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NOVEMBER 2020

# The female gaze on medicine



## AGORÀ

Directed by **Alejandro Amenábar**

Spain, 2009, 128' - DVD

A fiction film about Ipazia, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher of the ancient Greece, killed for her defense of science which made her "a martyr to freedom of thought".

To guarantee each individual the most appropriate care, which considers the peculiarities deriving from the different anatomy and physiology of women and men, and factors related to the environment, society, education, culture and individual psychology, is the basis of gender medicine.

Women live longer than men but often not healthy.

Stereotypes, gender biases in drug testing, in medicine, the underestimation of women's health needs are still cumbersome obstacles to an efficient healthcare response.

The drugs we take are mainly tested on the male gender, exposing us more often to adverse effects and often dangerous delays in treatment. Many people do not know that the leading cause of death for women, even before breast cancer, are cardiovascular diseases, and that cancers considered peculiar to man, such as lung cancer, are widespread.

Gender-based violence causes numerous physical and mental health problems in women, both immediate and long-term, and health professionals must be trained and prepared to deal with them.

Hence, gender medicine can and must become an essential tool to improve our lives, significantly contributing to the process of social emancipation, recognizing the important role of women as a promoter of health not only of their own but of the entire community.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

"A woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment; and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd" (Luke 8,43-44)

## COMMENT

Invisible women behind the crowd, behind culture, behind science. Women who suffer and are looking for answers that are difficult to find, forced to take new paths to be finally heard. Lesser-known women, compared to the model of the human to the male, and not noticed. Among the biblical pages we find surprises, if only we can read words written in other contexts with clear eyes: a suffering and courageous woman walks through the crowd and gets healing, but above all finds the personal attention that brings her out of anonymity. The treatment is never addressed generically to abstract categories, there are women and men, but even more there is her, there is him, there is me and there is you, and only then can the community as well be a real "we". Always addressed to a "you" with a face and a name is the Word, even when it appears spoken to everyone, because love is personal, intimate, concrete, even that which is expressed in science and medicine when they are authentic service and care, in the responsibility that we have towards each other.

## PRAYER

*Our Lord, praise be to you for the beauty of the love who sees who hears and responds, we ask you to learn how to live it between us in every act that becomes care, deep knowledge and an effective word that heals and consoles.*

*Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Would a gender approach in medicine, improve medical care?

## Authors who have collaborated to the production of this review

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# Women make a difference



## BEING WOMEN IN MEDICAL SERVICES IN ITALY: A STILL UPHILL PATH

The career path of a medical woman is much more uphill than that of men: only one in 50 becomes Director of Complex Structure and 1 in 13 manager of Simple Structure and, with the same curriculum, professional value and seniority, there is still a difference between their respective salaries, while in the higher-earning specializations, such as Surgery, women are under-represented. On the other hand, women's employment clearly prevails over that of men in Nursing (there are about 2/3 nurses), but it is also much more precarious.

## EVANGELICAL HOSPITAL VILLA BETANIA DI PONTICELLI: A VIRTUOUS EXAMPLE

Marianna Stingone, risk manager

This hospital offers many more opportunities for women for managerial roles, (President is Cordelia Vitiello); born on the initiative of a group of deaconesses in Berlin, to meet the strong social distress of Ponticelli, the hospital earned the pink badge precisely for the particular spiritual assistance it has always offered to the most marginalized women (gypsies, mothers of infants at risk,

breast operated women, etc.). Corporate welfare aimed at both employees and patients also contributes to creating an added value of this hospital.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable (...) he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5,1-3)*

## COMMENT

Here is a healing story where the protagonists seem to be all important male characters: a leader, two kings, a prophet. Yet the one who sets the story in motion is a young Jewish slave whose name the biblical text does not even tell us.

She, young and helpless, taken prisoner in foreign land, instead of cursing those who enslaved her, cares about her master's health.

Like many foreign women living in Italy, the Jewish girl, while adapting and integrating herself with the new context of life, keeps the memory of her origins and uses this to help her sick master.

Traditional roles are thus reversed so that the weak help the powerful and God to lead to conversion subverts social schemes, breaks down the hierarchies, national, religious and gender divisions created by us.

In this text there is a message of hope in view of a liberation that is always possible in God and in which it is a foreign woman who makes the difference!

## PRAYER

*Lord, empower all women pursuing medical and nursing careers to resist prejudice, patriarchal mindset and gender discrimination. Help us all to respect the medical, health and scientific professions especially when it is women who hold them! Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Is it always better for a woman to have a woman as a primary care physician??



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NOVEMBER 2020

# Public Family Planning Clinics: what future?



On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the National Law on Health Clinics (L. 405 - 29 July 1975 and subsequent laws) has promoted research to verify the “state of health” of the clinics. The research published in 2019 showed a reduction in the service offered both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Many clinics, whilst functioning, provide a reduced service to only a few days a week, limiting themselves to monitoring pregnancies, assisting mothers in the neonatal period, providing contraception and providing certificates for termination of pregnancy. With the Juvenile Court and the territorial social services, they should follow the cases of families and minors hardships and without staff additions. The planned assembly of women is then rare, which also had the purpose of a “feminine” elaboration of health. Finally, the number of affiliated private clinics has increased a lot, often with confessional orientations.

