

Lottiamo Ancora¹: Reviewing One Hundred and Fifty Years of Italian Feminism

By Miguel Malagrec²

Abstract

This essay examines the struggle of Italian feminism for transforming long rooted beliefs and gender roles in Italy since the late nineteenth century. I specifically focus on the legal, political and symbolic levels. First, I describe the historical formation of Italian feminism and its relation with literature and politics. Next, I examine the emergence of new feminist groups, and their involvement with the late 1960s protests. I then briefly explore the issues of divorce, labor and family laws during the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, I summarize the progress of the lesbian and queer movements in their struggle for recognition and freedom.

Keywords: Italian feminism, identity, lesbian and queer activism

Introduction

In some popular representations, Italy appears to be a land of fertility, style and old tradition. In this land, women have sensual curves and gesticulate while they talk. These women are the headmistresses of their families, but are subordinated to the male rule and have little practical liberties in the outside world. Is there a core of truth in these lay representations? As a matter of fact, gender equality has been more problematic in *Il Bel Paese*³ than in other Western European countries, and the unprivileged status of women (from parity at work to sexual orientation rights) demands continual struggle in the present.

While the direct achievements of Italian feminist movements on legislation cannot be overemphasized, their challenging of the cultural status quo has also been remarkable. In a country with structurally grounded male patriarchal power, the history of Italian feminism is revealing and inspiring. Although internal strife and heterogeneity characterize the history of Italian feminism, the movement's representatives have traditionally shared a belief that women should act as integral subjects towards one another (Passerini, 1996). The principles of groups such as *Unione Donne Italiane* (Union of Italian Women, officially created in 1944), for example, were composed of a hybrid coalition of militant communists, socialists, Roman Catholics and laity. As Andreina de Clementi (2002) suggests, however, the history of the Italian feminist movement can be divided in two parts--early and contemporary--separated from a long period of hibernation during Fascism⁴. The specificities of Italian feminism have to be discussed taking into account the wider European emergence of feminism that functioned

¹ We continue to struggle.

² Miguel Malagrec is a Ph.D. in Communications from the Institute of Communications Research (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA). He is also a licensed psychologist. His current work focuses on the legal and human rights of migrant queer subjectivities in Italy and their representation film. His next book is *Queer Italy* (Forthcoming, Peter Lang). email: malagrec@gmail.com

³ *The Beautiful Country*, a common way Italians refer to Italy.

⁴ I capitalize the terms Fascism/Fascist to refer to the political regime and avoid confusion with the general, yet less specific, English words fascism/fascist.

as context and sometimes horizon of the Italian movement. Whenever distinctions are made among feminist groups or movements, it is important to stress that these distinctions are based on practical reasoning, and can only partially reflect the complexity of a constituency whose history has alternated between fragmentation and unification. Accordingly, although some authors choose to discuss at least six branches of feminism in general--liberal; difference; socialist; poststructural; black; and postcolonial feminism (Barker, 2004)-- influential Italian film critic Teresa de Lauretis prefers to look for commonalities as characteristic of the Italian context. She terms these commonalities *comunità* (community), "in the sense that everything is intrinsically unstable and contextual, not based on the identity of components or their natural bond, but a community that is the result of work, of struggle, of interpretation" (1999 p. 3, my translation).

In this essay, I discuss the role of Italian feminism and its struggle for transforming long rooted beliefs and practices of gender roles in Italy since the late nineteenth century, paying attention to the legal, political and symbolic levels mainly. I first provide a brief description of the historical formation of Italian feminisms as political/activist and philosophical movements that are representative and agents of women's rights, experiences and subjectivity. I offer a brief description of the relationships between some of these movements with literature and politics. Second, I examine the emergence of 1960s feminism, and its impact on the two following decades. Next, I briefly explore the issues of divorce, labor and family laws that were subject to similar legal transformations during the three last decades of the last century. Finally, I summarize the progress of the lesbian and queer movements in their struggle for recognition and freedom.

Early Italian Feminism

The antecedents of Italian feminism can be traced back to the Renaissance, in the literary work of women like Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Moderata Fonte, Lucretia Marinella, and Angelica Tarabotti. During the Enlightenment, other European writers served as source of inspiration for Italian early feminists as well (Christine de Pisan, Mary Astell, Mary de Gournay and Joespha Amar, among others). Called 'the daughters of educated men' by Virginia Woolf (1938/1998), these educated, upper-class women, opposed misogyny and were aware that the subordination of women originated in the social and political advantage of men (Ballarin, Euler, et al, 2004). At the time of the unification of Italy, in the 1860s, European feminism was calling for the emancipation of women, promoted especially through the struggle of the British suffragists. These feminists thought that granting women the right to vote would allow them to participate in political decisions and to pass laws against gender inequities.

Later than in Britain or France, Italian feminism emerged in the nineteenth century represented by women such as Princess Cristina Trivulzo Barbiano di Belgioioso--heroine of the Italian unification because of her nationalistic politics. During the 1870s, early feminist philanthropic interventions, such as di Belgioioso's founding of charitable institutions, aimed to improve the standard of education for girls and battled against illiteracy in the recently unified peninsula. Situated in the political disjunction between a monarchical liberalism and a democratic republicanism, these interventions supported Giuseppe Mazzini's ideals of shaping Italy as a republican democratic state.

Mazzini defended an abstract notion of culture, and the role of a literary education that Antonio Gramsci explicitly blamed for being instrumental in the passivity of the *Risorgimento*⁵ (Cento Bull, 2001)--that is, unable to develop a political culture relevant for the peasant masses. Also notable from this period is Anna Maria Mozzoni's *La Donna e i suoi Rapporti Sociali in Occasione della Revisione del Codice Italiano* (Woman and her Social Relationships on the Occasion of the Revision of the Italian Civil Code). Regarded a founder of the Italian women's movement, Mozzoni became internationally famous for her focus on legal reforms and her critique of the Italian family law.

In their speeches and interventions, early Italian feminists like Mozzoni addressed the poor working conditions of more than a million women textile workers that entered the market during the 1890s. In the same period, the first women's magazine was edited (*La Donna*, or Woman, founded by Adelaide Beccari in 1860), Matilde Serao's novel, *Fantasia* (Fantasy), was published in 1883, and the term 'feminism' was introduced, very gradually, into the vocabulary of the northern aristocratic elites (Danna, 2004). The word was meant to signify an aspiration towards universalism, the improvement of women's education, and women's access to liberal professions. Ironically, however, in order to voice their claims, early feminism had to rely on a universal, usually asexual and generally a-historical conception of the human subject. Italian feminist Adriana Cavarero (1987) refers to this when she says that, for a long time, women did not have a language of their own, but had to use that of the other--that is, they had to utilize a patriarchal symbolic framework. Throughout history, some feminist voices resisted, though. In the following section, for instance, I examine the life of Anna Kuliscioff, a political activist whose work exemplifies the early existence of a radical, anti-patriarchy and militant feminism in Italy.

