Finding Feminist Affect in Italian Literature: From Sibilla Aleramo to Rossana Campo, 1906-2012

By

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Abstract

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The project of nation-building is an affective one; it depends on shared sites of emotional investment and collective memory in order to produce a language that speaks to and for the subjects of that nation. In Italy this task has been at the heart of public debate since the turn of the century, coloring the content and form of literary narratives as well as political activism. *Finding Feminist Affect in Italian Literature: From Sibilla Aleramo to Rossana Campo, 1906-2012,* identifies parallels between political activism and narrative at different moments in the history of the Italian women's movement; I begin with the suffragists and consider narratives of individual achievement and struggle, like Sibilla Aleramo's (1906) *Una donna*, that echo the philosophical impulses and political efforts of that moment. Following this interplay of textual expression and feminist thought, I move from the turn of the century to the present day with each chapter focusing on a discrete period in modern Italian history. The second chapter explores connections between collaboratively authored manuscripts and practices of collective identification and group politics beginning in the 1970s. This is followed by an analysis of the academic turn among Italian feminists in the 1980s and 1990s, and its effects on both the style and content of the texts they authored. In the final chapter I ask how the current women's movement is defining itself as Italian, and how those criteria have changed in light of the expansion of the European Union, increased immigration and demographic diversity, the rise of nationalist sentiment, and public displays of racism.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2009 one of Italy's leading news sources, *La Repubblica*, published an open letter in its online edition that went viral almost immediately. "Appello alla dignità delle donne," ("Appeal to the dignity of women"), collaboratively authored by Michela Marzano, Barbara Spinelli and Nadia Urbinati, appeared as a response to a nationally televised incident in which the then prime minister Silvio Berlusconi publicly insulted senator Rosy Bindi by disparaging her gender.[1] In the "Appello" Marzano, Spinelli and Urbinati do not refer directly to the Berlusconi-Bindi incident, instead they call on Italian women to come together and denounce this pattern of misogynist behavior. "È ormai evidente," they begin, "che il corpo delle donne è diventato un'arma politica di capitale importanza, nella mano del Presidente del Consiglio."[2] They explain that the Prime Minister uses women's bodies as a political tool by reducing them to symbols of submission to his power: "La donna come lui la vede e l'anela è avvenenza giovanile, seduzione fisica, ma in primissimo luogo è completa sottomissione al volere del capo."[3] This condemnation of Berlusconi's misogynist behavior is presented not simply as an affront to women, but also as a threat to the practice of democracy in Italy. To emphasize this point, the subheading of the "Appello" reads: "Quest'uomo offende noi donne e la democrazia: Fermiamolo."[4] This same statement is repeated, word for word, in the last line of the "Appello," stressing the connection between women's dignity and democracy. Through this rhetorical move, the "Appello" participates in a contemporary trend of equating women's rights with democracy, drawing on the widely held notion that the realization of each can be measured in the success of the other. In other words, the "Appello" argues that Italian democracy is threatened when women's dignity is undermined.

Marzano, Spinelli and Urbinati argue that the act of objectifying and denigrating the female body is used as a weapon, "contro la libera discussione, l'esercizio di critica, l'autonomia del pensiero."[5] Implicit in this equation is the idea that democracy and freedom of expression are universally shared ideals and will, therefore, be motivators for people to rally in their defense.[6] While democracy implies a degree of equality among

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[1] Michela Marzano, Barbara Spinelli and Nadia Urbinati, "Appello alla dignità delle donne," *La Repubblica.* October 9th, 2009. All translations are my own.

[2] "By now it is clear that woman's body has become a political weapon of utmost importance to the President."

[3] Woman, as he sees and represents her, is youthful beauty and physical seduction, but, first and foremost, she represents complete submission to the will of the leader."

[4] "This man offends us women and democracy: let's stop him."

[5] "against free speech, critical dissent, and autonomous thought."

[6] This is a logic that began to emerge in the Eighties, with the rise of neoliberalism, and one that has gained global currency with recent campaigns to export a brand of Western democracy embodied in the image of the liberated woman. A very important essay by Chandra Mohanty, titled "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," exposes the ethnocentrism and objectification of the oppressed-other that inform this line of reasoning. Unlike the women's movements of the Sixties and Seventies that drew heavily on leftist ideas of socialism and communist utopias, the logic that drives this formula comes out of the Nineties when Western democracy was repackaged as the only true expression of modern freedom. Lisa Duggan offers an extremely provocative analysis of this shift in her 2003 text, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy.* The idea of democracy takes on new

citizens, regardless of gender, the notion of dignity for women is much less clearly defined because it depends on culturally and individually subjective notions of womanhood as well as what constitutes respectable and offensive behavior.

In the "Appello," "ubbidienza" and "avvenenza" ("obedience and beauty") are identified as the new tools of female oppression, they are the "burqa gettato sul corpo femminile, per umiliarlo sulle scene televisive e tramutarlo in arma che ferisce tutti e tutto."[7] By invoking the image of the burka the "Appello" draws on contemporary stereotypes of oppression and freedom, creating an affective dichotomy that places respectable, intelligent Italian women, those who feel "offended," on one side, and Berlusconi and burkas on the other. The danger of this reductive equation is that it dismisses the possibility of women choosing burkas of their own free will; at the same time, it draws on current nationalist impulses by reaching outside the repertoire of Italian cultural images and using a foreign word as a metaphor for oppression, thus suggesting that misogyny is itself a foreign import that goes against authentic Italian values.[8] This ethnocentric critique is one that I am making, it was not raised in the public response to the "Appello." There were, however, dissenting voices among Italian feminists who took issue with the language of "offence" and "dignity" on the grounds that it implies a unified set of values shared by all women and thus risks alienating or creating divisions among women.[9]

Despite these critiques, the "Appello" was extremely successful. By making use of the newspaper's online venue and linking the text to a signature page, the "Appello" collected more than one hundred thousand signatures in a matter of days. While signatures did not lead to any specific legislative change, they did serve as a visual testament to the emergence of a new community of politicized women in Italy, most notably the emergence in 2011 of *Se non ora quando?* a politically and socially active organization that has grown significantly in just a few years and that advocates for women's rights in Italy.[10]

The rhetorical choices and the literary form that characterize the "Appello" speak to the specificity of the historical moment in which it was authored. By engaging with online media, the "Appello" is able to create a new form of feminist community that reflects a current emphasis on social (as opposed to exclusively legislative) change. The

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urgency towards the end of the last decade with the so-called "Arab spring" and its uprisings in the name of democracy, and the parallel (re)turn toward conservative nationalism among EU nations seeking to assert themselves as independent states within the framework of an increasingly centralized EU government.

[7] "burka thrown on the female body, to humiliate it on television and transform it into a weapon that hurts everyone and everything."

[8] Feminist author Noami Wolf explores some of the misconceptions, bigotries and racial tensions that inhere in the use of the veil as a metaphor for women's oppression in her controversial editorial "Behind the Veil Lives a Thriving Muslim Sexuality" for *The Syndey Morning Herald*, (August 30th, 2008).

[9] Valeria Ottonelli, for instance, argues that by focusing on dignity and respect, the "Appello" promotes a moralistic feminism in which individual people and their actions are condemned rather than structures of oppression and inequality. [Valeria Ottonelli, *La libertà delle donne: contro il femminismo moralista*, (Genova: Il Melangono, 2011)].

[10] Following the model of the 2009 "Appello," *Se non ora quando?* also begins with an open letter published on a number of online forums (newspapers, social media sites, and blogs). The focus this time, however, was not a visual gathering of signatures but a physical demonstration of support in the form of a nation-wide protest on February 13th, 2011. For more information on the history and mission of the organization visit the website: www.senonoraquando.eu.

call to action employs the contemporary coupling of democracy and women's rights, notions that are being challenged by the emergence of multinational government alliances, and increasingly fluid global economic and cultural exchange. Throughout this dissertation, I analyze moments like this one, where text, activism and affect come together for women in Italy.

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This dissertation traces literary and political parallels while paying attention to the specificities of each historical moment and, in particular, the ways the women's movement negotiates the changing category of citizenship.

Beginning with a study of the impact of turn of the century awakening narratives, I move to an analysis of collective authorship and politics in the 1970s, and conclude with a discussion of contemporary writings by im/migrant women. By making affect and textual production contingent factors in the articulation of the Italian women's movement, this project proposes a new methodology through which to approach the question of Italian women's political identity.

The violence, sexual objectification and discrimination Italian women endure in the home, in the media and in the workplace have largely been ignored by scholars abroad. In Italy these issues are taken up almost exclusively by women's groups and women scholars who are split amongst themselves less around differences in policy and tactic, than on the use of the term "feminism;" some take it up proudly as a symbol of power and unity, while others reject it as a marker of radical separatism. Feminism has always been a loaded term, whose definition is more affective than empirical. The question of "defining and recognizing feminism" is a key one that surfaces throughout this project but which I do *not* answer. Instead, I trace feminist affect as it echoes in and through literature.

Thinking about feminism in terms of affect, cultural production and social, political and artistic vision is a move that comes out of a North American academic tradition. As queer theorist David Eng explains, affect is a political project, it is not the property of the private and personal; instead it is a critical component of history-making and alliance-building.[11] Affect is that which can animate the past in the service of a differently imagined future; it is a bond with transformative and temporally transgressive potential. Building on Eve Sedgwick's theory of the periperformative, I locate affect in moments where texts (and readings of them) are haunted by unwritten genealogies, and in those spaces where genre prescriptions are distorted and confounded.[12] In thinking about awakening narratives as a form of gendered narrative expression, I am pushing for an understanding of form as a sort of performative utterance (where ritual and repetition *are* meaning) and narrative as the periperformative, as that which echoes and clusters around the performative that is the form. The clustering around an unspoken center is in itself a generative act, so that each awakening narrative participates in that affective clustering, constantly displacing and replacing centers without ever naming a single one. Feminist affect is the bond formed through and around the recurring act of voicing both the need to address gender inequalities and the desire for universal livability.

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[11] David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) 21.

[12] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Inherent in the formation of these bonds is a reorganization of the experience of time. The utopian vision is a forward gaze, an impulse toward imagining new futurities. It finds its roots, however, in a turn toward the past, seeking recognition and validation by identifying narratives of experience that mirror current affective conditions (of all types, including joy, suffering, longing and frustration).

A recurrent theme in the literature I will examine is a concern with, recognition, and acceptance of negative emotions as affective bonds. Unlike what is seen in a great deal of North American literature analyzed by feminist critics, the Italian narratives rarely describe this "negative" bond as a catalyst for action. (Think, for instance, of how anger is mobilized as a call for action and change in *This Bridge Called My Back* – the 1980s anthology by women of color written in reaction to the racism in white North American feminism). Often, in Italian texts, this pessimism simply *is* – undisturbed by a particularly American impulse to transform it into positive action. Through a reading of specific texts, I will discuss how these negative qualities do not diminish the significance or impact of the bond.[13]

In his discussion of hope as a crucial element of utopianism and as a critical methodology, queer of color theorist José Muñoz points out that "hope is not the only modality of emotional recognition that structures belonging; sometimes shame, disgust, hate, and other 'negative' emotions bind people together."[14] Without dismissing the central position of sexuality in queer theory, "queer" is used here as a critical optic. Through this queer lens, identity is understood as having different and mutually influential valences in the psychic, social, and legal spheres. I am particularly drawn to Jasbir Puar's discussion of sexuality and race in the context of our increasingly global surveillance state and its treatment of minority and oppressed peoples.[15] In my study of Italy, this has meant paying attention to the ways racially and ethnically othered populations are insistently categorized as "im/imgrants" (rather than potential citizens), and are treated as "issues" confronting the European Union. The use of this linguistic marking of difference and cultural incompatibility has resulted, somewhat paradoxically, in the creation of new affective networks among people from different national and cultural backgrounds living and writing in Europe. For instance, in my study of the "Concorso letterario lingua madre" ("Mother Tongue Literary Competition"), a national competition directed toward immigrant women in Italy, I ask how the women's movement is defining itself as Italian, and how those criteria have changed in light of the expansion of the European Union, the rise of nationalist sentiment, and public displays of racism.

The terms "Italian" and "woman" convey politically, racially and culturally charged notions of identity, they can refer to any number of experiences and modes of living and, at the same time, both terms are treated as self-evident and incontestable. The dangers that arise from allowing these labels to go unchallenged lead to the subordination or exclusion of certain groups of people from the public dialogue. In Italy, this separation

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[13] Political pessimism is an important consideration when analyzing the Italian feminist landscape. I will return to this theme in Chapter Three, and to the broader question of how political pessimism is perceived and portrayed *by* many Italians as being a particularly Italian trait.

[14] José E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 97.

[15] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

has occurred along racial lines, so that brown women go largely unseen and women's rights are discussed in terms of the preservation of a national culture. Extant scholarship on these issues can be roughly divided into a few distinct categories. There are those who focus on women's issues from a strictly sociological and political angle, like Lorella Zanardo's recent exposé on the role television and Berlusconi's media empire have played on representations and treatment of women in Italy over the past few decades, and Franca Bortolotti's seminal history of early Italian feminist activism and organization.[16] Scholars focusing on Italian feminist theory, like Sanda Kemp and Paola Bono, tend to restrict themselves to the 1970s and 1980s, and indeed this is the time period most Italians associate with "femminismo" where important texts like Carla Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel* (*Let's Spit on Hegel*) (1974), stand out as markers of the significant philosophical work being done at the time.[17] Women's literature is generally held in a separate category, as is the case with Marina Zancan's important study, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura* (*The Double Itinerary of Writing*) (1998), in which texts are discussed in relation to the historical context, and the organizing term is "Italian women".