## A.B., GYNECOLOGIST

She’s been working in the clinics for 37 years. First in the province of Viterbo and then in Rome. It is understood that the work for her is passion and commitment. She believes in it. She’s been coordinating 11 clinics of a Roman ASL for years. In our meeting, she stressed that the clinics risk not only reducing the services they perform, but also the sanitization of the service and the loss

of a multi-professional approach. The case of voluntary abortion is: to prevent it, it is a question of grasping the problems that are upstream (social problems, relationship problems, problems of too many children). She feels that she does everything to keep alive the mission of the clinics, that is the health of women and therefore the care of the health of the family. On the threshold of retirement, she looks with concern at the future of clinics.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*“There was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia; and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.” (Luke 1,5b-7)*

## COMMENT

Beyond common thought, infertility is a problem that also affects men; however, it is almost always associated with women. Why? May it not be the legacy of an ancestral concept that a barren man is only half a man?

Yesterday as today, pregnancy is hidden because the miscarriage rate in the first months is high (and in serious increase). So she hides to reduce, in the event of an abortion, the emotional impact of having to give the news.

In relation to being “righteous before God”, I would remind you that sterility or failure to complete the pregnancy is not, as is often, a lack of faith or will, nor disgrace. Sometimes there is nothing to do, other times the right care is enough. Unfortunately, health clinics are often seen as “day hospital for sluts” and see less funds and services, leaving women alone and intensifying their sense of inadequacy.

## PRAYER

*God mother and father, how many women are unable to have children! Do not leave them in pain and fear, give them comfort and love, don’t let them stay alone but with friends. Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Have you ever been in a public family planning clinic? What do you think?

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NOVEMBER 2020

# For a conscious and responsible sexuality



There is a secret about sexuality, a secret that we inherit from the many thousands of years of human history. Over the millennia sexuality has been included in the sacred and linked to reproduction. One cannot easily get rid of a legacy of perhaps millions of years. Sexuality means reproduction. Gift of God and sometimes a curse of women. So it is not easy to experience sexuality as a gift, pleasure and not just a means of reproduction. Yet even sons and daughters are one of the greatest gifts that men and women can receive, so much so that they are sometimes sought obsessively and painfully.

Complicated! Yet sexuality has been present since the first days of life. Sucking your finger, “touching” for a newborn means peace, tranquility, security. And it is also in adult life. But it’s not always easy. Then there are sexualities that are not addressed only to the other sex, becoming aware of it implies an uphill path. There is also someone who discovers that their sexuality and identity are imprisoned in the wrong body. These are all phenomena that we now know and discuss. Seeking peace, tranquility, serenity.

A sexologist said, “Sexuality is one of the gateways we have for the development of self-awareness, for our personal and relational growth. I help those who wish to cross that door through an open, welcoming and constructive dialogue.

What about us? Let’s talk.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*“Thy neck is a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Hesbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus” (The song of Solomon 7,4)*

## COMMENT

The Bible knows the language of eros. The Song of Songs is a lively and engaging expression of it. The writer plays with words, wisely uses similarities and references to flavors, colors, scents. His words full of passionate love are, at the same time, liberating words. Freedom to live the relationship with the body as a time of life experience that is offered to us.

It is an experience of real and lived encounter which involves the senses and the mind. It tells the love of every creature who marvels at the beauty, the intense and unique colors, the perfect design of every shape of those bodies that the Lord has molded from the mud. The Canticle invites us to get to know each other, to compare ourselves with our body which is an integral part of the life from which we benefit and which has been given to us by God. Life can be a path in which to learn to love ourselves and in which the body is not a burden, a part of us to hide, but in which we recognize ourselves and that makes us happy.

## PRAYER

*You who have given shape and life to our bodies, who know every detail of our limbs, free us from the images that oppress us and the stereotypes of which we feel the weight on our shoulders.*

*Teach us the way of love towards ourselves, aware that this path requires us to get involved and dig deep within ourselves.*

*We can look in the mirror with different eyes, we can enjoy the passionate love that is part of life, we can be happy. We ask you for the courage and strength to take this liberating path!*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Why is it so difficult to talk about sexuality?

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NOVEMBER 2020

# Motherhood: choice, destiny or obligation?



## UNEXPECTED

Directed by **Kris Swanberg**, Usa 2015, 90' -

An high school's teacher befriends a teenage student, when both get pregnant unexpectedly. The movie delicately addresses the issue of the contrast between career and motherhood.

