the commodification of relational capacity, causing indifference and homogenisation. From a philosophical-political point of view, the paper highlights how the denial of humanity in female victims of human trafficking poses serious questions about the West, while spreading codes of violence, degradation, and a weakening of human rights[1].

The metaphor of blindness is taken from a famous novel[2] and is used here as a frame for the inability of seeing the degree of dehumanization that is affirmed towards different categories of people such as migrants, the homeless, and trafficked women. The text focuses only on the condition of the latter, as a serious indicator of the ongoing debacle, characterised by Cavarero as a dimension of "horror-ism" (2017), a homologation or as mass indistinction. Concerns are raised about the re-enactment of crimes against the human race.

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[1] For a sociological analysis of the phenomenon, please refer to a specialized bibliography, such as Aa.Vv., *Women Seriously Exploited*, 2022 Report, Slaves No More, Rome; A. Akinyoade *et al*. 2021.

[2] J. Saramago, *Blindness*, Feltrinelli, Lisbon 1995 — Milan 2000–2018.

2. Blindness: an interior disease?

Saramago (1995) describes blindness as an infectious disease with a strong capacity for contagion, capable of threatening institutions and plunging humanity into barbarism, erasing solidarity and compassion, with an assonance of the *Hoelle-Wut* feared by Roth and Nicoletti (1934; 2000).

Saramago details a disease "from within" that spares no one, not even the medics in charge of treatment. This raises concerns about the crisis of the anthropological substratum of contemporary democracy, which seems to suffer from a strange incapacity towards its own conspecific with such indifference to dehumanization.

The gravity of the issue is not restricted to a single area of social life and requires a considered reflection about the denial of humanity experienced by women who are trafficked for sexual purposes. In Italy, as in Europe and in many other countries connected by a criminal network, girls are deprived of their freedom by deception or physical coercion and are commodified and reduced to the disposal of others as private property. Here an instrumental treatment of the person reappears, denying the Kantian principle of never being able to conceive of the other as a means (1797-1954). The phenomenon transcends sociological and criminological questions and infuses the wider social fabric through a powerful diffusion of violent codes and degradation, contributing to what has become, for some, an addiction to the denial of human rights. Furthermore, this constitutes an unexpected symptom of the slumber of critical-propositional dissent, evidencing a crisis in empathy, which is seen as a part of the human species and not only the result of its ethical, religious, and cultural elaborations as posited by Boella (2017).

The complexity of the social phenomenon of women's slavery by Giaretta and Serughetti (2008; 2019) in the racket of forced prostitution has unexpected philosophical-political implications; I identify reflection points to problematise areas that are stratified in democratic societies and narrate female deportation. The use of strong language here is deliberate.

An effective image that evokes the critical condition of humankind's indifference to its own destruction is *Landscape with The Fall of Icarus*

by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in Escobar (2006). In the painting, Icarus' ruinous fall does not disturb the lightness of the landscape and fails to distract people from their occupations. This image helps me to reflect on freedom and I ask whether it is possible to define freedom as being able to look and see what is happening in front of me, even the ruinous fall of Icarus.

Building upon this, Nancy (2015) sustains that: "today to philosophise corresponds to opening our eyes", or at least to seek to understand the deep lacerations that humanity inflicts upon itself. For Cuomo (2018), a case in point is the oxymoron of a contemporary democracy that seems to remain fearfully inert: unable to react in the face of forced women's prostitution.

3. Women as commodity

Trafficking women must be distinguished from other types of trafficking and exploitation of human beings: it is just one of the ruinous falls that contribute to dehumanisation, a phenomenon that is growing exponentially, linked, but certainly not overlapped with migration[3].

The phenomenon of women as commodities requires us to take note of a new mode of horror that dismembers female bodies. Forced to undergo maltreatment and systematic rape, while witnessing those perpetrated against other girls, young women are transformed into fungible goods for sexual purposes and serve only as a function of their own bodies. In this way these women are dispossessed of themselves, of being a subject: transformed into leading lives of adaption or, as Pessina argues (2017), survival.