My dissertation draws on each of these approaches, and takes special inspiration from works like Graziella *Parati's Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (1996) and Carol Lazzaro-Weiss's *From Margins to Mainstreams: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (1993), where "feminism" is an active organizing category on par with "Italian women" and where literature is understood as a mode of textual expression. Lazzaro-Weiss thus signals each of these things – feminism, gender, nationality and textuality – as significant. My project takes a critical approach to this mode of inquiry, seeing the relationship between literature and politics not simply as reflexive, but as dynamic and mutually productive, stressing the ways in which textual expression, politics and the experience of gender-identity are interconnected.

This dissertation is, fundamentally, about the relationship between the aesthetic and narrative characteristics of textual production by women in Italy and the bent – the mode and focus – of feminism at different, significant moments in Italian history. I begin with a study of Sibilla Aleramo's 1906 *Una donna* (*A Woman*), and follow this turn of the century awakening narrative as it is transformed through the post-war period and the early 1970s. By tracing *Una donna* in texts by Alba De Cespedes (1952) and Giuliana Ferri (1976), I claim that the awakening narrative is less a marker of the birth of the women's movement, as it is generally theorized to be by genre scholars, than a form of affective engagement, echoing throughout generations of Italian women's writing and, in doing so, defining itself as a mode of feminist textuality.

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[16] Lorella Zanardo's *Il corpo delle donne* (2010) is an extremely provocative study of misogyny in Italian television and advertising media. Its immediate success speaks to the widespread anger and awareness of this objectification. Franca Pieroni Bortolotti's work, on the other hand, comes from an earlier generation and focuses on the history and legacy of organized political action among women. Her work includes: *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1978); *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia* (Milan: G. Mazzotta, 1974); *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia: 1848-1892* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

[17] Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp's *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, published for the first time in 1991 marks the beginning of a interest in and recognition of Italian feminisms on behalf of Anglophone academics.

Chapter Two lingers in the 1970s and 1980s and examines the interaction between new modes of textual expression and social activism, paying particular attention to the focus on communal living and collective expression that gained so much traction in that time and that revived the term "feminism" with radical, angry and passionate affect. In this chapter, I identify what I am calling a "collective awakening" through a close reading of three collaboratively authored texts: *Una donna sola* (*A Woman Alone*) by Franca Rame and Dario Fo (1977); *Più donne che uomini* (*More Men than Women*) by the Libreria delle donne di Milano (1983); *Baby boomers: vite parallele dagli anni Cinquanta ai cinquant'anni* (*Baby Boomers: Parallel Lives from the Fifties to Age Fifty*) by Rosi Braidotti, Annamaria Tagliavini, Serena Sapegno and Roberta Mazzanti (2003). The texts discussed here develop affective bonds through a continual restaging of the importance and impact of collective and relational identification. In other words, these texts resist privileging the individual story – a defining feature of the texts I discuss in Chapter One – and choose to foreground instead the complicated and potentially productive, provocative, even explosive dynamics of relationships among women.

Chapter Three is a study of three texts, *Autoritratto di gruppo* (*Group Self-Portrait*) (1988) by Luisa Passerini; *Piccole italiane* (*Little Italian Women*) (1994) collectively authored by a host of women; and *Le donne fanno paura* (*Women are Scary*) (1997) by Chiara Valentini. I grouped these three texts together because I identified in each what I am calling "feminist revisionism," by which I mean a two-pronged critique aimed at revising nationally shared narratives of Italian history while also revealing the norms and structures at work in different disciplines by which misogynist narratives of national identity are produced and upheld. Put in simpler terms, each text tells stories that have been left out of official histories – stories of women – and in doing so sheds light on the reasons for these exclusions.

The final chapter brings us to the present day through a discussion of the tensions between race, nation and gender in contemporary writing by women living and writing in Italy. This chapter questions not only the persistent power of feminism in all its multiple connotations, but also puts it into critical dialogue with changing notions of nationhood and belonging by considering how Italian feminisms echo in the work of an increasingly visible and textual im/migrant population. In a study of Laila Wadia's (2007) novel, *Amiche per la pelle* (*Bosom Buddies*), I explain how language learning serves as a path toward community formation but *not* assimilation for a community of women who have come from all over the globe and now find themselves living together as cultural outcasts in Italy. I develop this theme in my analysis of Rossana Campo's (2009) *Lezioni di arabo* (*Arabic Lessons*), in which I draw on Martin Manalansan's theory of queer immigrant identity as a "messy subject," spilling out of the conceptual containers used to make sense of social organization by inhabiting multiple, unspecific subject positions so that her very "messiness" marks her queerness.[18] The messy queer subject in Campo's novel invites an interrogation of the way current national borders in the European Union are erased for some people and redrawn more firmly for others in response to perceptions of their cultural, racial and sexual identities.

The project of bringing affect into academic debates on Italian feminism is not an easy one, as it requires destabilizing Italian notions of feminism as a political party or

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[18] Martin Manalansan, "Queer Dwellings: Migrancy, Precarity, and Fabulosity," paper presented at the Feminist Theory Workshop (Durham, NC: Duke University, March 22-23, 2013).

coherent world-view. The affective turn is one that, as Sara Ahmed teaches, recognizes subjectivity in every instance, taking critical notice of the paths and histories that lead to each site of affect response.[19] This tension between a past, present and desired future for Italian women is, I contend, an expression of an ongoing trans-historical dialogue that characterizes the Italian women's movement. It is, as I explain in this dissertation, a conversation that happens in and through the page. The restaging of Sibilla Aleramo's 1906 awakening narrative sixty years later, for instance, is a marker of both positive and negative affect, insofar as remembering and reviving are signs of enduring esteem for author and form, and persistent concerns and conditions for Italian women. In this dissertation, I revisit expressions of feminism in literature from across the arc of the last hundred years in order to bring to today's debate an invigorated and nuanced understanding of the affective, trans-historical force of "feminism" as a term around which to organize and create.

[19] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text 22.2* (2004) 117-139.

CHAPTER ONE:
WAKING WOMEN

This dissertation investigates experiences of Italian feminism by analyzing various modes of literary expression by Italian women across a broad historical spectrum. The range of material is born, in part, of necessity: where there is no official history of Italian women or of feminism, women's literary expression steps in as a rich, at times contradictory, historical narrative.[20] To borrow from Ann Caesar, Italy "did not produce (and still has not produced) a unified women's movement and […] therefore enormous obstacles lie in the way of writing any general history. In the absence of such general histories, monographs and individual texts assume enormous importance."[21] Those texts by women that come to "assume enormous importance" are diverse and inconsistent. Across this diversity of texts threads a notably persistent consciousness of the position each text occupies as the bearer of an untold history as well as an awareness of the intertextual community in which they participate. This chapter focuses on the awakening narrative as a form of expression that anchors a text in its historical moment while also placing it, by virtue of the repetition of form, in dialogue with other like narratives. Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna* (*A Woman*) (1906), Alba De Céspedes's *Dalla parte di lei* (*On/From Her Side*) (1952), and Giuliana Ferri's *Un quarto di donna* (*A Fourth of a Woman*) (1976), are three distinct texts that restage the awakening narrative in relation to very different social and political realities. Despite the distinct contexts that inform and are in turn described by these respective novels, I argue that each is haunted by the echo of the others in a way that disregards linear temporarily so that more recent texts are haunted by their predecessors just as older texts are haunted by their successors. I argue that such inter-temporal haunting is a particular manifestation of feminist affect, where affect is multiply defined as an agent of transformation as well as the consequences of that transformation.[22]

Each of the authors considered here was actively involved in changing the Italian political landscape of her time. Of the three, less is known about Giuliana Ferri. She was an active member of the Italian Communist Party and was working as the local party

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[20] A few important texts among the extant historiographic work on modern Italian women's history and the history of Italian feminism are: Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1991); Annarita Buttafuoco, *Cronache femminili: temi e momenti della stampa emancipatzionista in Italia dall'unità al fascismo* (Arezzo: Dipartimento di studi storia-sociali e filosofici, 1988); Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1978); Anna Rossi-Doria, *Dare forma al silenzio: scritti di storia politica delle donne* (Rome: Viella, 2007); and Rinaldina Russell, *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994).

[21] Ann Caesar, "Italian Feminism and the Novel: Sibilla Aleramo's *A Woman*," *Feminist Review* 5(1980): 79.

[22] This formulation leans heavily on Eve Kosofky Sedgwick's theory of affect outlined in *Touching Feeling* (2003). Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Silvan Tomkins, Michel Foucault and J.L. Austin, Sedgwick theorizes affect as itself performative – that is, temporally and spatially multiple, operating simultaneously as both performance and performer, cause and effect. Sedgwick's nuanced definition speaks directly to the performative repetition of the awakening narrative that I identify in these three texts, and informs my discussion throughout the following chapters.

secretary when, in 1975, she suddenly died. Alba de Céspedes (1911-1997) was born into a public political family (her father and grandfather both served as presidents of Cuba). She actively participated in the Italian Resistance (stories of which are worked into *Dalla parte di lei*). Her prolific literary and cinematic work almost always featured issues of socio-political injustice (usually class and gender-based).[23] Sibilla Aleramo (1876 – 1960) is considered one of the founding figures of Italian feminism; a prolific writer and dedicated advocate of women's rights, Aleramo is unquestionably the most well-known of the three.[24] Due in part to the historical moment in which it was written, *Una donna* is the text among the three considered here that responds most clearly to commonly shared notions of what constitutes an awakening narrative.

The awakening narrative centers on a female protagonist coming to a conscious awareness of her gendered identity. Similar to the traditionally male-centric *Bildungsroman*, the awakening narrative recounts the attempts of a sensitive protagonist to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and patterns, and acquire a philosophy of life. Unlike her male counterpart, the awakening narrative's protagonist must learn these lessons as a woman living in a society organized around sexual difference. As Susan Rosowski explains, the growth of the awakening narrative's protagonist "results typically not with 'an art of living,' as for her male counterpart, but instead with a realization that for a woman such an art of living is difficult or impossible: it is an awakening to limitations."[25] Thus, oriented by the metaphor of awakening to the "real" work, such texts levy political critique from within the space of personal experience by revealing the limitations that ideology imposes on one woman and, by extension, on women in general.[26]

The titular subject of Aleramo's *Una donna* (*A Woman),* for example, stands in for a particular historical actor and everywoman, thereby conflating the personal and political, the private and the universal.[27] Widely considered the first Italian narrative of

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[23] For more biographical information on Alba De Céspedes see: Ulla Akerstrom, *Tra confessione e contradizione: uno studio sul romanzo di Alba De Céspedes dal 1949 al 1955* (Rome: Aracne, 2004); Carole C. Gallucci and Ellen Victoria Nerenberg, *Writing Beyond Fascism: Cultural Resistance in the Life and Works of Alba de Céspedes* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000); Rinaldina Russell, *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994); and Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995).

[24] For a detailed account of Aleramo's life see: Monika Antes, *"Amo, dunque sono": Sibilla Aleramo, pioniera del femminismo in Italia* (Florence: Pagliai, 2010); Annarita Buttafuoco, *Svelamento: Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988); and Alba Morino, Bruna Conti, and Sibilla Aleramo, *Sibilla Aleramo e il suo tempo: vita raccontata e illustrata* (Milan: Feltrinelli1981).

[25] Susan Rosowski, "The Novel of Awakening," in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. E Abel et al. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), 49.

[26] While scholars – particularly feminist scholars – have applied the language of "awakening" to *Una donna* (though they may not define it as an awakening narrative), none, to my knowledge, have used this language to describe the texts by De Céspedes or Ferri. The nearest approximations come from Piera Carroli, who describes *Dalla parte di lei* as "an inverted bildungsroman," and Olga Ragusa who talks about the protagonist of *Dalla parte di lei* as "awakening to a political reality." [Piera Carroli, "Alba De Céspedes Rivisited," in *Writing Beyond Fascism*, ed. Carole Gallucci et al. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 43; Olga Ragusa, "Women Novelists in Postwar Italy," *Books Abroad* 33.1(1959): 7.

[27] For a more specific discussion of the significance and implications inherent in the title see: Franca Angelini, "Un nome e una donna," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed. A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988) 46-59; and Stephen Kolsky, "Changing Places: Space in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una Donna*," *Italian Quarterly* 39 (2002): 67-75.

its kind, in which a woman demands the right to her own space, life and freedom, *Una donna* was received with great acclaim when it was first published and has continued to occupy a privileged position in both the standard canon of Italian literature and feminist literary histories.[28] Situated ambiguously between autobiography and fiction, *Una donna* is the story of an unnamed young woman (commonly referred to in scholarship by the author's pseudonymous first name: Sibilla), who leaves her husband and child once she realizes that the suffering she endures is the consequence of institutionalized misogyny, and is not a reflection of her own failures or decisions.[29] Narrated in the first-person, this text thematizes writing as central to the process of awakening so much so that the protagonist claims her decision to leave her husband and child is motivated in part by her desire to pursue a career literary career.[30]

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[28] Aleramo's text occupies the position filled by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* for the English tradition, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* in the American context. For a reading of how Aleramo's texts relates to these other two see: Lea Melandri, "Scrittura e imagine di sé: la 'mente androgina' in Virgina Woolf e il tema dell''estasi' negli scritti di Sibilla Aleramo," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988) 75-87; and Augustus Pallotta, "Dacia Maraini: From Alienation to Feminism," *World Literature Today* 58.3(1984): 359-362.