The slogan “responsible motherhood” fell upon women of the post-war generation, liberating and tormenting, in the midst of a tortuous path of change. Little girls, we had passed the 50's, still marked in the obsession of purity, a pre-war legacy. Adolescents we had grown up in the widespread Catholic culture that overlapped and confused the meanings of abstinence, virginity, chastity, continued to separate physical motherhood and spiritual motherhood. Suffering was a fundamental attribute, self-sacrifice obligatory. These were years of hypocrisy, of words exchanged in a low voice about how much sex was lawful without too much sin, safeguarding the hymen. Changes in customs and society in the 1960s, feminism, free contraception, and finally the possibility of legal abortion affirmed the freedom to say yes and no. The weight of a complex decision to the point of fear was simplified in the word “responsible”, spread over reason and sentiment, leaving in silence the intimacy of maternal desire, on which patriarchal society had built myths and models. One could happily separate sex and love, difficult to combine eros and the desire to generate. Finally motherhood was not destiny or obligation, it was possible to choose if, when and how many children to have, but we did not have so many words that were lamps on our feet in exploring and exploring ourselves. I do not know how much of the unexplored remains in the women of the generations that came after. There is still work to be done on female generativity to bring together and shed light.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward (Psalm 127,3)*

## COMMENT

There are stereotypes that strain women's lives. One of these is motherhood seen not as a choice, but as a natural prerogative that must be indulged at all costs, under penalty of judgment and social exclusion. For too many centuries the barren woman has been considered missing, if not cursed. For these women the world became inhospitable because they lacked what attributed symbolic authority to them. Those who could not access it, perhaps for reasons not of their own, felt exclusion on their own skin. The Bible tells the story of Anna, a barren wife humiliated by her rival, the mother of several children. Only the love of her husband, an understanding, tender and sensitive man, was able to anticipate God's saving action.

With a cultural heritage that saw the woman fulfilled only if she was a mother, how hard was the struggle to acquire the right to responsible motherhood, or to decide on an abortion, always the cause of enormous suffering! The awareness of being valid for oneself, and not for what one has, is a concept that spreads and affirms with difficulty only recently. Collaboration between men and women, relationships based on justice and affection, mutual recognition are invaluable values that make life easier.

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Do women still think that children are the only woman's destiny?

## PRAYER

*Our Father, help me to see the others in their actual beauty and to support them in difficulties, as you taught us.*  
Amen



30 NOVEMBER 2020

# Voluntary termination of pregnancy: an avoidable defeat

## OBVIOUS CHILD



### IL BAMBINO CHE È IN ME (OBVIOUS CHILD)

Directed by **Gillian Robespierre**, Usa  
2014, 83'

A comic actress' sudden pregnancy forces her to confront single motherhood issues for the first time.

One of the most controversial laws voted in the turbulent 1970s was Law 194/1978 on the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy, strongly supported by women against the scourge of illegal abortions. It distinguished between the possibility of terminating the pregnancy within 12 weeks or up to the 20th week in life-threatening cases of the mother and / or the fetus.

The abrogative referendum of 1981 was surprising: 79.38% of those entitled voted and the 'no' vote reached 85.12%, the highest percentage of the referendum. The law worked: since 1982, voluntary interruptions of pregnancy passed from 235,000 in 1982 to 76,328 in 2018. This reduction represents one of the greatest successes of contraception, thanks also to the work of the counseling centers. In recent years, medical research has allowed early chemical IVG, which avoids hospitalization with the drug RU 486.

The real negative point of the law is the high percentage of objectors ( in 2018 69% of gynecologists and 46.3% of anesthesiologists), so in many cases public facilities are struggling to guarantee the IG. V.

### LAURA, 35 YEARS

She arrives with an about 7 months old baby in a carriage, born by caesarean section. She asks me for a certificate to terminate the pregnancy. I see her tense, worried; I ask her which contraception she plans to use in the future. She replies that she won't need it because her partner is gone. He reacted badly to the pregnancy: they already

have 4 children (two of her partner and 2 of hers, one of them from a previous relationship). His partner thinks they can't support 5 children and he's gone. She couldn't support 3 children on her own. Yet this decision makes her suffer. I offer her a meeting with the social worker and issue her the certificate for VTP.

### BIBLICAL VERSE

*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath (Mark 2,27)*

### COMMENT

The meaning of the law is summarized by Jesus with this phrase. Not even the divine law is superior to the human person, on the contrary it is at his service. Since ours is a God of relationship, not an absolute God, his is a law of the relationship. Since the revelation on Sinai it is evident that the human being is at the center of God's concerns. The whole law is functional to the preservation and defense of the human being from himself and his fellowmen.

But what human being? Sin seeks quibbles in God's Word and works to set people against each other. When it comes to abortion, some speak of women's right in contrast with the right of the embryo and, since the law must defend the defenseless, then the embryo should be defended against the potential mother.

Jesus' preaching and work, however, urges us not to look for quibbles. What human being? Next: what you have in front of you here and now. There is no other human being to take care of other than, in this case, the woman who chooses the IVG. The duty of society, health workers and churches is to welcome her with love and service.