Anna Kuliscioff

Italian industrialization coincided with the rise of anarchism. Women workers participating in this movement rebelled against the exploitation they were subject to, both in the domestic sphere and in workplaces. In this sense, the life of Anna Kuliscioff is illustrative of the politically overwhelming end of the nineteenth century in Italy. Her life illustrates the complicated links between achieving parity and creating a space for differentiation (Passerini, 1996). Also known as *La dottora*⁶ [sic] *dei poveri* (the doctor of the poor people), Anna Kuliscioff was born Anja Rosenstein in Crimea, under the regime of czarist Russia. She became a vigorous feminist thinker influenced by Russian anarchist Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin. According to Paola Mocchi (2004), under the order of the czar, she was persecuted for her anarchist political ideas and immigrated to Switzerland. She participated in rebellions in France--from where she was also dismissed in 1878--and in Florence, Italy, where she was arrested under the charge of anarchic

⁵ Since the Renaissance, Italy was divided in city states that were continually threatened by occupation from neighboring powers. *Risorgimento* (revival) is a term that describes the nationalism and political unification of Italy that began after the French revolution of 1789 and consolidated in 1860/1870. In these eighty years, there were three wars of independence leading to unification and several diplomatic and military battles, the most important ones led by northerners Cavour, Garibaldi, and Mazzini.

⁶ It is not clear why the neologism *dottora* was preferred instead of the Italian feminine noun *dottoressa*, although it most probably indicates a linguistic twist of Kuliscioff's lower class patients. Later, it might have been kept for its stressing of her radical ideas and anarchic attitude towards gender.

conspirator. Being a Jew, living her life in Catholic Italy was not easy. She had a daughter with political writer Andrea Costa, and then separated due to political differences: Costa insulted her publicly calling her *Compagnia della Morte* (the partner of death), when she asserted the need to use drastic political militancy. Back in Italy, she became an advocate of socialism and befriended the president of the Socialist Party, Filippo Turati. Although she was ill with tuberculosis, she traveled back and forward from Switzerland to Italy, where she finally graduated as a physician in Naples, specializing in gynecology at the universities of Turin and Padua. During her practice, she discovered the bacterial origin of puerperal fevers, opening the way for the treatment of a disease that had killed millions of women in the past. Her nickname, *la dottora dei poveri*, goes back to her work in the poorest districts of Milan, where she treated women who were victims of domestic violence, poverty and disease (Mocchi, 2004).

Kuliscioff never abandoned clinical practice while she continued her active political involvement. On the 27th of April, 1890, discussing the subject of women-men relationships, she became the first woman lecturer at a Milan university. Her talks, termed *The Monopoly of the Men*, argued that male dominance was intrinsic to Italian social dynamics, structurally reifying women's subordination. Kuliscioff was far from naïve. Franca Pieroni Bortolotti (1991) indicates that she reproached women for conceding power to men, hence remaining slaves of the domestic sphere. According to Kuliscioff, social and work equality would lead women to achieve freedom, dignity and respect, while marriage and family life would always humiliate them: "[T]he married woman is the being most worthy of commiseration" (cited in Mocchi, 2004, ¶ 16, my translation). For Kuliscioff, Italian women still had not developed the sense of solidarity that would subvert oppressive structures, the clergy and the socialist party. In later speeches, Kuliscioff disputed Pope Pious X's 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, on the doctrines of the modernists. She also rejected the regressive political agenda of Italian socialism, which would not battle for women's right to vote because it "was considered politically too dangerous, a move which might not only hand votes to less progressive parties, but which might also be greeted with less than enthusiasm by Socialist supporters" (Wood and Farrell, 2001, p. 144). Specifically concerned with the untenable situation of women amid changing patterns of industrialized work in Europe, her radical position, eloquence and rough personality render her, still today, an icon of Italian feminism.

The Giolittian Era

Feminist political activists hoping to win women the right to vote often encountered the ambivalence--and most frequently the explicit rejection--of political leaders like Turati, head of the socialist party. This opposition put women's suffrage in suspense until past the first decade of the twentieth century. Women's emancipation from patriarchal structures like the traditional family faded to echoes, as the industrial workers' struggle for better wages vindicated the same family that Kuliscioff had criticized years before.

In 1913, the Giolittian⁷ administration expanded the right to vote through a new electoral law that was strategically set up as a concession to the Socialist Party. A year later, however, Giolitti resorted to an electoral pact with the Catholics to end their boycott of his dreamt liberal state. Giolitti extended the right to vote, but continued to exclude women. The Giolittian era lasted until the Great War and secured industrial growth in the urban cities of Turin, Milan and Genoa, deepening the historical imbalance between the North and South. This modernizing, asymmetric industrial growth identified the Giolittian era with increasing labor mobility across national boundaries (Dickie, 2001). Emigration from southern Italian areas across the Atlantic, notably from Calabria and Sicily, peaked at almost 900,000 in 1913. Imbalance between a monopolist North and a peasant South, the mounting high number of emigration, and the rise of radical syndicalism had repercussions in family-centered cultures, particularly those of the southern regions. Partly due to the reluctance of socialism to support women suffragists, and partly due to the fracture of the Italian political landscape among Catholics, Nationalists, and Socialists, new groups of writers and feminists such as Anna Maria Mozzoni and Sibilla Aleramo emerged at a distance from trade-union and class discourse.

Mozzoni argued in favor of the absorption of women into a more progressive state, in particular through rural and urban educational programs, work, and the struggle to attain the right to divorce (Passerini, 1996). She translated John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* and contributed to the feminist magazine *La Donna*, although it could be argued that she remained attached to the male universal subject advocated in Mazzini's ideals of universal humanity and equality (Wood and Farrel, 2001). In contrast, Aleramo brought awareness to the middle-class female consciousness of the limitations of domestic roles, wrote about sexuality, had female and male lovers, and was not timid about homoerotic themes. Her first novel, *Una Donna* (A Woman), was published in 1906.