Una donna has been republished numerous times in Italy (most recently in 2008), has been translated into multiple languages and has undergone film and television adaptations. The text has been taught and written about regularly since the late '60s and its "rediscovery" by Italian feminist movements. For more on the reception of Aleramo's text see: Anna Morosoff Grimaldi, *Transfigurations: The Autobiographical Novels of Sibilla Aleramo* (New York: P. Lang, 1999); and Sharon Wood, "Breaking the Chain," in *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995) 74-90. For a discussion of how Aleramo's text has been used and the place it holds in Italian feminist thought see: Ann Caesar, "Italian Feminism and the Novel: Sibilla Aleramo's *A Woman*," *Feminist Review* 5(1980): 79-87; and Anna Nozzoli, "L'elaborazione di *Una donna*: storia di un manoscritto," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988) 29-45.

[29] For more on the complex and uneasy tension between autobiography and fiction in *Una donna* and in all of Sibilla Aleramo's work see: Franca Angelini, "Un nome e una donna," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed. A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988) 46-59; Celia Bucci, "Historical Reference in a 'lightly Fictionalized Memoir': Sibilla Aleramo's a Woman," *Romance Languages Annual* 2 (1990): 200-204; Ursula Fanning, "Sibilla Aleramo's Una Donna: a Case Study in Women's Autobiographical Fiction," *Italianist: Journal of the Department of Italian Studies, University of Reading* 19(1999): 164-77; Angelica Forti-Lewis, "Scrittura auto/bio/grafica: teoria e pratica. Una proposta di una lettura androgina per *Una donna* di Sibilla Aleramo," *Italica* 71.3(1994): 325-336; and Claire Marrone, *Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2000).

[30] For more on the connection between writing and self-discovery in *Una donna* and in the whole of Aleramo's work see: Fiora A. Bassanese, "*Una Donna*: Autobiography As Exemplary Text," *Quaderni D'italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 11.1 (1990): 41-60; Ursula Fanning, "Sibilla Aleramo's Una Donna: a Case Study in Women's Autobiographical Fiction," *Italianist: Journal of the Department of Italian Studies, University of Reading* 19 (1999): 164-77; Anna Folli, *Penne leggere: Neera, Ada Negri, Sibilla Aleramo. Scritture femminili italiane fra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Guerini, 2000); Keala J. Jewell, "Un furore d'autocreazione: Women and Writing in Sibilla Aleramo." *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* (1984): 148-162; Bernadette Luciano, "The Diaries of Sibilla Aleramo: Constructing Female Subjectivity," in *Italian Women Writers from the Renaissance to the Present,* ed. M. Marotti (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) 95-110; Colleen Ryan, "The Anonymity and Ignominy: Absence As an Asset in Aleramo's *Una Donna*," *Rivista di studi italiani* 17.1 (1999): 185-202; Barbara Spackman, "Puntini, puntini, puntini: Motherliness as Masquerade in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna,*" *MLN* 124.5(2009): S210-S223; and Marina Zancan, "Una biografia intellettuale: Sibilla Aleramo," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed. A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988) 13-28.

Drawing upon the model of Aleramo's text, *Dalla parte di lei* and *Un quarto di donna* reproduce and revise the narrative of one woman's awakening to gendered identity and institutional oppression.[31] *Dalla parte di lei* is about a young woman (Alessandra) who writes her story from a jail cell after killing her husband; it is a condemnation of both the institution of marriage and the misogyny of juridical logic. This text stands in affective proximity to *Una donna* by simultaneously reviving the topos of writing as a genesis for consciousness, and questioning the promise of freedom inherent to the awakening narrative.[32] For the protagonists of *Una donna* and *Dalla parte di lei,* the practice and process of writing constitute the platform on which the woman is able to recognize that the sufferings she endures are gendered and unjust, and from which she can begin to invent a new language and thus describe new possibilities.

In *Un quarto di donna* the implicit presumption that awakening liberates and transforms its subject becomes a central thematic, eclipsing the topos of writing entirely. Like her Aleramian precursor, Ferri's (also unnamed) protagonist comes to the realization that her "choices" to marry and bear children were dictated by a system of traditions that denigrate women on the basis of gender. Standing at once thematically proximate and in contradistinction to *Una donna* and *Dalla parte di lei*, *Un quarto di donna* reveals heterosexual marriage to be a symptom of institutionalized misogyny while at the same time denying its protagonist the agency to change her life. Indeed she is denied transformation precisely because it is not her *own* realization to which she awakens. That is, if it is by establishing a dialogue with its predecessors (through theme, title, and form) that *Un quarto di donna* marks awakening as performative, in doing so it challenges the affective power of (predetermined) revelation. As I will discuss in more depth below, this failed awakening occurs both internally and externally to the text.

The female awakening narrative has been taken as a euphemism for the "birth" of the women's movement. Such a formulation relies on the notion that history (the history of women) progresses from a state of being unaware (figurally asleep) to a realization of the mechanisms of oppression and the potential for rebellion and transformation. Implicit in this teleological trajectory is the equation of language (the ability to articulate thoughts) with awareness. In her discussion of changing conditions for women at the turn of the century, Marina Zancan highlights the increasingly important role of literary expression: "la scrittura, infatti, diventa uno dei luoghi possibili in cui affermare in pubblico il valore della propria presenza, sia che questo venga perseguito mimetizzando la differenza nella maschera dell'altro, sia che invece dia forma a una volontà di riscatto e di valorizzazione di sé in quanto essere umano femminile".[33] In other words, the

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[31] Though not nearly as successful or widely read as *Una donna, Dalla parte di lei* did enjoy a fair amount of acclaim when it was first published and was translated into a number of languages including English where the title was regrettably rewritten as *The Best of Husbands*. For a more thorough account of the reception and reprinting of the novel see: Ulla Åkerström, *Tra confessione e contradizione: Uno studio sul romanzo di Alba de Céspedes dal 1949 al 1955* (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2004).

[32] Piera Carroli traces the thematic of writing – specifically of *women* writing – throughout De Céspedes's work. Carroli's work is thorough and she makes a compelling argument for reading De Céspedes's texts as ferocious critiques of political and social disenfranchisement of women. Carroli's point suffers somewhat, I think, from her insistence on reading the author's biography too heavily into the events and characters that people her novels. [Piera Carroli, *Esperienza e narrazione nella scrittura di Alba de Céspedes* (Ravenna: Longo, 1993).

[33] "writing becomes, in fact, one of the spaces in which to publicly affirm one's value, whether this means masking difference by adopting the guise of the other, or whether instead it gives rise to a valorization of

significance of the female awakening narrative lies not only in its potential to inspire historical and subjective transformation but also in how it forges language to *enact* a condition for which no words previously existed. In other words, such narratives *perform* the tale they tell.

Yet there is no declarative in which these narratives proclaim their subject "awake!" If the protagonist responds to this demand in kind, the text never articulates such a pronouncement outright. In this sense, it hews more closely to what Eve Sedgwick calls the "periperformative" than to Judith Butler or J.L. Austin's definitions of that term. Periperformatives are "not performative utterances, even though (or… exactly because) they explicitly refer to performative utterances," Sedgwick maintains. "Though not themselves performative, they are *about* performatives and, more properly, they cluster *around* performatives."[34] In thinking about awakening narratives as a form of gendered narrative expression, I am pushing for an understanding of the form as a sort of performative utterance (where ritual and effect *are* meaning) and narrative as the periperformative, as that which is about and which clusters around the performative that is the form. The clustering around an unspoken center is in itself a generative act, so that each awakening narrative participates in that affective clustering, constantly displacing and replacing centers without ever naming a single one. Each text I examine in this chapter responds to the same performative utterance as it echoes through and is recalled in each periperformative.

This cycle of repetition, however, is problematic, for it repeats an experience – first awakening to the true conditions of the world – which is, by definition, a unique event. If the awakening narrative trajectory in fact corresponds to the women's movement, how do we account for its restaging? What is to be made of the fact that this narrative has become a type? It is my contention that these "subsequent" awakening narratives are markers of widespread transformations in social make-up and conceptual reorganization, *and* at the same time, reveal the "incompleteness" of previous awakenings.[35] In the very act of restaging the journey from silence to articulation, each new invocation of the formula (re)calls attention to its narrative precedents, thereby entering into a cross-generational, intra-conceptual debate about the persistence of gender as a foundational identity category.

Each text treats this reverberation in different ways, engaging with form and critique of form to varying degrees. In *Una donna*, cross-generational cycles are treated on the thematic level (by way of the protagonist's fear of following in her mother's footsteps), as well as on the formal level (in the invocation of future readers and writers). Barbara Spackman discusses the function of repetition in *Una donna* in terms of substitution both on a physical (mother's body) and linguistic level. Spackman argues that the power of the negative female genealogy is such that Aleramo's protagonist must

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the self as specifically female human being." Marina Zancan, "Una biografia intellettuale: Sibilla Aleramo," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed. A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998) 14. All translations are my own.

[34] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) 68. Emphasis in the original.

[35] By "incompleteness" I mean also "historically situatedness;" in other words, the awakening performed in each text is dependent on the specificity of its historical context because part of the work of the awakening narrative is to perform a critique of those same historical specificities and the way in which they limit the experiential possibilities of women. I will return to this theme throughout my discussion of each text.

break with it completely so as not to repeat its logic of sacrifice and self-effacement.[36] In a similar vein, *Dalla parte di lei*'s protagonist echoes the fears of falling victim to that negative female genealogy, responds to those anxieties with action, and stresses the connection between awakening, action and writing. The differences are historically determined, but the bond between the two texts and their protagonists is clear, if not explicit. *Un quarto di donna* signals participation in this affective community by way of its resonant title and narrative formula. But in refusing to thematize the act of writing, this text reveals a failure endemic to the awakening narrative as such.

The genealogy I establish by aligning these three texts describes a backwards flow of emancipation, wherein the protagonist of the most recent text (Ferri's) is effectively the most constrained. While Sibilla and Alessandra face significant social and legal obstacles (voting prohibitions, reproductive control, marriage constraints, limited financial independence, clothing and leisure restrictions, and more), Ferri's narrator seems to inhabit the topos of feminism: pursing a career of her choosing, engaging in political deliberation, inhabiting a language of choice in marriage, motherhood and divorce. And yet, she feels she has orchestrated none of these events. Ferri's protagonist finds herself impotent not only to determine the course of her own life but also, and more perniciously, to name that which stands in her way. Lacking an available discourse, she cannot even begin to battle for self-sovereignty.

Text and Politics

Sibilla Aleramo (pseudonym of Rina Faccio) wrote *Una donna* in the context of the dramatic rise of interrelated social and political movements in late nineteenth-century Italy: the push to enact universal voting rights and to educate the public in the merits of active political participation, and a parallel mobilization around labor issues, including workers' rights and the equal distribution of wealth. These movements met with some support among the more prosperous, industrialized populaces of the north. In the rest of the country, however, where power had long rested in the hands of few, such notions were perceived as deeply threatening.[37] Italian women, nevertheless, began to organize around both causes.[38] Though *Una donna* does not directly address either trend, in style and content the novel speaks to the volatility of the socio-political landscape for Italian women in this period.[39]

[36] Barbara Spackman, "Puntini, puntini, puntini: Motherliness as Masquerade in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna,*" *MLN* 124.5(2009): S210-S223.

[37] Victoria De Grazia offers a very useful account of the suffragist movement and women's position in the labor movement in pre-fascist Italy. She details not only the names and numbers of those involved in the various organizations, but also gives an account of political response – the liberal government's nominal according of the vote and practical suppression of women's rights. [Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)]. For a thorough overview of the history of Italian women's movements in interwar era see: Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1978).

[38] Marchesa Colombi's 1878 novel *In risaia* describes the harsh working conditions – and a budding resistance to them – of women rice harvesters in the Po Valley.

[39] For more on the historical and literary context surrounding and pre-dating Aleramo's novel see: Annarita Buttafuoco, "Vite esemplari. Donne nuove di primo Novecento," in *Svelamento: una biografia intellettuale*, ed. A. Buttafuoco et al. (Milan: Feltrinelli 1988), 139-163.