### PRAYER

*God, our Mother, help all women who do not welcome the seed of life inside their womb and relieve them from the heavy sense of guilt of an aborted pregnancy. Amen*

### FOR DISCUSSION:

How would you help a woman who decides to have an abortion?

1°

DECEMBER 2020

# The impact of AIDS on women's health

WHOOPI GOLDBERG  
MARY-LOUISE PARKER  
DREW BARRYMORE



BOYS ON THE SIDE

*A motion picture that celebrates the art of survival, the gift of laughter and the miracle of friendship.*

## BOYS ON THE SIDE

Directed by **Herbert Ross**, Usa 1995, 118' min. - DVD

A story of the friendship that binds three different women, one of them suffering from AIDS.

Every 1 December, since 1981, the International Day of the Fight against AIDS has been celebrated: a red lace is a sign of solidarity and awareness of the reality of the HIV virus that has killed over 25 million people worldwide.

The new diagnoses, in Europe, tell us that in a third of cases they are women: in 2018, there were 2847 in Italy, of which 618 were women. In 92 % of cases, for women, the origin of the disease is linked to unprotected heterosexual relationships within stable relationships. The diagnosis comes late for one in two women: this is often linked to a cultural problem and moralism .

## MARIA, 35 YEARS OLD

Maria is divorced, leads a regular life, has a daughter and a stable relationship for 7 years. One day she began to have very strange symptoms, which was followed by blood tests to ward off the worst infections, until the day she gave the permission to take the test, which resulted positive for the HIV virus. She asks herself: what should I do? Who should I tell? HIV-positiveness still scares the society, and even today there are still many prejudices. Weeping, despair, anger, and Marco who collapses and disappears. Maria will have to take medicine for life, she has no guarantee that she will not get AIDS, and she has a higher risk of developing diseases related to infection and taking medication. She hasn't said anything to her daughter yet, but she told her friend, who

listened to her fears, her worries, her doubts, without judging, and that, for her, was important.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying (2 Samuel 13,[14]-19)*

## COMMENT

Women living with HIV find themselves in Tamar's story. Victims of the male power who possesses the female body as if it were an object or a territory. They, in silence, look at their infamy, while others listen to his cry and publicly denounce so that justice is done.

Like with Tamar, the silence in which they live is not an autonomous decision, but an imposition, a form of violence, a consequence of the power that others (men, family, leaders, neighbors, society) have over them. Their remaining silent is not to be blamed but also for a relative serenity.

Few others, like Tamar, are open to the heartbreaking public cry because they know that this is the lesser evil in the face of everything they can achieve for themselves and for those women who share their condition. Justice, as a reality that cries out to heaven.

## PRAYER

*Together with the whole creation, we await the manifestation of the Kingdom which breaks down the barriers of intolerance and builds bridges of solidarity, which heals the deep wounds of prejudice, stigma and discrimination against people with HIV while respecting their rights. God of life, make us guardians of confidentiality, a sanctuary of security for all identity differences, let us return to think about the meaning of our mission. Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

How to help an AIDS-positive woman (or man)?



2 DECEMBER 2020

# Violence and depression: a dangerous combination



## LA PAZZA GIOIA (THE WILD JOY)

Directed by **Paolo Virzì**, Italia, 2016, 118', DVD

In the abyss of loneliness and despair madness lies the simple truth that all women as human being want to be accepted and loved.

A woman exposed to violence runs serious health risks: the beatings cause physical injuries that are often dangerous, sometimes fatal. The disparaging words, the humiliations tear the heart, often annihilating a self-esteem that is already fragile from the start. Some women make it: they take courage with both hands and ask for help from one of the growing number of support institutions. They are those who still see a meaning in their lives despite everything, who have retained enough self-esteem to want to live and have something or someone they want to carry on for.

And then, there are them, the ones who can't make it. They have neither the strength nor even the energy. They don't see any sense in living day by day and they no longer hope. Because even hope doesn't matter to them anymore in their gray cloud, in the quicksand of depression and often in the isolation in which they slipped.

According to the WHO, women who suffer violence are three times more likely to fall ill with depression than women without such experiences. And, according to the WHO, depressed women are twice as likely to suffer violence within a relationship. Thinking about the possible interlinked dynamics makes the skin crawl.

Treatment that is too late, wrong or non-existent because the victim does not have the strength or the possibility to consult a therapist can lead to serious chronic disorders and, in the worst case, to suicide.

It is important to be careful when we notice that women around us are beginning to retreat into themselves and lock themselves

in the house.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isaiah 41,10)*

## COMMENT

What? Is she depressed? But it's not possible, she's a good Christian!

Have we not often heard such reflections? Maybe we also had thoughts like that. And then one day at the doctor's office, you're told, "Ma'am, I think you have a slight depression. I'll prescribe something." What? Me, depressed? But that is not possible! Yes, it is. It can happen to anyone.