In addition, in their study on Italian modern homosexuality, Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo (2001) suggest that Aleramo's writings anticipate themes explored in Italian queer theory. Writing to her lover Lina Poletti, she asserted a kind of love against heterosexist constrains. She never regretted being in love with Poletti at the same time that she had a male lover, Giovanni Cena. Aleramo regretted, however, a limitation she considered intrinsic to all female-female relations. In *Lettere d'Amore a Lina* (Love Letters to Lina), she differentiates the love she feels for Cena from the one she feels for Poletti, and characterizes female-female love as an intrinsic impossibility: "in fondo al nostro [amore] c'è la condanna atroce della sua sterilità" (in the bottom of our love there is the dreadful conviction of its sterility) (cited in Barbagli and Colombo, 2001, p. 201). I read in Aleramo's use of the term 'sterilità' a reference to futility or despair, rather than biological infertility. Aleramo's melancholic tone testified to the condemnation that *Il Novecento*⁸ imposed on homoerotic bodies, a condemnation sanctioned by the medical

⁷ Giovanni Giolitti was five times premier of Italy (1892–93, 1903–5, 1906–9, 1911–14, 1920–21). He controlled the electoral system in Southern Italy, which helped him maintain political power. Giolitti's era was corrupted but liberal. During his appointment, he reorganized labor and introduced social and agrarian reforms, including universal male suffrage. He opposed the Great War of 1914 but was responsible for the conquest of Libya and in the elections of 1921 he helped Benito Mussolini by sponsoring his candidates.

⁸ For assessing the period called *Il Novecento*, or twentieth Century, and the modifications in Italian literature it implies, see Brand, P. and Pertile, L. (1999). *The Cambridge history of Italian literature*. London: Cambridge University Press.

term *inversione*. Although it is usually accepted that Karoly Maria Benkert coined the term 'homosexuality' around 1869, until 1940 the word *inversione* was more common in Italy. It had replaced the use of the term *pederasty* and the model it implied--which could be traced back to the writings of Bernardino di Siena, at the beginnings of *Il Quattrocento*. The more quotidian use in Italy of the term inversion after the 1900, and the use of this word by some groups to represent themselves signaled, on the one hand, the increasing permeation of medical representations in everyday vocabulary. It meant a wider framework of interpretation for homoerotic desire, a timid first attempt to explore an identity that would not consolidate until six decades later with the beginnings of the gay movement. Contrary to the pederasty model, which designated a practice of male subjects only, 'inversion' was applied to the female and male genders equally. It modified the social asymmetry tacit in pederasty and was associated with more gender-endogamic relations (Dall'Orto, 2004; Danna, 2004).

Aleramo elaborated on the notion of inversion in several passages of her writings to Lina, warning her of the risks of interpreting homoerotic love according to the male active-passive psychology. Instead, she seems to suggest that female sexuality was irreducibly different from that of men, and thus remained critical of the word *inversione*: "Nel dono d'amore, la donna non ha fatto quell senso di *sottomissione* che tu, con psicologia maschile, supponi...È un'illusione quella che ti trae a *virilizzarti*. Tu sei donna..." (In the gift of love, the woman does not hold to submission as you, with masculine psychology, suppose....It is an illusion that makes you assume a virile position. You are a woman...(cited in Barbagli and Colombo, 2001, p. 201, my translation)

The male active-passive dichotomy that Aleramo writes about had deeper roots in Italian culture than in other western European countries, going back to slave-master relations in the Roman Empire (Settembrini, 2001). The term 'inversion' and 'pederasty' also coexisted for longer periods, and were notions not foreign to political propaganda. The rise of Fascism, as will be discussed in following sections, manipulated both of them in a combination with racist slogans and military machismo.

Italian Feminism and Fascism

Although early feminist struggle was sometimes grounded in a normative view of womanhood, the movement formulated political categories for thinking about gender oppression, and opened up spaces for political intervention. Nevertheless, the Giolittian era and the failure to win suffrage in 1912 exhausted the early emancipationist movement, which very much had faded away by the onset of Fascism.

This is not to suggest that Fascism succeeded in erasing feminism, just as it did not completely totalize Italian culture. Indeed, Italians who resisted Fascism invented a variety of subversive practices to contest its regulatory agenda. In this section, while I am not concerned with an analysis of Italian Fascism per se,⁹ I briefly examine the interconnections between human rights, feminism, and representations of gender in Italy during Fascism.

The rise of Fascism originated in part in the crisis of liberalism and the increasing pains of modernity in Italy, symptomatically expressed by changing cultural conditions

⁹ For a historical study on Fascism see Morgan, P. (1995). *Italian Fascism, 1919-1945*. New York: St. Martin's Press. For a comprehensive feminist study on Fascism see De Grazia, V. (1992). *How Fascism ruled women: Italy, 1922-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

during the interwar era: “[C]lass conflicts, opposition to the liberal state, inflation, strikes, land occupations in the south, struggles for higher wages and reduced working hours, reaction against the country’s traditional leadership, and increasing and aggressive nationalism” (Landy, 2000, p. 9). In 1921, in a period of intensified political confusion, Benito Mussolini was elected to parliament as the head of a National Fascist Party. He led the march on Rome the following year, establishing himself as *Il Duce* (The Leader). The initial cohesion of socialists, early Fascists and some futurists was severed, signaling the consolidation of the dictatorial regime. Core to Mussolini’s ideal of making Italy an oceanic empire was his obsession with the power of and experimentation with media. Propaganda was an important method of control throughout the territory, and strategic manipulation of the media included *manifesti* (posters), radio broadcast services, and the compulsive repetition of slogans (“to believe, to obey, to combat”). After the march on Rome, the regime created private organizations under state control to ‘fascitize’ civic society, to stimulate private enterprise, to reduce state spending, and to achieve tax and fiscal reform (Morgan, 1995). The tension between state control and encouragement of privatization is one of the salient paradoxes of Fascism, for at the same time that the regime attempted consensus on the emblematic role of the state it also stimulated private investments toward increased productivity and profit.

In many ways the regime wished to regulate the Italian social life by generating nation-wide ‘operations,’ creating institutions and reforming cultural policies. For instance, the Balilla (*Operazione Nazionale Balilla* or National Operation Balilla) sought the indoctrination of Fascist values in the youth; the *Gioventù Universitaria Fascista* (Fascist University Youth) attempted to do the same with university students; the *Operazione Nazionale Dopolavoro* (National Operation After Work), counting in 3.8 million members, standardized people’s leisure time activities; the *Operazione Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia* (National Operation for Maternity and Infancy) advanced social policies for the protection of childhood (Landy, 2000) and positioned maternity as a ‘desirable’ quality of womanhood.