Una donna is the semi-autobiographical story of a young woman – Sibilla – who leaves her son and husband and decides to devote herself to writing.[40] Prisoner of a jealous and abusive husband in a small town in southern Italy, Sibilla slowly comes to the realization that her miserable condition is not the inevitable destiny of gender. Her decision to leave her husband and son is condemned both legally and socially, and the novel itself is figured as an act of contrition for this sin. "L'ultimo spasimo di questa mia vita sarà stato quello di scrivere queste pagine. Per lui. Mio figlio, mio figlio!" she declares, "Mi odii, ma non mi dimentichi!"[41] Sibilla offers this narrative of her life as apology and recognition of her wrongdoing. There is, however, a way in which the very act of textualizing her life is itself another sin of impropriety, upsetting social norms/expectations. In their discussion of women's autobiographical writing, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain this transgressive quality of women's writing in terms of response to categorical silencing and exclusion: "Historically absent from the both the public sphere and modes of written narrative, women [have been] compelled to tell their stories differently." Therefore "any theory of female textuality must recognize how patriarchal culture has fictionalized 'woman' and how, in response, women autobiographers have challenged the gender ideologies surrounding them in order to script their life narratives."[42] Developing this line of thought in the context of Italian women's autobiography, Graziella Parati notes that in the very act of narrativizing their own experiences, Italian women autobiographers transgress the public space typically reserved for men.[43] Expanding on Michel Foucault's theorization of the divide between public and private, this line of feminist theory points to the way the spatial binary reflects a gendered hierarchy, with the public, male realm occupying the dominant position: "The privileged public realm, the space to conquer in order to be equal among men," stands in opposition to the private space, "meant to be the space of women's history."[44] This spatial formulation is a material and a discursive dichotomy in which certain voices and positions are privileged while others are silenced. By this logic, Aleramo's act of exposing the narrative of her life to the public eye was inherently political and transgressive.

This literary move has been repeated by both women and men whose voices and bodies have been ignored, silenced, or otherwise deemed irrelevant. But my intention here is neither to discuss the merits of autobiography, nor to engage in a debate about whether these texts are grounded in authorial experience.[45] My focus is, instead, on

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[40] In the novel the protagonist remains nameless. For the sake of convenience I will adhere to the convention of referring to her as Sibilla. This conflation of author and protagonist highlights the tendency to read this novel as autobiographical, though there are many discrepancies between the story told in *Una donna* and the author's lived experience.

[41] "It is a book for my son!" she declares, "I would rather have him hate me than forget me." Original Italian: Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* 50th edition (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1906), 165. English translation: Sibilla Aleramo, *A Woman*, trans. Rosalinda Delmar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 198), 219.

[42] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 12.

[43] Graziella Parati, *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[44] Parati, *Public History*, 6.

[45] The discussion of what constitutes autobiography has a rich and interesting history, and has been extremely important for feminist theory as well as for scholarship on Aleramo. Autobiography, as a critical category, has played less of a role in scholarship about *Dalla parte di lei* or *Un quarto di donna*; in the case

looking at three texts that describe women's experience in the particular historical moment of their writing. To that end I am drawing on Smith's notion of "life writing" as a "general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer."[46] By grouping these three texts under the category of "life writing" I mean to resist autobiography's privileged position in the hierarchy of genres (as the elevated account of a notable life) without sacrificing attention to the historical and the experiential that attends discussions of autobiography. "Life narrators," Smith explains, "inevitably refer to the world beyond the text, the world that is the ground of the narrator's lived experience, even if that ground is comprised in part of cultural myths, dreams, fantasies and subjective memories."[47]

I am establishing, in this way, a linear teleology between *Una donna, Dalla parte di lei* and *Un quarto di donna*, highlighting the persistence of one narrative – Aleramo's – over time. This genealogy, however, is not exclusively progressive: these texts do not describe an onward march to freedom. Instead, they call attention to the accumulation of narrative: to the clustering of awakenings. The frustration and dissatisfaction that stifle Ferri's protagonist, for example, are simultaneously affirmed and thwarted by the action, independence and guilt that color Aleramo's text. Sibilla claims she writes for her son, that she shares her story to induce his empathy and forgiveness. In the process, however, Sibilla established new affective bonds with women who encourage her pursuit of writing and through this act, develops a community of women that exceeds the boundaries of both text and time. She is inspired to write – and to live – as a result of a textual encounter with "quelle [donne] esasperate che protestavano in nome della dignità di tutte".[48] It is in the act of reading about women that Sibilla finds inspiration to live: "Vivere! Ormai lo volevo, non più solo per mio figlio, ma per me, per tutti."[49] The topos of reading about brave women, and acting and writing in similar fashion is a miniature version of the effect Aleramo's text imagines for itself. Describing the text she will ultimately write, Sibilla conjures a community of women that come to recognize themselves in her story, while in the very same gesture hinting at a future that will be different *because* of the transformations her text will inspire:

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of the former some notes have been made about parallels between the author's activities during the war and those of the protagonist but there has been a resistance to calling this text an autobiography. The latter, on the other hand, has been summarily classified as autobiography though almost nothing is known about the author's life. For a comprehensive overview of autobiography and feminist theory see: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998). For a discussion of autobiography in Aleramo's work see my previous footnote number 8. For more on autobiographical elements of *Dalla parte di lei* see: Ulla Åkerström, *Tra confessione e contradizione: Uno studio sul romanzo di Alba de Céspedes dal 1949 al 1955* (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2004). For a brief discussion of *Un quarto di donna* see: Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994* (London: Athlone, 1995).

[46] Sidonie Smith, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3.

[47] Smith, *Reading Autobiography*, 7.

[48] "exasperated women who protested in the name of all their sex." Original: Aleramo, *Una donna*, 86. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 114.

[49] "to stay alive not merely for [her] son's sake, but for [her]self – for everyone." Original: Aleramo, *Una donna*, 86. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 115.

mi struggevo, certe volte, contemplando nel mio spirito la visione di quel libro che sentivo necessario, di un libro d'amore e di dolore, che fosse straziante e insieme fecondo, inesorabile e pietoso, che mostrasse al mondo intero l'anima femminile moderna, per la prima volta, e per la prima volta facesse palpitare di rimorso e di desiderio l'anima dell'uomo, del triste fratello… Un libro che recasse tradotte tutte le idee che si agitavano in me caoticamente da due anni, e portasse l'impronta della passione. Non lo avrebbe mai scritto nessuno? Nessuna donna v'era al mondo che avesse sofferto, quel ch'io avevo sofferto, che avesse ricevuto, e sapesse trarre da ciò la pura essenza, il capolavoro equivalente ad una vita?[50]

The text is, in this sense, very much a manifesto – exposing conditions and fueling change – in the same moment that it parades as an apology for failed motherhood.

Just as *Una donna* needs that imagined community of women readers to enact its realization as both manifesto and apology, so too Ferri's text engages not only with Aleramo's text but also with Aleramo's audience by positioning itself as both echo and response. In other words, if *Una donna* functions as the performative utterance that invokes and awakens *Un quarto di donna*, the latter is repetition of the same such that the performative is only ever a periperformative, and the awakening is simultaneously predetermined and unrealizable (as unique experience of realization). Her title, *Un quarto di donna* (a fourth of a woman), reads, in this context, as an apologetic confrontation with *Una donna*. Whereas Aleramo proceeds in dialogue with an imagined community of empathetic, forgiving women, Ferri's protagonist condemns herself for not living up to that expectation - she is neither empathetic nor forgiving of herself. Like Sibilla, Ferri's heroine complains that her identity has been reduced to her role as mother. In a passage that seems to directly echo Sibilla's confessional tone she writes: "Mio figlio non lo sa," Ferri's protagonist worries,

ma io so che per continuare a essergli madre senza disperazione e senza rimpianti ho bisogno che continui a battere un tempo anche per me, diverso dal suo, dalle sue ore di punta che entrano nella mia vita ignorando e distruggendo le mie, perché io non conti, non valga, non esista.[51]

She enjoys all the freedoms Sibilla lacks and yet shares Sibilla's sense of oppression and dissatisfaction. In another passage, Ferri's protagonist makes what I take to be a tacit comparison of her position with that of Sibilla, diagnosing her own unhappiness as the result of her inability to properly deploy the freedoms Sibilla's generation won for her.

[50] "I felt such urgent longing when I thought about the book which should be written: a book created out of love and pain, compassionate, yet inspired by an implacable logic, heart-rending, yet optimistic. Such a book would show the world for the first time what it was to be a modern woman, instilling in the feelings of her unhappy brother, man, regret for the past, and an intense desire for change… it would translate into print all the ideas which had so chaotically troubled my mind for the past two years – and it would bear the marks of real suffering. Would no one ever write it? Had no other woman suffered what I had suffered?" Ellipses in the original. Original: Aleramo, *Una donna,* 92. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 122.

[51] "My son doesn't know it, but I know that in order for me to continue to be a mother to him – free of desperation and remorse – I need a time just for me, different from his, from his piercing hours that enter my life ignoring and destroying my time, so that I cease to count, to matter, to exist." Giuliana Ferri, *Un quarto di donna* (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 1976), 15. All translations are my own.

"[I]o porto intera la mia responsabilità," she announces, "dal momento che ho scelto io di vivere due vite insieme, di casa e di lavoro, senza che nessuno me lo chiedesse".[52] In each instance, Ferri's unforgiving tone paradoxically acts on Aleramo's projection of a liberated future for women: on the one hand, shattering that illusion by inhabiting and textualizing a non-liberated present, while on the other, longing for that same dream by engaging with Aleramo in the first place.

Imagining the potential for a utopian community of empathetic readers in the future is what motivates *Una donna*'s awakening and allows its protagonist to be optimistic about breaking the negative cycles to which she is herself subject and heir. Ferri's text engages with this utopian longing by way of an affective mourning for the death of a future that did not come to pass but that is still kindled in desire. In *Cruising Utopias: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Josè Muñoz uses Derrida's notion of hauntology in his rethinking of temporality as a way of understanding and reading utopias outside of a binary logic that would set them against the actual and the historical.[53] In his discussion of hope as a crucial element of utopianism and as a critical methodology, Muñoz points out that "hope is not the only modality of emotional recognition that structures belonging; sometimes shame, disgust, hate, and other 'negative' emotions bind people together."[54] Ferri's text is haunted by the hope and pain, not only of *Una donna*, but also of their shared audience. The failure of inaction that colors Ferri's text determines the quality of the affective bond that, to borrow Muñoz's language, "structures belonging" as 'negative' but nonetheless meaningful and visceral.

For both women, the need to narrate is born in a space of negative emotion. In Sibilla's case, rape is the catalyst that transforms her life from one of youthful curiosity and independence, to despondency and stagnation. After a co-worker rapes the 15-year old girl, she tries to makes sense of what she feels must be her new position in life:

> avevo soggiunto che forse, in quell'avvenire di amore e dedizione non mai prima intraveduto, era la salvezza, era la pace, era la gioia. Sua moglie… Non l'ero già? Egli m'aveva voluta, egli m'era destinato, tutto s'era disposto mentre io credevo seguire una ben diversa via… Quello sposo delle leggende, che m'era sempre perso un puerile personaggio, esisteva, era lui![55]

She rewrites the narrative of her young life transforming the encounter with her coworker from the disruption of rape into the coincidence of fairytale, and she reasons that "la realtà non fosse tutt'intera in quella che mi aveva colpita disgustosamente:

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[52] "I bear full responsibility for this," she announces, "from the moment I chose to live two lives simultaneously, of home and work, without anyone asking it of me". Ferri, *Un quarto*: 5.

[53] José E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 43.

[54] Muñoz, *Cruising,* 97.

[55] "I started to tell myself that although I hadn't foreseen a future life based on love and sacrifice, perhaps it might give me the security, the tranquility, and the happiness I so desired. I would be his wife… Wasn't I his wife already? He wanted me, he was intended for me, and events had been pushing me towards him even when I had believed that my life was developing in some other direction… The bridegroom of fairytales, whom I had always thought such a childish figure, really existed. It was he!" Ellipses in the original. Original: Aleramo, *Una donna,* 28. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman*, 38.

immaginavo un compenso avvenire di ebrezze ineffabili che avrei goduta da sposa."[56] Sibilla's marriage becomes a consequence of this rape. Once in that marriage she begins to reflect on her own experience of sexuality, noticing her own lack of sexual response where she anticipated "ebrezze ineffabili" ("unutterable raptures"). In tandem with this developing realization of herself as a deserving sexual being is her burgeoning awareness of other women. Through the figures of her own mother locked in an asylum as a result of her father's infidelity, and an elderly housemaid resigned to labor and sorrow, Sibilla forms an understanding of women's suffering as a consequence of the devaluation of their gender. Beginning from herself, Sibilla begins to form an awareness of the suffering and oppression that impacts women across boundaries of age, class and nationality. I am using the phrase "beginning from herself" to invoke the intellectual practice of beginning with oneself (*a partire da sé*) as developed in the context of Italian feminist thought. The practice/theory of starting with oneself describes a textual activity that is intimate and relational. As Adriana Cavarero explains,

> Italian feminism responds to the binary economy of the patriarchal order – which catalogs man in the sphere of thought and women in the sphere of the body – by making speech the reciprocal communication of women in flesh and bone who communicate themselves contextually "starting with themselves." It is thus not a communal belonging – in the sense of identity politics – to the feminine sex that determines the political quality of this communication. It is not Woman, which is just as fictitious as Man, which is here expressed and represented. Rather, this politics consists in the relational context or, better, the absolute local where reciprocal speech signifies the sexed uniqueness of each speaker in spite of patriarchal prohibitions – even before signifying something.[57]

The practice of beginning with oneself is meant to be intentional – an intervention in the political process of advocating for women by articulating *as* women. I do not want to make the claim that Aleramo's text intentionally stages the practice of beginning with oneself that Cavarero describes; on the contrary, I would maintain that Aleramo's text advances a "belonging – in the sense of identity politics" by reducing differences among women and seeking to embody Woman. Rather than maintain the uniqueness of each speaker, Aleramo's text – echoing the political trends of her time – seeks to claim a position for Woman in a public sphere reserved only for Man.[58] When Aleramo's text is taken up by De Céspedes and Ferri, however, that intentional relationality Cavarero describes is, I am suggesting, retroactively applied to *Una donna*. Aleramo's narrative becomes an active and altered agent as it circulates in these other texts. Each time this narrative is revived, each time it is engaged with by a different text and a different reader

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[56] "once married [she] would enjoy unutterable raptures which would compensate [her] for everything [she] had experienced." Aleramo, *Una donna,* 29. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 38.