At times like this, it makes me feel good to think that even the great prophet Elijah was prone to depression. (1 Kings 19:1-13) It has nothing to do with our spirituality, nor with our relationship with God, nor with what we do for God. And the beauty is that God does not abandon us. On the contrary, He renews our strength, takes care of us, reveals itself. Elijah wanted to die. He no longer saw any meaning in his life. But God had other plans for him.

Elijah needed to feel God very close, almost concretely. And God revealed himself. But not in an extraordinary, exceptional way, but in a very small thing, in a light breath.

When we have the impression that nothing is right, that life no longer makes sense, we seek the presence of the Lord, even in small things, in small signs. God will reveal himself and renew our strength to get us into the projects he has for us.

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Does it cause you trouble having a friendship with a depressed woman?

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me see you at work in my life, even when I feel like it no longer makes sense.. Thank you for your presence and support.*

3 DECEMBER 2020

# Violence and eating disorders



While eating disorder is never a choice and has numerous causes, sexual abuse stands out among them. Almost more than half of women with eating disorders have been sexually abused, in 80% of cases occurring in childhood. This applies both to anorexia nervosa and adolescent bulimia, and to the phenomenon of binge-eating (uncontrolled feeding) more frequent in mature women. Conduct such as purging (i.e. the elimination of food with self-induced vomiting or abuse of laxatives) and the chronic diet represent, in fact, the response to a traumatic event to escape the painful memory associated with it.

“Like a foreign body, the abuser occupies a large part of the child’s mental space, which remains encysted in the psyche and therefore not “digested”, not “assimilated”, therefore all that remains is the path of “fasting or vomiting” (Montecchi, 2005).

In a group for girls and women abused in childhood, Lidia, a seriously bulimic 30-year-old woman, immediately “threw” chilling details of the sadistic abuse into the group, claiming she wanted to “throw up the story to get rid of it”.

Eating disorders also often occur with women who are subjected to violence by husbands and companions. Often, while they report the violence, they also tell about their recent weight gain. And only with dif-

ficulty, as they get rid of their “secret” they manage to think of regaining the lost weight.

Other women who experience beating situation as guilt (I’m not good enough) punish themselves and get into a vortex of bulimia / anorexia / vomiting

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Amnon forced her, and lay with her. Than hated her exceedingly (...)and said unto her: “Arise, be gone” (2 Samuel 13, 14c-15)*

## COMMENT

Amnon, David’s eldest son, doesn’t love his sister Tamar, he wants her. He has no sacredness in his eyes as a ruthless hunter who cannot do it without the collaboration of the poet of Israel, their common father. He convinces him that Tamar, a kind cook, would benefit from his health. And the father drinks it. Once used, Amnon chases his humiliated prey like an infected animal.

We can only imagine the torment of Tamar, a young girl used, abused, hated, driven away! Many women react to violence by ingesting or refusing food and causing further harm.

In 90% of cases, however, the perpetrators of atrocious crimes deny having committed them and, only by removing faces and facts, manage to have peace. David should have punished that son who had learned, above all, violence from him. He doesn’t do it. And then he provides Absalom, the other brother, for revenge, not justice. And blood will bring blood. On this page of Scripture there is a culture that shows an eros without philia and agape and which is only fierce consumption. Amnon’s gender culture is all in his words to the servant: “Hunt this one out here and push her behind the door.” The beautiful Tamar has no name for him, she becomes: “This one”, levelling her more to a dog than to a woman.

## PRAYER

*Lord  
Imprint in my heart that the  
land is yours  
And every human being, brother  
and sister in freedom  
Is your son or daughter. Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Do you think it is possible to help a friend who suffers from eating disorders or is it not better to let the specialists act?

4 DECEMBER 2020

# I am mine: you cannot step on me!



51 femicides from January to September 2020 are too many, but it is not the only problem of violence. The problem is systemic and hidden violence in the family. In this special year, marked by Covid, there was a sudden silence of women in reporting violence in the family at the beginning of the lockdown and then restarting exponentially from April onwards. Cohabitation 24 hours a day often in confined places has triggered fights and beatings. And the children assisted, also imprisoned in the four walls of their home. A single indicator, the ISTAT registration on the trend of telephone calls to the national toll-free number 1522 against violence: between March and June 2020 the number of telephone calls doubled compared to the same period of the previous year (+119.6%), from 6,956 to 15,280. The growth in chat calls has quintuplicated, from 417 to 2,666 calls, and the centers have had to equip themselves to respond to increasingly pressing calls.

### CLAUDIA, 41 YEARS OLD, CUNEO

I felt like I was going crazy. Before the insults, the violence, even the sexual demands I was able to manage them. But living together 24 hours a day, I couldn't take it anymore. Going shopping I phoned 1522. They listened to me, they sent me back to a center near me. Call, they told me, and then cancel the phone call. Luckily! My husband asked me what I did that I've been away so long. "There was a queue," I replied. As soon as this seclusion ends, I have to do something

for myself and my children. I understand that I have to start saying: I am mine, you cannot step on me.