This aberration is a return to Arendt's category of "crimes against the human condition" (1964). A parallel between the genocides of totalitarianism and human trafficking is not far-fetched since once again a part of humanity is reduced to a fleshly seriality and deprived of a voice. In the context of holocaust, humanity was denied to Jewish people,

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(3) Cf. UNODC. 2018. *Global Report on trafficking in Persons* 2016, United Nations, New York, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf.

today it is denied to those women considered "the most extraneous" to the collective identity, which Di Sciullo (2008) considers to be built on what is homogeneous and indistinct after denying the value of difference in the other, even at the physical level. In this political universe, mechanisms of exclusion are inevitable, especially towards those who preserve the value of difference in their bodies. If there is a universal and all-encompassing drift in this way to the detriment of plurality, as recognised by Arendt (1995), there is a decay of democratic institutions themselves. Physical heterogeneity undermines the ideological banality of a society that seeks to expunge diversity and remove any concrete relationship with a distinct person; fabricating the needs and desires of simulacrum partners, who are not considered fully human.

Convinced that philosophy must reconnect thought to life, Cavarero (1998) returns to the figure of Penelope with her skilful weaving work, giving new meaning to embodied being, which is unique and unrepeatable in each and every one. The scandal of enslaved women, who are denied all subjectivity and sentient singularity, transformed instead into fleshly seriality, affects every human being in their ability to see what they are looking at. Young lives forced to sell their bodies like pre-packaged body parts, to rent them for a few minutes, reducing sex to fungible materialism, raises severe questions about the democratic society we inhabit and anthropological thought. Why this inertia? Is it all Ismene's fault?

If one accepts the classical interpretation of Sophocles' character Ismene as the paradigm of acquiescence towards a stronger power; a well-known cliché often superficially superimposed on women victims of violence and women enslaved by international trafficking; we must ask ourselves if Ismene is not, instead, the portrait of a society of citizen-spectators, who are inert in the face of Icarus' fall and incapable of critical dissent.

Ancient democracy provided for slavery, but recognised slaves as having a legal status, evidently a weaker status compared to that of citizens. Fortunately, modern democracy does not allow any form of weakened humanity, making fundamental human rights a strong theoretical reference, even at the level of identity. However, the concrete suffering of various segments of the world's population, reduced today to a sub-humanity, clashes gravely with this ideological narrative: Bergoglio (2020) therefore discusses a conception of human waste underlying a prevailing

liberalism. Combining the concept of waste with the doctrine of homogeneity and exclusionary mechanisms, we see how its strongly contradictory presence in Western societies is underlined. According to Benhabib (2006), it often results in the ideological legitimacy of a group, without apparently conflicting with fundamental rights. According to Di Sciullo, we should speak of conditional human rights, because the alleged homogeneity of a political community implicitly tends to distinguish human beings with a selective concept of humanity.

Furthermore, and worryingly, the homogenised individual, for Girard (2003), remains a prisoner of the imitative conditioning of desire according to the other and of the Foucaultian device of power that pushes the individual towards the tangible and the instrumental. It is a short step, in the contemporary de-ritualized context, towards the dynamics of rivalry mimesis with unexpected shifts of the persecutory mechanism towards "victims of exchange", who for Girard (2007) insinuate themselves even into the most intimate relationships.

This is what happens to trafficked women, who are substitute victims already dismembered into many naked bodies. The frightening doubt arises that, in a spiral of hybrid mimicry, some, agitated and compressed by the inadequacy, even sexually, of the imposed models, who are then incapable of a fuller relationship, explode their anger towards the most easily reachable substitute victim. This could also partially explain the rise of femicides.

It is complex to address this theme of the expendables, who represent a discarded humanity that, in Forti's understanding (2016), we compromise in the name of the system's stability. In this discussion we recognise how these lives are deemed as "not worthy of mourning", according to Butler's (2019) definition: people who are already socially dead. In fact, girls forced into prostitution die the moment they lose their status as subjects, wandering invisibly with torn bodies.

4. Innocent Spectators?

To find a reason for the inert gaze of those who consider themselves extraneous to women's carnage, one faces the innocence of the West,

which, like a character in a film or a novel by Greene (1957), is so entrenched in its democratic ideals, that people within those places do not realise that they are walking among dying bodies. Citizens' blindness then becomes an ideological problem, whereby a total adherence to the truth of democracy prevents them from seeing the cracks within. This makes them an excellent instrument of the dominant conformity to the triumph of democracy itself, whatever the cost. A blindness that in retrospect, according to Sanyal (2010), ignores its own responsibilities for the history of others, leaving in the background post-colonial studies, which for Casadei (2018) has a connection with human trafficking.