[57] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press2005), 206.

[58] In a particularly compelling study, Maurizio Viano discusses the function of the ideal Woman in the narrative and title of Aleramo's text by placing *Una donna* in dialogue witih Nitzche's *Ecce Homo*. Viano suggests that the choice of autobiography as the genre for *Una donna* must be understood as political and cannot be separated from the question of gender. [Maurizio Viano, "Ecce Foemina," *Annali d'italianistica* 4(1986): 223-241]

it is transformed in the service of the political practices of the moment. The universalizing urge that characterized so many feminisms of Aleramo's time and allowed *Una donna* to be read as "any and every" woman, morphed – but were not silenced or forgotten – with each new development in feminist consciousness and practice.

The shared condition of womanhood that Aleramo's text proposes is one based in oppression: an oppression that she understands as both intellectual and sensual. The shared-ness of this condition is one Sibilla first notices through her own readings of texts by other women who were publishing at the time, "creature esasperate che protestavano in nome della dignità di tutte".[59] Part of what makes Aleramo's text so important and contentious is her refusal to treat sexual desire as a secondary concern – as the prerogative of a privileged life. Instead, sexual frustration serves as impetus for her burgeoning sense of self-worth. I am privileging sexual desire as a way of accessing a discussion of sexuality in texts where female desire is not fully imagined. It is in part because of the silence around female sexual desire that sexuality demands a central position in any discussion of women's politics and art. To borrow from Teresa De Lauretis:

> per ogni donna, ogni soggettività femminile, la sessualità è il luogo da cui il soggetto (ri)elabora l'immagine di sé e del corpo erotico nell'incontro con l'altro o l'altra, (ri)elabora il proprio sapere corporeo e la propria coscienza, i modi di rapportarsi e di agire nel mondo. Vale a dire, la sessualità è il "luogo commune" di ogni soggettività, ma è luogo di solito non segnato nelle topografie dei luoghi e dei mezzi della politica delle donne.[60]

The very quality of unmarked-ness of sexuality as a site of knowledge and awareness of the self is, in all the texts I consider here, a source of frustration and a central – though generally unrecognized – impetus for narration. Understanding frustration as the impetus for narration is critical to thinking about awakening narratives as affective clusters and concentric systems of echoes. Frustration is the moment of static, the unwanted pause delaying satisfaction; the sexual and the psychological come together in the moment and meaning of frustration. The struggle that becomes fixed in this moment is so powerful in part because the resolution is unclear – the satisfaction that will resolve this frozen, perpetual tension has not been experienced or articulated and for this reason must be repeated.

As Sibilla struggles to weigh the merits of living for herself versus living for her son and upholding convention, she looks outward. Her gaze and her narrative are affected by the realization that her frustration as a sexed and desiring subject is a consequence not of her personal failures and unique circumstances, but rather of institutionalized misogyny. Sibilla's awareness of this shared condition of silence is, I argue, part of what makes this text so persistent over time.

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[59] "exasperated women who protested in the name of all their sex." Aleramo, *Una donna,* 86. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 114.

[60] "for every woman, for every female subjectivity, sexuality is the site from which the subject (re)elaborates its image of itself, and of the erotic body as it encounters others; it (re)elaborates its own corporeal knowledge and awareness, its modes of relating and acting in the world. In other words, sexuality is the "common site" of every subjectivity, but it is a site usually left unmarked in the topographies of women's political spaces and tools." All translations are my own. Teresa De Lauretis, *Soggetti eccentrici* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), 79.

Fifty years later, in De Céspedes' *Dalla parte di lei*, that knowledge of sexual desire circulates just below the surface, masked in euphemism and disguised as emotional intimacy. Set during the rise and fall of the fascist regime, De Céspedes's text is evidence of a culture of self-censorship and paranoid language. The misogyny the suffragists and union organizers faced at the turn of the century was replaced by a national program of "renewing" the nuclear, heteronormative family model. The fascist program of remaking the nation was largely engaged with regulating the private (intimate and domestic) spheres; this consisted, in part, of condemning stories like Aleramo's and quashing women's efforts to engage in the political and economic spheres, in addition to fostering a culture of paranoid surveillance. The demands for equality that underlay the suffrage movement were rewritten as selfish, individualistic and antinationalist by the fascist state. Sibilla's decision to leave her husband and son was paralleled to an act of treason; the betrayal was stressed at the level of national interest, not domestic devotion. Women were, in this way, reduced to their reproductive capacity, their intellectual, physical, creative and practical skills were relevant only insofar as they were directed toward birthing and raising Italian (fascist) citizens. As Victoria De Grazia explains, "the state declared itself the sole arbiter of population fitness. Hence, on principle, it denied women any role in decisions regarding childbearing. Indeed, on population issues, women were presumed to be antagonists of the state, acting solely on the family's interest without regard for the nation's needs. Seeking to compel women to have more children, the state banned abortion, the sale of contraceptive devices, and sex education."[61] The fascist woman's role was to provide the *nation* with new Italians; a woman's ability to fill her role as mother and wife was thusly made to correspond to her participation in the political project of nation-making, aligning the privileging of individual needs (Sibilla's decision to "save herself") with a sort of treason.

In De Céspedes' text this project surfaces in the protagonist's rejection of the imposed definitions of Woman (wife, mother, citizen). *Dalla parte di lei* does not, however, directly address the fascist state. This omission is important in itself, as a silence indicative of both critique and caution.[62] The omission is also legible in terms of the persistence of the female awakening narrative across boundaries of time, regime change, and dramatic transformation of the social landscape. In the text the protagonist, Alessandra, is a markedly isolated individual: she never has more than one friend, she loses her mother to suicide and has no meaningful relationship with her father. It is her state of isolation – just as it is for Sibilla – that is the necessary setting for her realizations of selfhood. In Alessandra's case her isolation is magnified as the novel draws to a close and she reveals she is locked in a solitary prison cell. Like Sibilla's story, this narrative works backwards, justifying how the protagonist ends up where she is: Alessandra writing from a prison cell, Sibilla writing from a city and life away from her son. Alessandra's story is that of a lonely girl who, devastated by her mother's suicide, marries Francesco, a man involved in the resistance against the fascist state. One day,

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[61] Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[62] During Mussolini's rule De Céspedes' was actively involved with the anti-Fascist movement. She worked for Radio Free Bari and founded the periodical *Mercurio*. For a more detailed account of her political activism see: Carole C. Gallucci and Ellen Victoria Nerenberg, *Writing Beyond Fascism: Cultural Resistance in the Life and Works of Alba de Céspedes*. (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000).

after years of marriage, Francesco rapes Alessandra and in response she kills him. Inverting Aleramo's narrative, here rape spurs the dissolution of marriage rather than its beginning. The explanation offered for Alessandra's decision to end her marriage – apologetic and guilt-ridden in Aleramo's text – is here laid out in a language of pride and satisfaction. In fact, the novel ends with Alessandra reflecting on the good that came from her murdering Francesco: "mi viene fatto di sospettare che solo il gesto violento da me compiuto gli abbia dato la consapevolezza del suo amore e il modo di riconoscermi per quella che, amata da lui, avevo ambito di essere."[63] These musings give voice to a tone very different from Sibilla's, and promote the notion that a woman's, sometimes violent, reorganization of the terms of her world benefits not only *herself*– as in Sibilla's case – but also those around her. Alessandra does not pretend to be recognized for the righteousness of her actions by a male-dominated world that has consistently rejected, ignored, and finally imprisoned her. She does, however, explain that she offers her story in the hopes of inspiring understanding: "Io penso che, dopo aver letto, un uomo potrà più facilmente comprendere il mio agire sebbene, per sua natura, non gli riuscirà di giustificarlo."[64] If she had had a woman lawyer or women jurors, she laments, she would have been to explain her story in court and would have been immediately understood.[65] Alessandra's phrasing conveys that she has different expectations of her readers based on their genders. Men, she says, may gain some insight into the motivations driving women's actions; women, on the other hand, are invited to engage in a conversation that exceeds and critiques the dominant parameters of narration and legislation.

Both Aleramo's and De Céspedes's narrators engage with a broader community of women: Aleramo in terms of shared domestic suffering in the private sphere; De Céspedes in terms of legal exclusion in the public sphere. These texts, written more than forty years apart, describe the persistent confinement of women by traditional, institutionally supported gender roles (the subordination of the mother and wife being foremost among these). The spatial dimensions of these roles may shift over time, but certain discursive and psychic limitations remain constant, even as they are reinscribed in different but recognizable ways. In the texts I am focusing on, the spatial and the discursive are not construed as separate and divisible. Indeed it is precisely the gendered hierarchy that characterizes the dichotomy they call into question.[66]

De Céspedes' text marks a new conceptualization of what spaces and topics constitute the public and private, while simultaneously calling attention to the persistent exclusion of women – albeit with new tactics and new discursive elisions. These shifting notions of public and private are, as I mentioned elsewhere, affected by the fascist regime's effort to control the private in the service of the nation. To borrow from De Grazia: "Mussolini's state was a totalitarian regime to the extent that he, like his

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[63] "I have come to suspect that the violent act I carried out made him aware of his own love, and gave him a way to recognize me as the woman who I, loved by him, aimed to be." All translations are my own. Alba De Céspedes, *Dalla parte di lei* (Milan: Mondadori, 1949), 549.

[64] "I think that, after having read these pages, a man might find it easier to make sense of my actions despite the fact that his nature impedes him from justifying them." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 549.

[65] De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 548.

[66] In a similar vein, Catherine MacKinnon theorizes the feminist move to "explode the private" as a tactic for revealing and denouncing the gender disenfranchisement implicit in spatial metaphors of public versus private subjects, behaviors and discourses. [Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 191]

nationalist counselors, believed in obliterating the distinction between public and private and between central government and civil society."[67] Important to note, however, is that the distinction Mussolini's regime sought to obliterate was not one that took into consideration – or acknowledged – women's subjectivity. This meant that the public and private distinction was one in which only one subject operated, a male subject. Woman, in this equation, is man's property and the state's property – since the subject and the state are one and the same and male. This juridical and social distinction between men and women was supported by a newly articulated philosophy that saw women not only as object but also as potential threat. As historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains, "conflating sexual and social forms of power, [the fascist regime] set up an opposition between an ideal, male-bounded modernity marked by discipline, hierarchy, and the subordination or exclusion of women, and a negative modernity that linked female strength to moral corruption, political impotence, and social turbulence."[68]

Accordingly, De Céspedes' protagonist explains that there is no legal jargon available for narrating a woman's story – one central, unspoken aspect of this is a lack of language to narrate women's experience of sensuality. All three texts – Aleramo's, De Céspedes' and Ferri's – describe the frustration born from being unable to properly articulate the experience of being sensual beings. I am using the term "sensual" rather than sexual despite the fact that my focus on each narrative revolves around experiences occasioned in some way by sex acts, because often these women experience sexual violence as sensual violence where "sensual" refers to their experience of the space, sounds, lights and smells around them – both within and without the confines of each woman's body – as well as to their own experience of sexuality. The hyper-attention I am placing on the terms I have selected reflects, in part, the frustration in these texts that stems, as I mentioned before, from the lack of an available language. This lack of a precise vocabulary with which to accurately reflect their experiences of sensual violation and desire produce a pattern of negative identification, such that when there is no available language the woman questions the validity of her experience, or when metaphor is the only recourse the woman identifies with the metaphor, collapsing the distancing function of metaphor and, once again, troubling the boundaries of space and discourse. In Aleramo's text the young Sibilla is unable to articulate her experience of rape – she does not tell anyone and the text itself conveys the act only implicitly, by way of ellipses and hints. It is only later, through her education and awakening, that Sibilla begins to acquire the language to describe the event as a negative, violent experience. In the days leading up to Sibilla's final separation from husband and son the connection between violence, sensuality and language becomes more explicit:

> Perché, alla sera, attendendo d'essere raggiunta da mio marito nel letto che tante miserie ricordava, e allontanandone col pensiero il giungere, sentivo nel mio sangue penetrare la persuasione d'un diritto mai soddisfatto, e con essa un impeto formidabile di conquista, lo spasimo di raggiungere, di conoscere quella gioia dei sensi che fa nobile e bella la materia umana;

[67] De Grazia, *How Fascism,* 9.