### BIBLICAL VERSE

*The woman said unto Jesus: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4,15)*

### COMMENT

Jesus meets the woman at the well, he speaks to her as an equal, so much so that the woman expresses the intense need to receive water from him. "That water", Christ himself who reveals himself and gives himself as the One who can quench any thirst; thirst for life, love, freedom, justice, truth, peace and dignity.

A poem tells us about the suffering of a woman who experiences violence in silence...

### SHE...

She's beautiful,  
yet she no longer wants to live,  
she has no more smiles,  
no more lively gaze.  
She is tired, no more voice nor strength,  
no self-esteem and not even pride and dignity.  
She defines herself a nobody,  
feels her body like shattered glass, broken  
into a thousand small pieces,  
impossible to recompose.  
She only has tears cutting through her  
face every moment,  
no more joy nor gladness, only: "I don't..."  
comes out from her mouth  
She no longer knows how to pray

### PRAYER

*Lord, God of life, we entrust  
to you every woman violated  
and abused.  
Jesus Son of God, You who  
have known suffering, pain,  
disappointment, beatings, the  
cross, there are many "SHE"  
who cry or die every day.  
She, so precious in your eyes,  
is loved and esteemed by you.  
Fill her heart with love so she  
can come back to love herself  
again. Amen*

### FOR DISCUSSION:

How capable are we of transmitting the love of Christ to raped women?



5 DECEMBER 2020

# Am I still a woman? Imaginary and female neoplasia



## THE FAREWELL

Directed by **Lulu Wang** 2019, 98', DVD

When Nai Nai, an old chinese lady, is diagnosed with cancer, the family decides to hide the truth from her and spend the last months she has left with her.

“Psychically, breast cancer places a woman before her own mortality, with aspects of loss and mourning. The breast is attacked in its multiple conscious investments and in all its components: in the narcissistic one, which sees it as the origin of seduction, beauty and femininity; in the erotic one, which understands it as the origin of ghosts, erogenous zone and element of sexuality and in the imaginary component, that of the desired breast. Finally, the breast, in its anatomical aspect, as a nourishing breast, the origin of life and motherhood, becomes a potential threat of death. The announcement of the disease, on a somatic level, generates wounds in the body and in the image of oneself: potential hair loss with chemotherapy and breast mutilation or removal can symbolically represent real castration. The hard work of reintegration and the reconstruction of a modified organ requires the woman to take possession, libidinal reinvestment and incorporation of the reconstructed breast. “

## SELF-IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION EXPERIENCE

In Naples, at the Evangelical Hospital of Villa Betania, breast cancer patients receive a white and pink crochet clutch bag as a gift: it is a gift from other women who made it and in this way they communicate their solidarity.

In Chianciano, the Association “Io sempre donna” organizes a literary competition

for women operated on the breast: through the therapeutic value of writing they release their emotions and they bring their lives back in their hands.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*Go in this thy might* (Judges 6,14)

## COMMENT

Gideon is poor, he has no dowry to boast and yet he is invested by God with a vocation: to free the people from the Midianites. God does not say: ‘Go with my strength’, but ‘Go with this strength of yours’. A beautiful expression that reveals how God puts us in front of the reality of our tenacity. Each one, however fragile and weak, has something within himself that God is betting on. This also happens when pain strikes us violently and reveals us in all our precariousness. In God’s eyes, even illness must not be a pretext for being unhappy and get nailed to our vulnerability. On the contrary, we are called, in those moments, to find a potential secret that makes us valiant in our daily normality, that intelligence of life of which women are teachers. Even when the encounter with pain can become aphasia, they know how to find an intimate and personal way to welcome unexpected novelty and make it dominable.

## PRAYER

*Lord*

*we thank you for that unique smile of women, which itself represents a small victory, a revenge on disappointed hopes and the crudity of life.*

*Allow that smile to accompany our small and great happiness: the happiness of not always having to show efficiency, of being able to cure ourselves, of nurturing our affections, of building a small masterpiece every day.*

*May we recognize our strength even when order gives way to chaos and trust falters under the weight of fear and the unknown. Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

What fears attack us with the idea of having neoplasia?

6 DECEMBER 2020

# Am I still a woman? Imaginary and menopause

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*God blessed them, and God said unto them: "Be fruitful" (Genesis 1,28)*

## COMMENT

What does menopause have to do with this verse? It is precisely what is no longer possible to achieve, fertility! Once you enter menopause you can no longer have children. You're not fruitful anymore. And the transformation of the body is connected with the loss of fertility; it is no longer able to "welcome life".

I am convinced that menopause gives us women the opportunity to rediscover new dimensions of fertility in our lives. Especially those who were involved in the cure, in accompanying and the education of children.

I am convinced that menopause gives us women the opportunity to rediscover new dimensions of fertility in our lives. Especially those who were involved in the treatment,

Certainly the author of Genesis, when he wrote "be fruitful", thought of procreation, because in his time it was the only guarantee of future and protection in old age.