These many operations, intended to mobilize popular culture in general, aimed to discipline women’s bodies¹⁰ in ways that differ from those of other nations. For example, during the World War II, United States women served the military or were encouraged by propaganda to fill in jobs that did not match their expected “natural” female abilities--from clerical work, to heavy mechanical jobs requiring motor skills, etc. In contrast, during the same period the female body was imagined as the main instrument to achieve the Fascist dream of a new Italian nation. Subject to the ideological interpellation of procreating, Fascism excluded women from political life and their “rights in the workplace, their contributions to culture and their service as volunteers were called into question by the official message that their permanent duty was to bear the nation’s children” (de Grazia, 1992, p. 72). Interestingly, homosexuality was as equally invisible as women’s voices. While prostitution and illegitimate sexuality were banned, homosexuality per se did not pose a challenge to the regime. In fact, it was rendered virtually invisible. By assuming that there were no homosexuals in Italy, Fascism erased

¹⁰ I discuss the disciplining of male bodies during Fascism in Chapter 3 of my forthcoming book: *Queer Italy*. Peter Lang Int. Forthcoming.

a possible threat to the exacerbated masculinity that was required to legitimate a new empire and populate the nation. The regime prized a *nuovo uomo* (new man) in advertisements showing homoerotic comrades-in-arms while it cherished a *nuova donna* (new woman) in mass spectacles celebrating maternity, reproduction, and the sanctity of the family space. For instance, a Mother's Day was instituted by the nation state to reward fecundity.

While Mussolini thought that only a large number of children per family would provide enough soldiers for the Fascist cause--he even imposed a tax on 'unjustified celibacy', and encouraged factories to discriminate against women in favor of family men--women in the resistance defied the constraining values of child caring, domestic servitude, and Catholic religiousness. For example, some women would challenge the Fascist commendation of large families by surreptitiously using birth control methods; challenging their confinement at the household, some would establish hidden alliances with the resistance and became allies, informants or activists (De Grazia, 1992).

Anxiety and female resistance in Rome, Open city

Illustrative of the role of women within the resistance is Roberto Rossellini's film *Roma Città Aperta* (Rome Open City, 1945). This is a film that has been analyzed exhaustively several times before (see in particular Bondanella, 2003; Rocchio 1999) and so I will not extend on it here. In relation to the problem of resistance, it is enough to point out, however, that the film honors the anti-totalitarian forces that combated Fascism from below, in every day life. Rossellini imagines a city, Rome, which is remade thanks to subterranean negotiations and alliances against the regime. Indeed, as Vincent Rocchio (1999) suggests, in this film Rome is metonym for Italy, while resistance is the site where the nation fragmented by the regime, attempted to construct social unity. Interesting in the context of my discussion of female resistance is the representation of three female characters:¹¹ Pina (Anna Magnani), Lauretta (Carla Rovere) and Marina (Maria Michi). It is thanks to them that the destiny of all the other characters is tightly interwoven as in a fresco (Landy, 2000). Part of what has made this film legendary, indeed, is its open exposure of anxiety and confusion that contravenes Hollywood narratives. Female characters are central in this respect insofar as they are "confusing and disruptive to the narrative rather than being a clarification of it" (Rocchio, 1999, p. 38). Perhaps, what is most attractive about the female characters in this film is their symbolic relationship to Rome. While the geographical body of Rome represents the fragmented identity of Fascist Italy, the female characters embody the unfastening of emotions--betrayal and envy (Marina); utopia and sacrifice (Pina), confusion and disruption (Lauretta)--their gestures of desperation connecting with the equally distressed landscape of a Rome in war.

As Rossellini's film suggests, while women were subject to oppression or ideological subjugation during Fascism, some of them were also resistant to the regime, often actively involved in opposing the propagandistic images of their roles within the nuclear family, the stereotypes of sanctity, and the narratives of virginal conception (Danna 1997, 2004). These narratives were deeply criticized by Italian political

¹¹ I elaborate on the representation of homosexuality in this film in Chapter 6. of my forthcoming book: *Queer Italy*. Peter Lang Int. Forthcoming.

philosopher Antonio Gramsci in his analysis of the language of propaganda and Italian cinema. For Gramsci, hegemonic ideologies are reproduced in the practices perpetuated by social institutions and reproduced by the (then) nascent mass media. The status of social subordinate groups, in particular women, is maintained under indirect control (as opposed to vertical or coercive) thanks to sexual politics. He asserts that

the most important ethical-civil question tied to the sexual question is that of the formation of a new female personality: until women shall not only have reached a real independence equal to men but also have a way of conceiving of themselves and their role in sexual relations, the sexual question shall remain rich in morbidity and will necessitate caution in every legislative innovation (cited in Landy, 1986, p. 63).

Gramsci situates women within similar parameters and social relations of domination than the ones oppressing workers and peasants, not only subordinated but restricted to the margins of culture (Landy, 1986). When the mass media enters to play a role in Italian culture it appropriates these subordinated positions and represents them as abnormal creatures.

Italian queer theorist writer Daniela Danna (2004) contends that resistance to subordination was not uncommon in the literature of the period. Two distinguished examples that she cites were the 1926 Nobel Prize laureate Grazia Deledda, and Gianna Manzini's first novel *Tempo Innamorato* (Time in Love), published in 1928 and awarded the Royal Academy of Italy prize in 1935. Deledda was a Sardinian writer concerned with the relation between local morality and class issues. She depicted female Sardinian characters, from landowners to servants, confronted by complex moral problems and community rejection. Manzini adopted Rome as a city to live and write about in her essays, all of which accompanied the early growth of the industrial city where her female characters experiment loneliness and fright.

In addition, Danna (2004) argues that during the heyday of Fascism another text that included images of lesbian love were Guido Stacchini's *Lesbiche* (Lesbians), the erotic novels of Pittigrilli, and in the 1930 Verona's parody of Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed) which was burned by hordes of irate Manzonians in revenge. Finally, the same year, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, often considered the first lesbian novel, was translated into Italian (Danna, 2004). While reference to lesbian sexuality does not amount to indicate social acceptance of lesbianism, it might suggest changes in the cultural representations of womanhood.

Mussolini's regime fell in 1943. Soon afterwards, the Italian women's rights reentered political discussions. Women's right to suffrage in Italy became a law on the 1st of February, 1945, thanks to many of the same activists who had struggled for liberation from Fascism. Among them were Ada Gobetti, Rina Picolato, Lina Merlin, and Elena Dreher, who founded literary and activist groups in Piedmont and Lombardy; and Natalia Ginzburg, Oriana Fallaci, Lalla Romano, Camilla Ravera, Marina Jarre, Iris Origo, Renata Viganò and Marina Serini, writers in the antifascist resistance movements during the war. In great part due to the bold interventions of these activists, Italian women voted for the first time on June, 2, 1946, for a referendum to choose between a monarchy and a republic.