[68] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Envisioning Modernity: Desire and Discipline in the Italian Fascist Film," *Critical Inquiry* 23. 1(1996): 113-114.

quella fusione di due corpi in un sospiro di felicità dal quale il nuovo essere prenda l'impulso alla vita trionfante?[69]

This passage begins with the anguish and confusion of a woman preparing herself for a sexual encounter that will always be a form of rape because the marriage itself is involuntary. However, unlike young Sibilla's passive acceptance of rape which led to marriage, here Sibilla's response is colored with a language of *rights* and *desires* (concepts she learns through her feminist education/awakening) and culminates in her realization that her life should be, deserves to be dedicated to "the combined gratification of every need, intellectual and sensual." In De Céspedes' text rape is metaphorized, and figured immediately as assault – as an invasion of her space, her body. This marks a significant shift from Sibilla's understanding of rape as an act that transforms her – causing her to belong to her attacker-cum-husband. Alessandra experiences rape as an affront that will not be tolerated – much less incorporated into her conception of self. Like Sibilla, however, Alessandra is also frustrated by a limited language that refuses to articulate the sensual violence of rape as anything other than straight sex sanctioned by marital law.[70] In Ferri's text the episode of sensual violence takes the form of an illegal abortion during which the protagonist's frustration at not being able to control the price, place or terms of the procedure is matched by her realization that she is also unable to control or select the language that describes her body and her deeply sensual and specifically female experience of pain. I will return to the scene of the abortion in detail later, for now I want to stress how these different responses to sensual violence are indicative of changing conceptions of the self which in turn shape, and are shaped by, reorganizations in the national and political global climates.

The texts considered in this chapter are all situated in the particular historical moment of each author's life and have been selected in part because of the ways each one communicates an understanding of the self specific to each era, and in part because a

[69] "why, as I waited for my husband every night in bed, mentally distancing myself from him, did I feel my blood pounding with the anguished conviction that I was depriving myself of something that was my right? …I still wanted, as fiercely as ever, to have known sexual ecstasy. I still believed that the bliss when two bodies intermingled could create new life and help people achieve full human dignity and fulfillment. The meaning of existence was only too eloquently and irresistibly revealed to me now…It was harmony, nothing more, the combined gratification of every need, intellectual and sensual". Original: Aleramo, *Una donna,* 140. Translation: Aleramo, *A Woman,* 188.

[70] Rape laws in Italy have been notoriously slow to change and have been the source of much controversy in recent years. When Aleramo and De Céspedes were writing it was not uncommon for a man to "pay" for the crime of rape by marrying his victim (illustrated by Sibilla's story); in other words, marriage constituted a legally and socially acceptable mode of reparation. This practice no longer satisfies legal demands as rape has been made a criminal offense, though there are still reports of such arrangements (particularly in areas where women suffer the threat of "honor" killings). Spousal rape, however, continues to be a crime for which women find little support from the public or the law. When Aleramo and De Céspedes were writing not only were there no laws, there was also the widespread refusal to acknowledge the possibility/existence of spousal rape. The idea that a man's desire to have intercourse with his wife as an unquestionable right is one that persists today, and found support in the law only after, and as a direct consequence of, the very public efforts and activism of the feminist movements of the 1970s. For more information about the laws, attitudes and history of rape in Italy: www.casadonne.it. See also: Laura Terragni, *Su un corpo di donna: una ricerca sulla violenza sessuale in Italia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997).

parallel reading of these specificities reveals the malleable and contextually contingent nature of categories (like "selfhood") that are treated as fixed.

As Keala Jewell explains in her study of the historical and literary atmosphere leading up to *Una donna*, "[t]he decades which followed the Risorgimento witnessed an increase in the number of women writers, many attracted to the emancipation and socialist movements".[71] These movements, though different in focus, philosophy and activist practices were gaining momentum globally and were promoting new concepts of selfhood that challenged existing political and social order. The suffragist movement – organized under the slogan "equal rights for women," pushed for legislative action aimed at erasing gender inequality. The socialist movements, on the other hand, stressed the redistribution of wealth as mode of enacting social change. This sound bite summary of the two movements is intentionally reductive in order to emphasize the fundamentally different ways each offered solutions for dealing with the hardships women endured. The suffragist movement, largely ignoring issues of class, race and religion, suggested that women (as a class) would benefit from a hierarchical system equal to that which organized men (as a class); the difference, they claimed, would be that with equal rights women would no longer be the bottom rung of the hierarchy organizing men's relations with each other, but would now by a parallel social system. The socialist movement claimed that this hierarchical structure was responsible for all injustices and, once this classed system was eradicated by way of the equal redistribution of wealth, all other systems of oppression would be erased as a consequence.[72] The radical suggestion that both movements put forth was that existing conditions were not only undesirable but also unnatural: dictated not by by nature but by systems of power and dominance. Such a suggestion risked encouraging individuals, like Aleramo's Sibilla, to question the conditions and rethink the terms of their existence by validating their feelings of oppression; the very existence of these movements was evidence that the isolated housewife (our Sibilla) was not unique in her desire for change.

These radical notions that social structures of power might not be the natural order of things were violently quashed under fascism. This forcible reinstalling, or revaluing of social hierarchy under fascism was part of an effort to eradicate enlightenment notions of individuality – encouraging mass identification with the state, rather than reinstituting nineteenth century notions of hierarchical, class-based inequality. De Céspedes's text gives voice to the particularly Italian need to reimagine a space for

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[71] Keala Jewell, "Un furore d'autocreazione: Women and Writing in Sibilla Aleramo," *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* (1984): 148.

[72] Numerous volumes have been written about the interaction between these two movements and the placement different feminisms in relationship to each. For a more detailed history of the Italian context see: Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1978); Annie Goldmann, *Le donne entrano in scena: dalle suffragette alle femministe* (Florence: Giunti, 1996). A few useful titles for a more global perspective include: Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002); June Hannam, Mitzi Auchterlonie and Katherine Holden, *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210; and Joan W. Scott, *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

the individual in a post-fascist, war torn nation. Ferri's text, written a quarter century after De Céspedes's, illustrates the persistence of this national existential crisis. Ferri's text comes on the heels of the student and worker-led revolutions of 1968 that shook the world and left a particularly visible and violent legacy in Italy. Where De Céspedes's protagonist is concerned with carving out a *space* for herself in a rapidly changing political landscape, Ferri's protagonist is concerned with articulating a *concept* of herself in a rapidly changing social landscape.

Shared Borders: Gendered Limits of Space, Knowledge and Discourse

> "Mia madre usava dire che le donne sono sempre in torto di fronte ai fatti concreti."[73]
>
> *Dalla parte di lei* – Alba De Céspedes

Dalla parte di lei is a text that continuously draws attention to the ways women's experience and possible modes of expression are subjected to and limited by male power. In the quote above Alessandra, the protagonist and narrator, describes an equation in which gender (women) and at least one mode of knowledge (facts) are established as incompatible. Implicit in this formulation is the recognition that hierarchies of discourse and modes of knowledge production work to keep women in a space of continual disenfranchisement. As the title suggests, the intellectual and discursive exclusion of women is also a physical and material exclusion. *Dalla parte di lei* can be interpreted and translated as "from her side," "on her side," "her side," or "her point of view." Implicitly opposed to *his* (any male) point of view, the title marks gender as a central organizational tool for this text.

Equally polysemous is the title of Ferri's text: *Un quarto di donna*. *Un quarto di donna* may be translated as "a fourth of a woman" which can be read as a physical descriptor (referring to an abortion that figures prominently in the narrative), or as a psychological descriptor (denoting the multiple lives the protagonist feels torn between as suggested in the quote below). The imperative to articulate a singular story of the self that permeates Western philosophy is experienced, by Ferri's narrator, as a weight and imposition: "Mai che qualcuno mi avesse consigliato di cominciare a scoprire la molteplicità dei mondi che erano dentro di me".[74]

In both texts, gender is figured as a primary identity category that dictates available modes of self-narration. The same gendered logic that segregates the public and private spheres works to divorce the rational (logical, linear, productive) and irrational (sentimental, circular, affective). Both texts are narratives of female experience that call attention to these structuring spatial and discursive dichotomies by mapping the consequences of silence and oppression on the female body. I argue that by conflating the spatial and the discursive, and blurring a clear division between the literal and the metaphorical, these texts refuse the supremacy of the rational and thereby commit acts of political transgression.

[73] "My mother used to say that women are always wrong in the face of concrete facts." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 548.

[74] "No one ever encouraged me to begin to explore the multiplicity of worlds within me". Ferri, *Un quarto,* 55.

Alessandra, the protagonist of *Dalla parte di lei*, attacks the gendered primacy of the rational through a critique of the law, on the grounds that the Law does not speak or recognize her language because women are not the subjects of rational, "fact-based" discourse. Alessandra writes from her prison cell: "Credo che se avessi avuto per avvocato una donna mi sarebbe stato facile spiegarmi; e così se tra i componenti della Corte avessi visto una figura femminile. Invece…non potevo parlare."[75] Feeling alienated and silenced in the courtroom, Alessandra takes advantage of the privacy of the prison cell to assume the speaking position of her own story. The question of the false privacy of the prison cell – a space of isolation defined by constant surveillance – is one I want to keep present throughout my reading of this text, but one which is not reflected on by the text itself.[76]

The divide between the public and private is a physical and a discursive one – with implications on the level of the psyche (subject's conception of the self), as well as in material, political and gendered terms. The texts I am considering here give voice to the ways in which discursive binaries negatively impact women's lived experiences. Both the women narrators and the texts themselves are bound, in different ways, by the discursive limits of the spheres they understand themselves to be operating in. In a broad sense these limits are the public and private spheres, but the jarring effect of these imposed boundaries is manifest on every level of experience, including the sexual.

Dalla parte di lei and *Un quarto di donna* both betray a structural inability to speak beyond a logic of heterosexuality. This inability, however, does not preclude their focused attention on what I want to call the genders of sexual difference. I am using the compound construct "genders of sexual difference" to stress how, within these texts, a notion of sexual difference (woman as different from man) works in conjunction with a concept of gender as a performance. [77] Throughout these texts the women voice an

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[75] "I believe that if I had had a woman lawyer it would have been easy for me to explain myself; and similarly, if I had seen a woman among the members of the Court. Instead… I was unable to speak." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 548.

[76] I understand space as a descriptor of the discursive, that is, as a term that describes the relational dynamics of power and rights. I don't intend to promote a reading method that ignores a consideration of the physical place (specific location). In these texts, and for my purposes here, the material conditions of place are significant insofar as they are determined and characterized by structures of power, subject formation and subject validation. When I say "subject *validation*" I am evoking a body of work that attempts to explain and uncover the codes and norms (explicit and implicit) that determine legal and social notions of citizenship and im/proper modes and objects of desire. Of particular relevance to my thinking about this are the works of Anne McClintock, Judith Butler and Michel Foucault.

[77] The idea of gender as performance has been elaborated in many different terms. For instance, in her 1929 essay "Womanliness as Masquerade," Joan Riviere discusses the expectations and performativity of gender, though those terms were not available at the time. The notion of social roles was elaborated in by sociologists in the first half of the century, and then taken up by feminists who complicated the discussion of gender role theory by questioning the political, psychoanalytic and economic implications. Judith Butler's more recent theorization of the performativity of gender draws this history together in a way that is central to my thinking. It is worth noting, however, that Butler's background in philosophy, and interest in the discursive, distances her theorizations from a concern with the material and behavioral that occupied the question of gender roles elaborated primarily in the social sciences. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler acknowledges this distance and responds to the critiques that her theorization of queer ignored the sensuality and specificity of each body (hence her title ***Bodies** that Matter*). My goal here is not to enter into the debate about Butler and bodies, rather I want to draw on Butler's theorization of the constructedness of gender and its complicated and irrevocable relationship with discursive regimes as I

anxiety about not being able to properly perform the role expected of them, a role defined in terms of sexual difference. Every part of each woman's identity – her desires, pains, appearance, language – is defined in terms of this gendered binary; the consequences for failing to make each part of herself properly correspond to the gendered division fuel the anxieties and frustration that drives the narrative (the need to narrate). Women are negotiating between occupying the positions of subject and object simultaneously; wanting to claim – discursively, politically and physically – sovereignty over their own subjecthood, while constantly being told – in ritual, law and social norms – that she gets her meaning only as the other of man. Teresa de Lauretis theorizes this female condition in terms of a coming together of knowledge, eroticism and consciousness: "questo continuo trasformarsi della donna da soggetto in oggetto in soggetto è ciò che pone le basi, per le donne, di un diverso rapporto con l'erotismo, la coscienza e il sapere."[78] De Lauretis uses the term "eccentric subject" to describe this uneasy position women occupy between subject and object; I am privileging "frustration" as the descriptor for this position because I want to emphasize the theme of sexual dissatisfaction that runs tandem to – and is a consequence of – women's complicated relationship with regimes of knowledge and discourses of consciousness and selfhood. I argue that in these texts gender and sexual difference come together in the frustration – in that suspended moment and place where climax and language and inaccessible – of trying to express that which exceeds the available repertoire for representing human experience: woman's experience of her body. Because the body is always enmeshed in gender, and because gender is discursively (ideologically) constituted according to a logic of a universal (male) being, finding discursive expression for the specificity of women's bodily experience is a challenge – it is the building of an archive that must draw on other moments of frustration for reference.