Today we affirm that the fertility of a couple, that the fertility of a woman goes far beyond procreation. Being fruitful means not living one's life just by thinking of oneself (although many women still have to learn to really think about themselves!), but to be there, to make their own contribution so that life becomes more sustainable, more blessed for all and all. I would like us to be able to experience menopause as a time of life when we can take better care of ourselves and develop new projects inspired by the dream of a new world.

## PRAYER

*God, you who are for us like a mother who welcomes and protects us, help us to discover how we can be fruitful and blessed in the menopause phase and put our life experience to good use. Amen*



**Menopausa  
in salute:**

A recent CENSIS survey of women not yet in menopause shows that 66.4% of women believe that menopause is a phase of life like many others and no longer has any specific impact on their lives. However, 66.2% of respondents stated that with menopause the body undergoes negative aesthetic changes (hair, skin, weight) that worsen their self-image and 64.7% said that menopausal disorders are socially underestimated. 54.5% fear that their symptoms will become evident under certain circumstances. Menopause is considered a positive condition by 39.4% of those surveyed because it eliminates the problem of unwanted pregnancies, but 26.8% report a loss of interest in sexuality. For another third or so, menopause marks the onset of old age (29.7%), while 22.1% believe that women are considered less attractive from a sexual point of view, all claims on which women who are not yet menopausal are most in agreement. In particular, 40.4% of women not yet in menopause confess that they would tend to hide and not talk to anyone about being menopausal, compared to the much lower percentage of women who are already menopausal (23.8%). It would therefore seem that the imagination of women not yet in menopause are worried about this stage of life, while it is reversed for women who have entered menopause. An imagery produced by cultural factors and perhaps also by the fear of the male gaze!

## FOR DISCUSSION:

For me, menopause is ...



7 DECEMBER 2020

# Wife-Housemaid: To whom?



We do not want to agree with those who say that things were better when women were not working outside the home but were housewives and mothers only, but it is a fact that many men tend to pass on much more domestic work to their wives and companions than they do themselves. Therefore, the condition of the working woman is often aggravated by the double work of household chores found on her shoulders, as if it were totally her responsibility and the man only had the task of “helping out” sporadically. The desired division of tasks ‘without ifs and buts’ is far from coming, indeed the wife is often treated as a housemaid, even if sentence no. 24746/2006 of the Court of Appeal established that it is a crime.

## SANDRA, 60, EMPLOYEE

Finally out of that stuffy office, I breathe freely for a few minutes. Now I have to think about what’s missing in the fridge, hurry up shopping, get home and make dinner.

But will the boys have fixed their things? Will the beds have been made by someone? I think I’m going to find the usual chaos of clothes thrown here and there, in the bathroom or in the rooms, the breakfast cups still

in the sink instead of in the dishwasher, the usual pile of shirts and trousers to be ironed.

I’m tired, oh, how tired I am almost at the very thought of all I have to do before I lay my tired limbs on the bed. If I don’t stop this stress, I will end up with a heart attack.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*“Mary hat chosen that good part, which shall not taken away from her”*

(Luke 10,[38]-42)

## COMMENT

I imagined that Jesus was invited home by Martin and Mary (his sister, or his wife). Mary sits at the master’s feet and listens to his word; Martin, completely occupied with household chores, comes and says to Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my sister (or my wife) left me alone to serve? Tell her to help me.” Jesus replies: “Martin, Martin, you worry and are agitated for many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good part and will not be taken away from her”.

To imagine this scene as a man, you must have experienced daily domestic work as an integral part of your life. Only having cooked, washed the dishes, done the shopping, laundry, cleaned the house, looked after the children, every day, at least for a few years can you understand the request of Martino/Marta, and you can therefore grasp the scope of Jesus’ answer: the woman who neglects the housework to listen to the teaching of Jesus has chosen the good part and will not be taken away from her. In order to receive this word of Jesus, man must first devote himself to the care of the house and children with a certain regularity, not to help his wife, but assuming his responsibilities as husband, companion, father. Then you will understand the liberating character of this word of the Lord.

## PRAYER

*Lord, help us free ourselves from gender roles, give us the spirit of sharing and reciprocity. Amen.*

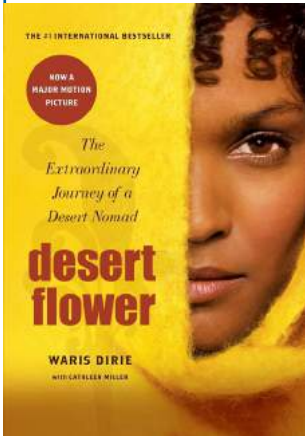
## FOR DISCUSSION:

Is there a power that women exercise in managing the house?



8 DECEMBER 2020

# The sign of patriarchal power over the body



## DESERT FLOWER

Directed by **Sherry Hormann**, Germania 2009, 120' - DVD

Through the true story of Somali-born ex-super model Waris Dirie, the film unleashes a severe blow to female genital mutilation.