Already Sartre (1962), with Fanon's wretched of the earth, underlines the dichotomous attitude of the colonial and dehumanising politics of the European states that at the same time theorised the return of humanism. It would not, therefore, be the first time that the West has used ideological lenses that prevent it from being horrified by its own destructive responsibilities in the "geographies of hunger". The theme deserves much more in-depth analysis, here I concentrate on the state of suffering of those national territories from which many of the girls who are victims of trafficking come.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to recognise the significant exposure to an indirect ideological conditioning, through homologation, that results in the pain of exclusion from the whole group. It is also important to consider the addiction to the consumption of violent digital images and the intimate relationship between viewer and consumer, with the desire for self-affirmation at the centre. Surprisingly here, the contributions of Foucault (1995) about a contemporaneity imprisoned by a panoptic power becomes significant in the debate's development, building upon the work of Mathiesen (1997) who characterises a democratic capitalist society and develops the synoptic and panoptic dimensions, relating them to each other and seeing them as increasingly constitutive of human beings who control themselves having introjected the synoptic gaze.

A citizen as total spectator emerges completely accustomed to an active and passive control of even the cruellest scenes, which no longer admit any exceptionality. He has learned to survive exposed and observed at all times.

We become accustomed to horror, and here we might evoke Medusa who for Cavarero (2007) is its symbol, embodying the violence that undoes the figural unity of the person: Saramago (2018, p. 233) also maintains, that having eyes in a world of the blind does not constitute any advantage, but rather corresponds to "one who was born to see horror".

The sovereign people have therefore been transformed into an audience of indifferent spectators who certainly do not see how humanity is negated and undone on the roadsides and not only in the urban peripheries of the polis. Perhaps the excess of spotlights flattens reality into a single dimension of imprisonment and makes everything equally bearable or everything equally indifferent. The withdrawal from the world of the total spectator is thus configured as completely different from the overall view of the spectator-*theatés*, conceived by Arendt (1978) as a witness and support to the philosopher.

Having embraced the dimension of a visual power, symbolised by a technology that prolongs the gaze, consciences are accustomed to a hyper-control and to the viewing of all sorts of raw images, with a powerful confusion between virtual and embodied reality. Moreover, being so completely immersed in a confusion of multimedia images could lead us to say, along with Baudrillard (1976), that technological individuals have been trapped in an invisible network of unreality that conditions "a contingent mode of needs and pleasures", allowing for the supremacy of the signifier to supplant social order and values. If this were the case, buying sex from women as a simulacrum of pleasure would constitute a representation of enjoyment itself.

It is then, according to Pulcini (2003; 2009), that the significant stresses of a narcissistic dispersion of the postmodern ego reduce the relationship with the world to that of a homologated consumer and spectator: the central axis being the inability to recognise within oneself an authentic desire capable of sustaining the profound balance of the subject. The philosopher advocates a critical approach to desire, with the awareness that desire in and of itself is not a truthful criterion, accepting rather that there are also aspects that are detrimental to the good and autonomy of the subject. Only a shared culture that recognises the need for a process of cognition of one's own emotionality, which frees desire from a crude immediacy with inauthentic and

negative inclinations, can access a distance from the desired object. This would help the subject move from existences necessitated by an anxiety that engulfs objects of desire, often in an imitative and inauthentic manner. The self-realisation of the subject can then pass through an emancipation of the desiring dimension from homologising to hetero-directed parameters.

The centrality of the homologation-desire binomial reemerges from a different philosophical perspective and, in my opinion, brings the discourse back to the importance of the sense of estrangement from an aspect of humanity; towards the emptying of relationships with otherness that favour an instrumental conception of the other, sustained by the inauthenticity of desire and are oriented towards fungible materiality and become the new idol in need of compulsive consumerism. Through a focus on the desiring dimension and its drifts towards reified bodies such as female bodies transformed into commodities, we see how these women become, as Casadei (2018) observes, "bartered goods" along migrant smuggling routes. These commodities exist in the new structures of capitalism, in which a global apartheid and dehumanisation are spoken.

5. Dehumanisation

Neuroscience intervenes to support the understanding of an indifferent audience, especially with Lakoff (2009) who explores the progressive closing down of mirror neurons in the human race and the consequent inhibition of every empathic instinct that characterises the human race, typically inclined to help the cospecies especially when exposed to violence.

Science, grounding empathy in nature itself, comes to the support of philosophy and warns humanity against a fall without recovery, in which dehumanisation involves the loss of characteristics in the human species, resulting in indifference. There also remains the question of the force that humanity has used so many times to annihilate spontaneous empathy with multiple ideological tools. It is only a few steps short of the radical none-love that Sequeri (2017) describes, of a cruelty without