Published just after World War II and the end of Fascism, *Dalla parte di lei* (1949), is marked by very different historical conditions from those which inform the post-'68 revolutionary era of *Un quarto di donna* (1973). Despite these significant differences, both texts reflect the enduring centrality of narrative to concepts of the self, identity and recognition, and are shaped by the related question of gendered access to representations of the self. As Marina Zancan writes, "sul piano della storia, al dominio sul corpo femminile, è corrisposto, oltre al controllo sociale esercitato sulle donne, il dominio sulle forme di rappresentazione dell'io."[79] I find this particular phrasing very useful because it suggests the ways in which gender dynamics and the relations of power impact the literary world not solely in terms of content, or in relation to discursive and ideological references (the language of the Father; man as the neutral subject of philosophy and so forth), but also in terms of the capital of cultural images and metaphors available for the representation of self and, I would add, of desire. In this formulation I am not following Zancan to the letter, rather it is her particular phrasing of this statement

examine narrative representations of women's knowledge of, and ability to speak about (experience), their bodies.

[78] "Woman's continual transformation from subject to object to subject is what sets the foundation, for women, for a different relationship with eroticism, consciousness and knowledge." De Lauretis, *Soggetti*, 17.

[79] "on the historical level, control over the female body is aligned with social control over women, but also control over the forms of representation of the self." All translations are my own. Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana* (Turin, Italy: Einaudi, 1998), viii.

that admits the possibility of a materialist analysis of the symbols and metaphors that circulate in literature, and of the gendered differences implicit in the power to deploy such cultural capital. The spatial metaphors through which these women define themselves and describe their experience of being are simultaneously discursive and physical; referring both to their experience of the sensual (knowing their own bodies and inhabiting the spaces around them), and to their in/ability to articulate that experience (the barriers that constrain their actions are, in large part, discursive – articulated in the form of laws, or implied by way of silence and lack of appropriate terminology). Read together, these texts map a set of enduring concerns and prohibitions regarding women's ability to articulate their sensual experiences, and the consequences of this limitation in the legal spheres and in the circulation and production of knowledge more generally.

Narrated in the first-person, from a jail cell, *Dalla parte di lei* mimics the confessional, crime novel where the narrative is offered as the explanation for Alessandra's murder of her husband; but, in a significant twist, the event of the murder and incarceration are not revealed until the end of the six-hundred page novel. The temporal structure of the novel is not straightforward. Alessandra begins by introducing her husband ("Incontrai per la prima volta Francesco Minelli a Roma, il venti ottobre del mille novecento quarantuno." [80]), only to abandon him for a few hundred pages, effectively erasing him so as to reintroduce him again later. The narrative then moves almost imperceptibly from an account of the house she was living in when she met Francesco to the house she grew up in:

> Abitavamo in uno dei nuovi casamenti sul lungotevere Flaminio, dove avevamo preso alloggio subito dopo la morte di mia madre. Io potevo considerarmi figlia unica sebbene, prima della mia nascita, un mio fratello avesse avuto il tempo di venire al mondo, rivelarsi un fanciullo prodigioso e morire annegato a tre anni. Di lui si vedevano, in casa molte fotografie...ma mia madre, fra tutte, ne predilegeva una.[81]

Un-remarked upon by the narrator, the shift in time and focus redirects the reader's gaze to a photograph in another house and time, forcefully relocating the beginning of the narrative to Alessandra's childhood and before, to the life and death of her brother Alessandro. The strategy of narrative reorientation, from Francesco to Alessandro, signals a refusal to be bound by teleological narratives of origin imposed by others.[82]

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[80] "I first met Francesco Minelli in Rome on October 20th, 1941". De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 9.

[81] "We lived in one of the new buildings by the river in Flaminio, where we had moved immediately following my mother's death. I could consider myself an only child even though, before I was born, a brother of mine had time to come into this world, prove himself to be the prodigal son, and drown at the age of three. There were many pictures of him in the house…but my mother favored one over the others." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 9.

[82] According to Marina Zancan, this inhabitting of multiple temporal locations is a structuring principle in this text, necessitated by the circular nature of the plot: we find out at the end *why* the story was told and simultaneously learn that the story is memory and so can only be told from the distance of time. "[D]isposto a una successione temporale che riconnette l'inizio alla fine del romanzo, si complica e si stratifica per l'immissione nel tessuto narrativo del tempo passato, come memoria dell'infanzia; e di quello presente, il tempo della coscienza della scrittura" ["Structured around a temporal sequence that reconnects the beginning with the end of the novel, the narrative is complicated and stratified by the insertion of the past – childhood memories – into the fabric of the text; and of the present – the time of awareness of writing"] (Zancan, *Il doppio*, xxvi). Despite acknowledging a certain non-linear quality, Zancan's reading

In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History,* Heather Love theorizes movement and lingering in literature in relation to the idea of modernity and hierarchies of progress:

> If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind – and so seriously compromised the ability of these others to catch up. Not only sexual and gender deviants, but also women, colonized people, the nonwhite, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness.[83]

Dalla parte di lei, though not situated at the turn of the century, does describe a historical moment characterized by transition and by Italy's being dramatically repositioned on the global stage. The intense nationalism of the Fascist era had, to some degree, isolated Italy from the rest of world, stressing the importance of national self-sufficiency and cultural supremacy. With the violent end of this era Italy was, in a sense, returned to that narrative of global progress that began at the turn of the century, only now Italy's position was described in terms of "lagging behind" and "backwardness." The force of this narrative of return and delay – of thwarted progress – was extremely powerful and continued to echo in the cultural imaginary for decades to come. As John Agnew explains, in his study of the history and repercussions of this notion of backwardness in relation to "modernity": "Across the [Italian] political spectrum there is common recourse to the language of 'the modern' and 'modernization' even though there may be differences over the substantive components of modernity. … In other countries this vocabulary has been much more contestable and contested than it appears to be in relation to Italy. In Italy it has become central to *conceptions of the country* and to Italy's place in the world of nation-states."[84] It was in the moment of the fall of Fascism and the end of World War II that this notion entered and became central to the Italian imaginary. *Dalla parte di lei*'s temporality mirrors this theme of returning to an earlier, interrupted narrative. The restaging of beginnings and the rejection of imposed chronological order that characterize De Céspedes's text, mark Alessandra as a deviant in the way Love suggests the term was applied to those who lagged behind ideals of progress and development. This narrative deviance (from the norm of sequential chronological progress) hint at Alessandra's sexual and gender deviance to which I will return shortly. Her story cannot move forward in a linear manner because she is not the subject of modern progress.

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seems somewhat reductive, making order of Alessandra's disorder by imposing a chronology wherein childhood gives way to adulthood as time progresses, refusing to consider the coeval existence of multiple temporalities and modes of determining past and present.

[83] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

[84] John Agnew, "The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe" in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Allen et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 24. A few additional important texts that have helped promote or have discussed Italy in terms of backwardness include: Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-88.* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989); Nicola Rossi and Gianni Tonioli, "Catching Up or Falling Behind? Italy's Economic Growth, 1895-1947," *Economic History Review* 45(1992): 537-63; and Carlo Tullio-Altan, *La nostra Italia. Arretratezza socioculturale, clientelismo, trasformismo e ribellismo dall'Unità ad oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1986).

In the passage from De Céspedes's text reproduced above, the focus of the narrative moves almost imperceptibly from the house she lives in with her widowed father, to that which housed her still-living mother. I am insisting on using spatial language to describe these narrative strategies because I want to stress how inseparable space and discourse are in Alessandra's self-representation. Significantly, it is the image of her dead brother that allows for this transition away from her married, adult life. The mention of Alessandro invokes his image, bringing into focus the photographs of him that covered the house Alessandra grew up in; the idea of spiritual evocation takes on a more explicit form as she recalls the séances her mother had with a local medium.

The ghost of her dead brother is a powerful presence that shapes Alessandra's conception of herself, particularly in terms of how, as a young girl, she conceived of gender-appropriate (and inappropriate) behavior:

> Si chiamava Alessandro e quando io nacqui, pochi mesi dopo la sua morte, mi venne imposto il nome di Alessandra per rinnovare la sua memoria e nella speranza che in me si manifestassero alcune di quelle virtù che avevano lasciato di lui un inestinguibile ricordo.[85]

Alessandro remains a forceful presence throughout her childhood and adolescence – not just as eponym, but also because he comes to function as the gendered symbol of Alessandra's ambiguous feelings about her own body and desire. Drawing provocatively on postcolonial feminist theory, Anna Maria Torriglia describes the gender dynamic between Alessandra and Alessandro in terms of conquest: "Alessandra thus enters the family as her brother's replacement, that is, as an already *colonized* being."[86] In other words, Alessandra's narrative makes her brother occupy the more powerful position in their relationship, mirroring the traditional, conventional gendered dynamic in which the female is subservient to the male.

Alessandra literalizes the metaphor of her brother acting through her by claiming a shared embodiment: "Non dubitavo che egli si fosse stabilito in me." [87] This shared existence is a source of anxiety for Alessandra. The constant comparison to her brother, and the suggestion that her brother can enter and act through her complicates her gender identity as well as her ascription to the expectations of her gender. Alessandra's imprecise but powerful sense of gender-appropriate behavior is compounded by her experience of spatial distinctions between male and female activity and interaction. I will return to this shortly, but first I want to consider the ways in which Alessandra's rigid division of behaviors along gendered lines corresponds to moral judgments and assumptions about good and bad desire. In Torriglia's reading, Alessandra blames her brother for every bad impulse she has and this "culminates," Torriglia writes, "in the attempted murder of her husband."[88] Although I agree with Torriglia's claim that Alessandra blames her brother for every bad impulse, it is my contention that sex, rather than murder, is the real culmination of this narrative path. I argue first, that Alessandra

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[85] "His name was Alessandro, and when I was born a few months after his death the name Alessandra was forced on me to revive his memory and in the hopes that some of those virtues that made him so unforgettable would show up in me." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 9.
[86] Anna Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 51.
[87] "I had no doubt that he had taken up residence in me." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 9.
[88] Torriglia, *Broken,* 39.

does not ever really condemn herself for murdering Francesco; and second, that the text gives us license – albeit tacitly – to read the 'negative' impulses Alessandro provokes as being exclusively related to sexual desire.

Sexual desire is a recurrent source of anxiety for Alessandra. Alessandra attributes any kind of sexual desire to Alessandro, as though this male presence in her body were responsible for introducing improper thoughts. In one such instance she recalls listening for the sounds of her parents' love-making: "La loro camera era attigua alla mia e la sera, talvolta, io m'indugiavo sveglia, ginocchioni sul letto, con l'orecchio schiacciato contro la parete. Ero rossa dalla gelosia e il sentimento che mi spingeva a quelle basse azioni mi sembrava veramente 'Alessandro'."[89] Alessandra does not merely blame her brother for pushing her to commit these "base actions," she makes Alessandro stand for all those actions that do not correspond to the girl she thinks she is or ought to be. Alessandra's sexual desire and jealousy are irreconcilable with her ideas of gender-appropriate behavior, so she calls them "Alessandro," and rewrites her jealousy as a means of protecting her gender: "Tornai nella mia camera e consumai in silenzio il mio sordo livore. Avevo ancora negli occhi il viso di mio padre che sorrideva in maliziosa complicità con la mamma. Per la prima volta l'avevo sentito entrare nel nostro raccolto mondo femminile come un insidioso nemico."[90] Throughout a good deal of the novel, as evidenced in the preceding passage, Alessandra is vocal about her desire to preserve a gendered space—what she understands as an importantly, and intentionally "female world."

The world of women Alessandra fiercely guards is spatially defined. Originating in the home with herself and her mother, it extends outward to include all the women of the apartment complex who Alessandra watches but never joins:

> Nel cortile le donne vivevano a loro agio, con la dimestichezza che lega coloro che abitano un collegio o un reclusorio. Ma tale confidenza, piuttosto che dal tetto comune, nasceva dal fatto di conoscere reciprocamente la faticosa vita che conducevano…Lontane dagli sguardi maschili, si mostravano veramente quali erano.[91]

The idea of a space away from the male gaze – a space where women can show their true selves, relax and bond – is a topos that recurs in different forms of cultural representation by men and women from many time periods (one famous example is the story of the Sabine women freely and happily bathing, mistakenly thinking they are safe from the dangerous male gaze). Angela Jeannet hints at this theme of a 'spazio femminile' in her analysis of the representation of Rome in *Dalla parte di lei*. "The city'" she writes, "is a closely fitting habitat for the women, while seeming to have little impact on the novel's

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[89] "Their room was adjacent to mine and some nights I would stay awake, kneeling on the bed with my ear pressed against the wall. I was red with jealousy and was certain the feeling that pushed me to commit these base actions was truly 'Alessandro.'" De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 17.

[90] "I went back to my room and silently savored my blind jealousy. The image of my father's face, smiling in malicious complicity with my mother, still hovered before me. For the first time I felt him enter our intimate female world as an insidious invader." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 17.

[91] "In the courtyard women lived comfortably, with the familiarity that binds those who populate a college dorm or a prison. Rather than being the fruit of living under a common roof, this intimacy was born of a mutual knowledge of the difficult life they lived…Far from male gazes, they showed themselves as they really were." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 21.

men".[92] This reading fits into Jeannet's larger argument that the representation of Rome in *Dalla parte di lei* participates in a trend in twentieth-century women's writing of reimagining Rome. Unlike their male contemporaries and predecessors who, Jeannet claims, repeated a language of admiration, maintaining Rome's position as the Eternal City, twentieth century women writers brought the city down to human size, so much so that "the female characters live in essential symbiosis with the urban context".[93] In fact, for much of the novel the landscape and geography of the city is conveyed only in terms of its relevance to Alessandra and her mother and the distance from their home.