We still have to talk about the horrendous phenomenon of female genital mutilation, as it has a serious and irreversible impact on the health of a very considerable number of children, girls and women: around 125 million of them in the world have to live with a mutilated body and every year about 3 million are added to this statistic.

Paradoxically, the incision or removal, partial or total, of the external female genitalia, which aims to allow the patriarchy control of female sexuality, is performed and essentially guaranteed by women, traditional midwives or real midwives, highly remunerated if the outcome is (if I may say so) positive. The complicity of women themselves in a practice that backfires on their sex is another dramatic aspect of this phenomenon.

All girls enter a state of neurogenic shock due to intense pain and psychological trauma, risking dying this alone, as well as for hemorrhagic shock (blood losses are conspicuous) or generalized infection (sepsis).

Further long-term consequences are the formation of abscess, stones and cysts, abnormal growth of scar tissue, chronic obstruction of the urinary tract and pelvis, severe pain in menstruation and sexual intercourse, increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, hepatitis and other blood-borne diseases, infertility, incontinence, increased risk of maternal mortality due to closed labor or hemorrhage at the time of delivery.

## BIBLICAL VERSE

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, (...) he hath saved us (...) by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1,7-10)*

## COMMENT

Timothy, unsure how to deal with people from other religious beliefs, having to run a new Christian community, is full of doubts. Even we Christians today sometimes do not know how to behave with people of other religions, when they do not respect the physical and mental integrity of women. Female genital mutilation (MFG) is a fierce custom, practiced in various Muslim communities in the name of religion. In reality they are a cultural heritage and not a religious precept. The Gospel tells us that God has destroyed death and has brought life to light and we are called to seek dialogue with those who practice, or risk suffering, MFG because all women have the right to health, education and the joy of living their lives to the full. No one should be subject to painful and harmful patriarchal actions anymore. The Gospel also encourages us to treasure our freedom and to act in solidarity to (re) establish the safety of all.

What does it really mean to show solidarity with women suffering from FGM? Do we also still suffer cultural heritage in the name of religion?

## PRAYER

*God the Father and Mother,  
light on our journey, clear  
the darkness, which envelops  
women exposed to mutilating,  
physical and psychic practices.  
Give us the strength, love and  
concreteness to show solidarity  
with our sisters who need  
our support.  
Open our hearts and minds  
for a fruitful dialogue of  
empathy and emancipation  
between us. Amen*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Are there also forms of violence of patriarchal power over the body of women in our society?

9-10 DECEMBER 2020

# Children, not bodies to use



## The Horror of Child Brides

The UNICEF estimates that there are about 22 million child brides in the world, 1 in 7 of whom are under the age of 15. Many of them are already divorced or widowed. These girls and children who are victims of forced marriages are subject to social isolation and, above all, to early school dropout, which irreversibly undermines their growth and future. Not to mention a number of health risks: an early pregnancy exposes both the new mother and her baby to a high risk of mortality. The practice is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, where Niger stands out. The World Health Organization estimates that about 100 million girls are at risk of getting married prematurely. A risk that will only increase if the world population continues to grow at the current rate, since the greatest population growth is expected in the poorest countries on the planet.

## The Horror of Pedophilia and Child Pornography

The practice of pedophilia and child pornography, which exploits both girls and boys and which affects some poor countries also known as 'the countries of love', is also moving to Europe, thanks to the new possibility offered by the Internet. This practice is more subtle, but no less detrimental to the mental health and future lives of boys and girls. A resolution of the European Union in 2017 invite the member states to take appropriate measures to prevent physical and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of minors. In the resolution, the European Parliament expresses its concern at the threats and risks that the online dimension poses to minors and stresses the need to strengthen the protection of children online and at the same

time to launch awareness and education programs about their risks.

### BIBLICAL VERSE

*A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not (Jeremiah 31,15)*

### COMMENT

I imagine the pain of mothers who see their sons and daughters still children being given into marriage or prostituted for money. It is not conceivable for any mother that her children become commodities, daughters who are still children sold to husbands or abused by strangers. They are wars that never end, as with Rachel, or the fierce poverty that so many women live today that lead to these decisions, that break the dreams of the future for their sons and daughters.

But the Bible brings us a sign of hope. In verse 16 the Lord says to Rachel: "Keep your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for your work will be rewarded". There, we must be an instrument of the Lord's will, and be promoters of peace and justice in the world.

### PRAYER

*Lord, we must not only be surprised and scandalized by what is happening in the world, thinking with arrogance "it does not happen to us, we have nothing to do with it". Let us understand the causes of so many horrors and seek, in our daily choices and actions, the tools to stop all the horrors that exist in the world.*

### FOR DISCUSSION:

How much and how do extreme poverty and wars affect the lives of the children?

This english translation has been done quickly and accurately by Annie Marcelo to whom go all our thanks.