The Past War Period

Paradoxically, with the collapse of the Fascist state, divisions within Italian culture increased. Vincent Rocchio (1999) argues that the failure of Fascism defined identity into three groups: opponents, ex-Fascists, and accomplices. Further, the nation was divided politically between the Christian Democratic Party and a strong left. After 1945, however, Catholicism and Communism became slowly but gradually less prominent as their national and international roles and ideologies diffused. Between 1945 and 1947, the country was ruled by governments of national unity, with the participation of all anti-Fascist parties. In an atmosphere of collaboration and compromise, the First Republic was established, a Constitution signed in 1947, and a new universal electoral suffrage introduced. In 1948, an election campaign concluded with the total victory of the Christian Democrats and the expulsion of the Left from government. With that election, forty years of Christian Democrat rule began, and “Italian women continued to live as a minority group in a situation of serious inferiority, not unlike that reserved for them by the Fascist regime that had just passed” (de Clementi, 2002, p. 333).

The most visible changes in Italian society after war originated with the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s (Cento Bull, 2001). In this period, increasing exportation, the growth of consumerism, the development of the mass media, and specifically the centrality of television secularized the middle class strata of society. The political use of television helped to modernize Italian subcultures, with its tendency to homogenize the North-Center-South divergences, making them appear integrated into the new project of a nation opened to the world. At the same time, legal reform, the result of struggles carried out by feminists, modified the heterosexual conjugal family configuration. It should be pointed out that there are antecedents to legislation in family rights in some laws passed by the Fascists in 1942. Fascist’s legislation tried to prove the ideological claim that the regime could succeed where the *Risorgimento* had failed, that is, in creating a unified nation state, highly populated and internationally competent. In this sense, the Lateran Pacts of 1929¹² sealed the mutual interests between Catholicism and the state (Wood and Farrel, 2001). The Catholic catechism was instrumental for Mussolini’s dreams of Italy’s grandeur, while the building of a *terra madre* (mother earth) was consistent with the Church’s promulgation of woman as wife and mother. The female body was a metonym for the national body, a space of sanctity (the maintenance of the status quo), purity (through ethnic and religious cleansing and regional integration), and reproduction. Mussolini’s dreams of population growth failed, however, in part due to the paradoxes of exalting motherhood on the one hand and exploiting women as cheap laborers on the other.

Contributing to the defeat of Fascism, groups of feminists allied with members of the resistance, leading to the participation of women in the local elections of 1946 and, finally, in the national elections of 1948. They criticized the little political space left for their cause in a country divided between a radical left that functioned as an almost autonomous culture and a Christian Democrat Party dependent on the social control managed by the Church. Nevertheless, the leftists *Unione Donne Italiane* (Union of

¹² On February 1929, the Italian Government and the Vatican signed an historic treaty that reasserts the political power and diplomatic standing of the Catholic Church, which had been lost with the unification of Italy and the annexing of Rome in 1870.

Italian Women) kept women's ideals alive, and helped to increase their visibility in universities, magazines, working spaces and journals.

Transitions

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Italian governmental agenda was very much influenced by the pontificate of Pope Pius XII. Governmental legislation regarding women's rights and family was narrow and reactionary, and affirmed the indissolubility of marriage and the state control of prostitution. At the same time, decrees indulged mafia criminals, and punished abortion and adultery. Finally, the Fascist code against abortion was in force until the 1950s, and argued in favor of the purity of the Italian race (de Clementi, 2002).

Until the 1968 revolts, some feminists advocated breaking free from oppressive political divides that often frustrated women's aspirations and ambitions, and created instead marginalized groups that succeeded outside political orthodoxies (Wood and Farrel, 2001). They mobilized against domestic subjugation practiced both at home and in political quarters, celebrated the extension of communication and information resources, and were optimistic about the leaps in literacy for women,¹³ which in the middle and upper classes meant attending university (Saraceno, 1991).

Women's achievements throughout this period are not scarce. They organized their political representation, attained a national plan for nurseries, built family planning clinics and repealed the legislation on rape--which had stated that a marriage of 'reparation'¹⁴ cancelled out the crime, thus preventing women from presenting their cases in courts. Reforms in labor rights included equal pay for equal work, paternity leave, and five months of maternity leave.

Legislation reforming family rights was passed in 1975 (Law 151, *Riforma del Diritto della Famiglia* or Family Rights Reform) and laws covering equal rights at work were passed in 1977 (Law 903, *Parità di Trattamento tra Uomini e Donne in Materia di Lavoro* or Equality Treatment between Men and Women Regarding Labor). In the context of the history of Italian feminist struggles, the struggle for the reform of family law was a major challenge, drawing as it does directly on the Italian constitution of the First Republic. Article 3 of this constitution states:

All citizens are invested with equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction as to sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, and personal or social conditions.

It is the duty of the Republic to remove all economic and social obstacles which, by actually limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human being and the actual participation of all citizens in the political, economic and social structures of the country (cited in Passerini, 1996, p. 146).

¹³ By 1968, literacy rates had increased up to 20% for both sexes in some regions; school-leaving age was raised up to the age of 14 for both sexes, and 19 million Italians could read. (Lumley, 1996).

¹⁴ The marriage of the victim and the offender.

In addition, drawing on constitutional articles 29, 37, 48, and 51, the new family law asserted the equality of partners within the family, the recognition of the wife's domestic labor, the right to equal payment in the workplace, women's electoral status and their full entitlement to take up public and elective office, the duty of holding property in common and the equal contribution of partners to the maintenance of the family. Finally, the natural family was recognized--asserting that family arrangements did not derive from legal matrimony--and dowry payments were abolished together with the custom of seeing marriage as an exchange between two groups transacted through the person of the woman (Passerini, 1996). Some commentators, however, have noted elements of inequality remaining in family law, abortion and divorce. Fortino (1981) suggests that the new law forced the wife to take the husband's last name and required children to take the father's last name. In addition, the feminist group *Rivolta Femminile* (Feminine Revolt) was reluctant to support the abortion law because of its patriarchal philosophy: Article 4 allows voluntary termination of pregnancy during the first ninety days and only when the woman can prove that continuation of pregnancy would imply serious mental or physical risk.

The 1970s

During the 1960s and 1970s, Italian feminism engaged in forms of struggle that became more and more radical as they joined in the students and workers' protests. In politics, main concerns were related to the presence or invisibility of women within the left party. The most important representative for women's politics and history was Franca Pieroni Bortolotti. In *Alle Origini del Movimento Femminile in Italia: 1848-1892* (Origins of the Feminist Movement in Italy, 1848-1892), she criticized several communist leaders for their oblivion in regards to women's political strength and perseverance. However, she also rejected easy generalizations and did not accept the idea that the whole party was chauvinist. Bortolotti was also critical regarding transformations within the Italian family. She believed that in industrialized countries liberation could turn to the psychological sphere because youth were independent, hence making the family obsolete in its role as economic unit. Within this transformation, Bortolotti hoped that sexual oppression would cease insofar as the repression of sexuality would no longer be a way of subordinating women (Ergas, 1982).

Intellectually, the 1970s feminism was inspired by post-Freudian psychoanalysis and Franco-American feminism. The vanguard positions included the Milan group *DEMAU* (Anti-Authoritarian Demystification) following the writings of Herbert Marcuse; the Milan group *Anabasi* (Anabasis) and the already mentioned *Rivolta Femminile*, founded by radical art historian Carla Lonzi (di Clementi, 2002). The title of a well known book, written by Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel. La Donna Vaginale e la Donna Clitoridea* (We Spit on Hegel: Clitoral and Vaginal Women), illustrates the extent to which Italian feminism had become, by 1970, a site of radical opposition centered on the issue of sexual liberation.

In addition, the decades of 1960 and 1970 are marked by influential feminist works developed in conjunction with diverse academic and political platforms. Therefore, it is important to underline some differences that distinguished the work of Italian feminism from other countries. One of the critical qualities of Italian feminism emerging in 1968 is its political appropriation of psychoanalysis and philosophy more for activist

than for academic reasons. In particular, Lacan, Sartre, Foucault, and of course Marx and Gramsci, were leading intellectual sources. Maria Serena Sapegno (2002) argues that it was mainly in France and Italy that psychoanalysis first met feminism, and it did so principally for political reasons. Consequently, when the North American tradition of *consciousness rising*¹⁵ started to spread in Italy, it found a particular psychoanalytic and philosophical background that operated both as a form of resistance to and facilitator of psychoanalysis. The philosophical and political traditions of Italy eased a major reinterpretation of psychoanalysis into activism, a result of which was the *pratica dell'inconscio* (practice of the unconscious), a non-clinical use of Freudian categories to analyze the discourses about women's relations. As Sapegno (2002) notices, the articulation of psychoanalysis and politics was thereafter more influential, a situation different from other countries and rooted in diverse epistemological projects:

In the Anglo-American world the rejection of psychoanalysis and the stress on individual rights set the feminist agenda in terms of political actions directed towards self-determination and strong individual and social identities... In continental Europe, however, where the philosophical tradition met up with the psychoanalytical one, the road was open to a politics of the unconscious and to theories of the subject, the focus being on desire, in the text and in the overwhelming power of the symbolic. (2002, p. 111)

In Italy, politics of the unconscious translated into direct interventions on the symbolic, including the legal sphere. Already in 1962, feminists reclaimed the equal authority of parents within the family by law. In effect since then, a new law replaced the 'paternal' authority by 'parental' authority, and in 1963, the law gave parents equal power in certain family, business, and residence matters. Finally, in the same year, women were granted access to all public offices and the possibility for full career in public administration (Passerini, 1996).

Changes in law were accompanied by new literary trends. Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico Familiare* (Family Lexicon) was awarded the Strega Prize and Elsa Morante's essays *Lo Scialle Andalusso* (The Andalusia Shawl) was published as a book. These are texts with experimental writing where the female self is at the center of the narrative. In addition, feminist intellectuals concentrated on the analysis of family formations as a vehicle of patriarchy through an invigorated reading of Marx and Gramsci, critiquing hegemonic ideologies that discriminated against women on the basis of their capacity for sexual reproduction. Within this framework, the family was the private sphere that mirrored the capitalist division of labor.

In December 1970, after a hundred years of unsuccessful efforts, the parliament voted in favor of divorce. Nevertheless, Paul Ginsborg (2001) has emphasized that divorce law did not immediately change patterns of family cohesion within Italy. Indeed, some indicators suggest that formal transformations in the legal sphere only very slowly translated into effective separations and divorces. Twenty years after the referendum ratified the divorce law, there were sixteen separations and eight divorces for every 100 marriages in Italy, compared to thirty-five divorces in France and forty-four in Britain

¹⁵ Small groups of leftist feminists who would meet regularly in private homes to share experiences under the motto 'the personal is the political'.

(Ginsborg, 2001).¹⁶ Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that divorce laws and legal reforms favoring women's rights had been present in France and England for a much longer period of time than in Italy.¹⁷

When in July 1970 the movement *Rivolta Femminile* (Feminine Revolt) posted a manifesto in the streets of Rome and Milan proclaiming that women were not to be defined in relation to men, a new form of feminism was born--a separatist movement emphasizing not equality but disparity or difference. Their members drew from middle class, university students and intellectual circles. Not far from the preoccupations of their American, British and French counterparts, these Italian feminists regarded domestic labor as reproducing the capitalist workforce physically (in domestic chores and maternal functions), culturally, and emotionally (through socialization). With the female body exploited as the site for material reproduction, the complete liberation of women demanded the total revolution of social relations (Oakley, 1974). Most importantly, what distinguished Neo Feminism from earlier feminism was its emphasis on questions of representation and gender, concerns that became more and more central throughout the 1970s and 1980s, following a linguistic shift that consolidated throughout continental Europe. Neo Feminism emphasized the separation between gender as a social construction and sex as a biological foundation as a means to unveil the cultural and political discourses that legitimate discrimination. This claim is consistent with Nicholson's (1995) notion of identity as a *coat-rack*: An object that supports cultural meanings. She argues that "one crucial advantage of such a position for feminists was that it enabled them to postulate both commonalities and differences among women" (p. 41). In this view, gender analysis stressed that there is always a possibility to change the social conditions that oppress women.

Adriana Cavarero (1999) argues that the gender paradigm normalized women under two laws, one juridical--and universalistic--that places women and men at the same level and the other symbolic--and particularistic--that perceives the cultural discrepancies in gender construction between the sexes. Alongside the gender paradigm, a second analytical methodology emanated in the 1970s, an approach often termed *Feminism of Difference* for it criticized the facade of gender equality which veiled the virtual nonexistence of a genuine women's symbolic. This perspective suggested that sexual difference is inherent to the constitution of subjectivity. Indeed, sexual difference is considered for some feminist authors to be the foundation upon which all other differences in culture are structured. As Italian critic Carla Lonzi puts it: "[The difference] between men and women is the base difference of humanity" (Lonzi, 1974, p. 20, my translation). Accordingly, the objective of feminism would be to unmask the modern fallacy of a neutral, universal (male) subject. If the neutrality of the modern subject is the intellectual instrument that legitimates the physical and legal subordination of women, then the female symbolic is virtually nonexistent: By structuring culture on male power, phallogocentrism constitutes a symbolic order that is devoid of female representations. To put it in another way, Modernity represents women through a male symbolic, which

¹⁶ I am aware that while some readers might find these statistics indicative of the unchallenged strength of marriage, others might read them as indicators of an impressive change in attitudes toward matrimony. In either case, my main concern is to show the relationships between the legal and symbolic contexts.

¹⁷ For example, divorce first became legal in France on September 20, 1792; it was abolished in 1816, and re-established in 1884 under the Third Republic.

rejects the experiences, history and materiality of women, depriving them of autonomous representation:

The woman does not have a language of her own, but has to use that of the other. She does not represent herself in language, but has to welcome the representations that are the products of men's language. In this way the woman talks and thinks, talks to herself and thinks to herself, but not from herself. (Cavarero, 1987, p. 53 my translation)

In the search for autonomous representation, feminists theorized that the oppression of women does not result from socio-economic determinants only, nor can it be affected by means of juridical struggles alone. More radically, subordination is about structures of meaning and power played out at the level of the symbolic.

Sexual Difference

After the creation of the *Commissione Nazionale per la Realizzazione della Parità tra Uomo e Donna* (National Commission for the Equality between Men and Women), and the publication of *Raccomandazioni per un Uso non Sessista della Lingua Italiana* (Recommendations for a non-Sexist Use of the Italian Language), feminist literature continued to evolve. During the 1970s and 1980s, an important number of women's books were best sellers, denoting a shift in the national taste in literature. New female narratives, biographies, and short stories raised female awareness and created original aesthetic sensibilities. Examples of these narrative works are Carla Cerati's *Un Matrimonio Perfetto* (A Perfect Marriage, 1975), Gabriella Ferri's *Un Quarto di Donna* (A Quarter of a Woman, 1976), Natalia Ginzburg *La Famiglia Manzoni* (The Manzoni's, 1983), Dacia Maraini's *Donna in Guerra* (Woman in War, 1975) and *La Lunga Vita di Marianna Ucrìa* (The Long Life of *Marianna Ucrìa*, 1990).

In her study on twentieth century Italian women writers, Alba Amoia (1996) characterizes the structural organization of feminism as well as the experience of writing it promoted as an inextricable liaison between the leftist cultural and political activism and the awareness of women's selves, resources, and visions. The feminist experience, however, has been vast and diversified. This diversification is partly explained as emerging from the regional, linguistic, artistic and ethnic composition of the country. For this reason, Italian feminist writing permeates multitude of genres and viewpoints (Amoia, 1996). Yet, during the two last decades of the twentieth century, it is possible to observe, among other themes, a focus on sexual and gender difference and their expression within social institutions. This is a time when "narrative fiction was reasserting itself as the dominant literary form, and as a medium through which new voices could make themselves heard" (Gatt-Rutter, 2003, p. 603). Women writers' preoccupations extended to some male writers as well, who became allies of their cause. In recent decades, feminist writers concerned with the lost of sense and memory in contemporary postmodern societies have attempted to preserve or recode Italian culture, and contrast them with consumer culture: "The struggle both to give expression to a fictional past self and to understand...the interconnections between an individual and a historical past...is evident in the early fiction of a number of writers, all of them women" Gatt-Rutter (2003,

p. 603). Some male writers have also embarked on such a journey to reinterpret (and challenge) sexism (Gnerre, 2000). This is indicative of awareness that gender inequalities of the past have been overcome partially, and that these inequalities have a negative effect on society as a whole, not only on women.

The (incomplete) emancipation of Italian women from the domestic sphere created a shift in gender relations. The 1970s were marked by changes in law regarding marriage and birth control, including the legalization of divorce (referendum in 1974) and abortion (referendum in 1977). This process was not only disruptive of long-rooted gender divides in the nation, but more importantly, it prepared the ground for the questioning of sexuality that movements like *Arcilesbica* would perform in the following years.

Arcilesbica

There are several reasons why the political activism of non-heterosexual women in Italy demands special consideration. One stands out among them, namely the search for autonomous means of political representation, independent from the ways male gay movements (*Fuori* first, *Arcigay* later on) used to represent sexuality. Nevertheless, the quest by lesbians for a symbolic patrimony that would represent them was more than a response to the male dominance within the gay movement. It was also a reply to other political groups, including feminism. For some decades there had been intense debate about the intersections between the lesbian and feminist movements in Italy, as well as discussions around the nature and extension of a female symbolic (de Clementi, 2002). In addition, the intersections between feminist and lesbian politics on the one hand, and the intersections between these politics and the gay movement on the other, had triggered disagreements and political tensions within each of these groups (see Braidotti & Griffin, 2002). In 1996, these disagreements influenced the decision of diverse lesbian-feminist coalitions to compromise and found a federal, women only branch of national gay movement *Arcigay*. They named it *Arcilesbica*¹⁸.

To judge the political compromise of *Arcilesbica*, therefore, it is important to remember that before the decade of the 1980s (specifically during the 1970s), the two most frequent if not only venues for lesbians to get involved in politics were either a gay male-oriented *FUORI!* or the rather anti-lesbian feminist movement, a reason that complicated and delayed the consolidation of a pure lesbian organization. I use the word “pure” here because the initial attempts to form such political affiliations were referred to as *separatism*, a word that came to characterize the Italian lesbian struggle to achieve different political recognition. Indeed, it was only in the mid-1980s when some lesbian groups (*Identità Lesbica* first and *Collegamento fra Lesbiche Italiane* later) started giving form to this separatist form of political representation that would be used by the lesbian movement for almost two decades. In the history of the Italian gay movement, this form of political representation is usually called *lesbofeminism*.

Lesbofeminism defined a political consciousness and a philosophical enterprise uniting individual women and groups of women who perceived that their status was structurally neglected in two ways: first as women, and second as lesbians. More

¹⁸ The prefix *Arci* in the words *Arcilesbica* and *Arcigay* comes from the name of an Italian Human Rights organization, *Arci*, which supported the construction of the gay and lesbian movement during the 1980s and 1990s.

importantly, it was (or rather, *is*) a political aspiration to demonstrate the specificities of a subjectivity different from that of heterosexual women and male gays. Finally, it defines a form of alliance seeking intervention at the level of social communications, including media, literacy, and social psychology. For these reasons, lesbofeminism was conceived of as intrinsically separatist, a political quality that would prove influential and remain crucial for lesbian politics, even after its partial eclipse.

In her essay *Arcilesbica Perché* (Arcilesbica Because...), Maria Cristina Gramolini (2000) is sarcastic in saying that the lesbofeminist mobilization did not prosper because, more than being separatist, their members were *separated*. She argues that no matter how much the lesbofeminists struggled, the kind of visibility necessary to attain a minimum degree of political recognition was never granted or achieved. The ironic result was that, by 1990, most lesbians preferred to adhere to the principles of the gay movement rather than to be completely alienated from the public sphere. That same year, therefore, discussions started within Arcigay about the possibility of creating an independent, women-only branch of the movement. By 1994, however, the question of lesbian political representation within Arcigay had worsened, and lesbian groups across Italy pushed Arcigay's agenda further.

Two circumstances finally pushed the creation of Arcilesbica. First, the Resolution of Strasbourg passed during an international meeting on human rights, and which granted, for the first time, equity of rights to homosexual persons in the European Union. Second, there was deep concern about the future of the gay movements after the 1994 victory of Berlusconi. The general elections of 1994 assured the power of the right, the Catholic, and secessionist forces, and anticipated the course of Italian politics.

The purpose of the Resolution of Strasbourg, passed in 1980 by the European Court of Human Rights, established that a sexual act between individuals of the same sex should not be forbidden under the European Convention of Human Rights. This ruling applied to Northern Ireland (following the *Dudgeon* case) in 1981 and, in 1988, to the Republic of Ireland (following the *Norris* case). Finally, in 1993 it was extended to Cyprus (following the *Modinos* case). In 1988, however, the United Kingdom passed legislation to ban the provision of material promoting homosexuality in education, libraries and media. Italy, Ireland and Belgium opted for similar measures in the interest of preventing young persons from having access to any form of 'positive' information about homosexuality (Roth, 1993). Indeed, reaction to the Strasbourg resolution was far from well received in Italy. According to Danna (1999), media campaigns were decisive in constructing a negative representation of homosexuality in Italy immediately following the resolution, and they opposed the unification of gays and lesbians factions under the umbrella of Arcigay. As had happened before, Danna (1999) explains, media coverage attempted to manipulate Italian conservative morals, this time using the case of a child from Savona, in Northern Italy, who was living with two women. Danna (1999) reports that in an opinion poll commissioned by agency *Panorama* to the Cirm Institute at the pinnacle of the mass media debate, 77% of the Italian population was decisively against the adoption of a child by a same sex couple. Particularly controversial was the 1998 law on fertilization, which excluded homosexual and single persons from the right to use reproductive technology at a time when, on the other hand, there were ads within news magazines of wealthy heterosexual couples looking for donors with blue eyes and an elevated IQ. Not only a homophobic, but also a mercantile ethics separated those who

could afford the use of these technologies from those who were discriminated against based on their sexual orientation.

Regarding the use (or rather, selective proscription) of reproductive technologies, parody was the approach favored by the Italian lesbian groups in the 1980s. A memorable example is the 1998 Arcilesbica awareness campaign, which included the distribution of a mock kit for self-insemination to the public circulating across the streets of Parliament. However, it would be incorrect to confuse the strategies that the lesbian groups used to raise public awareness *outside* or in the streets, and the strategies they used to achieve political representation *within* or inside the gay movement. Within the movement, and increasingly after the victory of Berlusconi in the 1994 general elections, all the lesbian groups previously dispersed around the country came to the agreement that a national lesbian association had to be created. In December 1996, the general committee of Arcigay, including the majority of Italian lesbian groups, passed the final resolution for the founding of Arcilesbica. Surely, this creation represented the most significant achievement of the homosexual community in Italy during the period from 1980 to 1996. It was a political victory with consequences not only for lesbians, but also for all of the gay movement, and it was a material, symbolic victory in which the power extended beyond the private sphere of the political movement as well.

Indeed, the founding of Arcilesbica meant a victory that affected the whole gay movement because it implied that sexual and gender difference had to be not only acknowledged but made visible within the politics of a movement that had been, for most of its history, centered on male gay concerns. The visibility I am referring to implies making symbolic and material resources available to guarantee the existence of otherness, clear in the debates about transgender subjectivities, which came to the forefront of the Arcigay agenda only after the creation of Arcilesbica. The public and private struggle involved in the creation of Arcilesbica illustrates that internalized homophobia is a powerful force that operates from within, and not only from afar. Even if not purposely, the gay movement had contributed to the silencing of sexual difference, reproducing the patriarchal and heterosexual structure of society. Further, it was a victory affirming that the personal is the political. As Maria Cristina Gramolini (2000) puts it, “the heterosexual fate of women can only be resisted if one speaks out as a lesbian. It is fundamental to raise lesbianism to the political level, to take it outside the purely private sphere” (p. 119, my translation).

Final Remarks: La Lotta Continua¹⁹

A number of reasons can be mentioned to argue that, to date, Italian women’s liberation is an ongoing struggle. Disregarding current legislation, salaries continue to be unequal between men and women; women are less frequently elected in higher positions, and are still discriminated against in some sectors of the academic and professional worlds. Women continue to bear the weight of domestic chores, social policies regarding maternity are few and impractical, and men tend to avoid domestic chores and child caring (Barbagli, 1988; Balbo, 1978; Ginsborg, 2003; Saraceno, 1991). Currently, even though partial emancipation was conquered with much pain, Italian women must engage the conflict of, on the one hand, being emancipated to work and, on the other, being

¹⁹ The phrase can be translated as *The Struggle Goes On* or as *The Ongoing Struggle*.

pressured by long-rooted Italian standards dictating what society expects from them. As Ginsborg (2003) points out, working women find themselves exhausted by their double presence, in their homes and in their jobs. Consequently, some Italian professional women might agree with de Clementi (2002) that “[a]s far as professional visibility and the giving of responsibility goes, almost nothing has changed” (p. 338). Currently, there are neither media conglomerates nor universities run by women and only around a 10% of Italian women are parliamentary members. In addition, the situation of lesbian and queer individuals is far from constructive. To begin with, the Italian penal code contains no anti-lesbian or anti-gay discrimination provisions, and the Constitution does not provide anti-discriminatory protections regarding sexual orientation. The penal code contains no laws protecting gays and lesbians as a group, although it does include considerations for gender, race, and religion. Same-sex couples are not recognized by Italian law even though parliament members have presented at least four proposals for civil unions. To date, none of these bills has been passed in the parliament.

To conclude, this essay has examined almost one hundred and fifty years of feminism in Italy, in several of the forms it has taken, their ramifications and their power to transform a society that, as others, has not completely eliminated the subordinate status of women. The brave, continuous history of Italian feminism suggests, however, that the struggles have not been in vain. Indeed, it seems fair to say that women’s voices, their activism and political interventions made identifiable changes in Italian society. For over a century, Italian feminism has been opening up spaces for critical thought and concrete social change. I am positive that the feminist and lesbian movements and their allies will further transform Italy in the near future. It is only a question of waiting, for as the title of this essay suggests, our struggle continues.

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