The only female space that Alessandra experiences in her youth, outside her home, is in the apartment of the upstairs neighbors: Lydia and her daughter Fulvia. It is around the figure of Fulvia that Alessandra's desire for women takes shape – moving away from a desire for her mother. As a young girl Alessandra blames her brother for making her listen for the sounds of her mother's lovemaking. As an adolescent Alessandra continues to blame her brother for the desires she feels for her friend. It is my contention that these desires are never explicitly stated because the possibility of homosexual desire exceeds the logic of this text. Situated in the midst and aftermath of a repressive and prescriptive era, the available images with which a woman could identify were severely limited. The models for relations among women were described in terms of family structure (mother-daughter), in terms of friendship, or in terms of gender-based solidarity. Sexuality, on the other hand, was described as the interaction between the sexes wherein men were assigned words like "desire" and "passion," and women were permitted "sensuality" and "romantic love." As Ulla Akerstrom explains in her thorough study of the historical conditions surrounding De Céspedes's text:

> Durante il Ventennio il regime fascista e la Chiesa si erano trovati d'accordo nella loro visione della posizione della donna nella società. La sua biologia doveva decidere la sua vita che era rappresentata dal matrimonio, dai figli e dalla cura della famiglia e della casa, in un ruolo tradizionale che era naturalmente esistito anche prima del fascismo. Secondo le norme vigenti, una donna doveva sposarsi presto e avere molti figli. Una donna seria doveva essere semplice ed evitare le frivolezze che erano considerate tipiche delle donne anglosassoni. Questi ideali permearono l'infanzia e l'adolescenza delle ragazze che crebbero durante il Ventennio per le quali l'Amore doveva essere al centro delle ambizioni[94]

[92] Angela M. Jeannet, "A Myth Reclaimed: Rome in Twentieth-Century Women's Writings" in *Italian Women and the City: Essays*, ed. Smarr et al. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 105.
[93] Jeannet, "A Myth," 101.
[94] "During the Ventennio the Fascist regime and the Church found themselves in agreement on the position of women in society. Her biology determined her life, and her life was represented in marriage, children, and care of the family and the home: a traditional role that had existed naturally even before fascism. According to the guiding norms, a woman had to get married young and have a lot of children. A serious woman had to be simple and should avoid the frivolities that were considered typical of Anglo-Saxon women. These ideals permeated the childhood and adolescence of girls who grew up during the Ventennio and for whom Love was supposed to be at the center of their ambitions." All translations are my own. Akerstrom, *Tra confessione*, 17.

There was, in other words, no available repertoire for representing same-sex female desire that this text could draw on – there were no words to express the desire. It is with careful intention that I say same-sex female desire exceeds the logic of the text because I want to stress that this conversation (my analysis) is not about prohibition; there is nothing to suggest that the author stages this desire as a way of bringing attention to the silencing and suppression of non-normative desire. My task here is not to uncover a hidden agenda, but to point to the ways in which discursive limitations reflect ideological mandates and impact women's ability not only to express but also to *know* themselves. Substituting Alessandr*o* for Alessandr*a,* reinforces the ideological imperative that desire should proceed in a linear fashion from man to woman. The first time Alessandra is aware of the reaction Fulvia's body provokes occurs when the girls are ensconced in the safe female world of Lydia's apartment. Alessandra, Fulvia, and a few other girls are gossiping about a pretty new girl when Fulvia suddenly jumps up:

> Fulvia, con un balzo, si levò in piedi. 'Più bella di me?' disse, lasciando cadere la vestaglietta e apparendo nuda sullo sfondo del grigio serbatoio dell'acqua. Le ragazze ebbero un piccolo grido e la guardarono. Io distolsi subito gli occhi senza neppure distinguere le forme del suo corpo e fuggii via.[95]

There is nothing sexual or seductive in this description of Fulvia suddenly ripping her clothes off. There is no attempt to convey what her body looks like; the only detail offered is the color of the water tank behind her. What stands out is Alessandra's extreme reaction; her self-censorship erases the moment before it begins, forcing her to run home. In the days that follow Alessandra reflects on this moment as an instance of her own transgression, conveying the threat of desire Fulvia's naked body evokes in her. "[I]l mio impulso," she professes, "sarebbe stato quello di tornare da [Fulvia] subito, e supplicare che mi concedesse il suo perdono…Mi pareva d'essere in torto: io che portavo il corpo come una colpa. Avrei voluto spiegarle della presenza di Alessandro, ma non osavo".[96] Alessandra associates her feelings of shame about her body with her brother. This conflation betrays Alessandra's anxiety about being unable to properly inhabit her gender; an anxiety which, I am suggesting, is the product of stringent normative gender roles, but which is here redefined as the consequence of her brother's ghost invading her body. She accuses her brother of making her feel different from other girls and tries to deal with it physically by chasing him away: "mi accanivo furiosamente contro la maligna personalità che mi possedeva. Nel salotto buio, tra i mobili scuri, i tendaggi polverosi, speravo di poter sorprendere Alessandro, liberarmi di lui."[97] She is angry because her desire makes her feel different. This anger is exacerbated because she has no way of understanding her desire – there are no images, narratives or figures available for

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[95] "With a leap Fulvia was on her feet. "Prettier than me?" she said, letting her dress drop and appearing naked in front of the gray water tank. The girls let out a little cry and stared at her. I averted my eyes without even distinguishing the contours of her body and ran away." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 71.

[96] "My impulse would have been to go back to [Fulvia] immediately and beg for her forgiveness…I felt like I was in the wrong: I carried my body like a sin. I would have wanted to explain to her the presence of Alessandro, but I didn't dare." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 72.

[97] "I became viciously angry with this evil personality that possessed me. In the dark living room, amid the dark furniture and the dusty drapes I hoped to surprise Alessandro and rid myself of him." De Céspedes, *Dalla*, 72.

her to imagine a non-heterosexual female subject. Alessandra's experiences have been limited by the boundaries of the "cortile," and her fantasy world reflects this limitation, making use – out of necessity – of the available repertoire of images to give life to those stories and fantasies that exceed the familiar. She does not have access to a language that acknowledges, much less condones, same-sex desire. In the only instance in which Alessandra gives space to her desire she finds she must adhere to the script of heterosexuality.

This instance comes years later, when Alessandra is a married woman. One night when her husband is away she invites Fulvia on a date. Though the text refuses to acknowledge any sexual content, it is my contention that this scene is tense with sexual desire but that this desire is disavowed by the text itself and rewritten as friendship because that is the only available (closest corresponding) term. Alessandra is constrained to a language where the intimacy of female friendship unavoidably whitewashes any transgression of heterosexual desire. Those feelings and behaviors that exceed this language are necessarily relegated to silence. When Alessandra proposes the date (movie and sleepover) the ensuing silence is significant enough to be remarked upon: "Ella mi fissava, incerta. Io le stringevo il polso fra le dita. 'Vieni, hai capito?' 'Sì' rispose piano e non ne parlammo più."[98] In the cessation of speech an understanding passes between the two women, under the guise of a straightforward (pun intended) invitation. This appointment should be no different from the thousands of other times these friends have spent together, but their unspoken understanding signals a shift. Muñoz theorizes this unspoken queer signal as "disidentification." "To disidentify," Muñoz explains, "is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject."[99] Disidentification is, in other words, a mode of survival for the nonconforming subject. It is also the only possible way of describing female same-sex desire in the context of a heteronormative ideological discursive register, to articulate, to name such a desire would be to acknowledge its existence and thus to allow for the possibility of difference.[100]

The lack of an available language to describe sex and sexual desire between women results in a bizarre scene in which the narration takes a turn towards the surreal. In their moment of passion, tears and angels are the most intense symbols available: "Ci eravamo entrambe vestite di bianco, come angeli…Ambe due, immobili, c'inoltravamo nella lucida lastra dello specchio, leggere, a piedi scalzi, andavamo incontro ad Hervey. 'Aiutami' io dissi a Fulvia crollando sul letto, tra i singhiozzi. 'Aiutami' anche lei diceva. Dicevamo Dario, Francesco. Tutta la notte dormimmo abbracciate."[101] In this moment of

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[98] "She stared at me unsure. I pressed her wrist in my hand. 'Come, you understand?' 'Yes,' she answered softly, and we didn't speak of it again." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 400.

[99] José E. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

[100] I am shying away from using the term "lesbian" because I don't want to risk implying that this is a "lesbian novel" or that the text is consciously, intentionally making any particular claims about the need to recognize lesbian sexuality. On the contrary, I think the text reinforces the mandates of heterosexuality. It is to avoid suggesting that there is a politics of sexuality rights operative in this text that I sticking to the clumsy phrasing "female same-sex desire."

[101] "We had both dressed in white, like angels… Both of us, standing still, met in the clear light of the mirror, weightless, barefoot, we went forth to meet Hervey. 'Help me' I said to Fulvia, falling on the bed weeping. 'Help me' she said too. We said 'Dario,' 'Francesco.' All night we slept embraced." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 401.

sexual intimacy the mention of Hervey serves as a signal. Hervey is the man Alessandra's mother fell in love with and whom she tried to leave her husband for. Alessandra never meets Hervey; she knows him only though stories and rumors where he is figured as a mad, sickly, foreign, brilliant artist, and, importantly, a homosexual. Evoking Hervey in this moment is the only means the text has of naming same-sex desire. To borrow from Muñoz, this text makes use of a particular "code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics of positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture."[102] Hervey is reinscribed here as code for that which exceeds the iterable. The women say "Dario" and "Francesco," the names of their male partners, because those are the names that are meant to be spoken according to the script of heterosexuality.

Ultimately, this imposed heterosexuality and the negation of a female discourse come together as the forces that compel Alessandra to kill Francesco. Shortly before she shoots him, Francesco returns home after a stint in jail as a political prisoner. Alessandra reacts to his long-awaited return as an invasion of her space: "Francesco era tornato a casa, allegro, sorridente…aveva invaso la mia camera coi suoi scuri indumenti, il mio letto col suo sonno pesante, sordo, ostile."[103] The theme of male invasion of female space is recurrent throughout the narrative. Alessandra recognizes the vulnerability of female space as a young child, when her father's return from work each day feels like an invasion they must respond to according to a specific script that demands her mother abandon Alessandra in order to serve her husband. As a grown woman Alessandra has difficulty adhering to the script upon her husband's return. She registers his invasion and her expected submission in the space of their bedroom as well as in the space of her body and her language. She feels connected to the space in part because she must surrender both her body and her space. In an extreme illustration of this dual level of surrender, Francesco rapes her their last night together. The only direct description of this awful moment is Alessandra saying "no," the rest is implied: "Dopo, Francesco era tornato ad assopirsi. Io avevo ripetuto 'no, no' durante tutto il tempo, ma lui era sordo e non poteva udirmi."[104] Alessandra's first reaction is to reflect on the transformation the space will undergo as a result of this violation – not just of her body but of the behaviors and codes of the space: "Intuivo che anche la nostra camera chiara, luminosa, aperta sulla terrazza che dominava la campagna e gli orti, presto sarebbe divenuta una cupa tomba, come quella di mia madre."[105] Alessandra explains the violation of her body in terms of its repercussion on the space around her and as a sign of her inability to speak in a meaningful way. In frustration and anger, she shoots him and is subsequently imprisoned.

As the novel draws to a close, Alessandra reflects on the necessity of an isolated space for the possibility of female narration:[106]

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[102] Muñoz, *Disidentifications,* 31.

[103] "Francesco had come home happy, smiling…he had invaded my room with his dark clothes, my bed with his sleep: heavy, deaf and hostile." De Céspedes, *Dalla*, 514.

[104] "Afterwards, Francesco had fallen back asleep. I had repeated "no, no" the whole time, but he was deaf and couldn't hear me." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 516.

[105] "I sensed that our light and airy bedroom, open to the balcony that overlooked the countryside and the gardens, soon would become a dark tomb, like my mother's." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 516.

[106] This is theme that will become central to De Céspedes's subsequent novel, *Quaderno proibito* (*Forbidden Notebook*) where, as the title suggests, much of the drama centers around a woman trying to find the time and place to write a private journal but cannot manage to claim any part of her home for

> La mia condizione attuale mi favorisce, permettendomi di non aver ritegno alcuno nell'esaminarmi crudamente e nel sottoscrivere atti e pensieri che, in altri momenti, forse avrei evitato di palesare a un uomo. Poiché, fin dal primo incontro, uomo e donna stabiliscono tra loro, involontariamente, l'intesa di recitare entrambi la parte che ambiscono di rappresentare, rifuggendo dal mostrarsi quali sono, per tema di distruggere il personaggio inventato con tanta minuziosa cura. ..Io credo, perciò, che nessun uomo avrebbe il diritto di giudicare una donna senza saper prima di che materia diversa dagli uomini le donne sono fatte.[107]

In the above passage, Alessandra reflects on how her jail cell affords her the freedom to write in a physical, intellectual and emotional space away from the male gaze and free of the pressure to fulfill her gender role. Alessandra voices her critique of the gender bias of the judiciary system. She also conveys an understanding of gender as a performance, as something that both men and women must rehearse and perform.

Alessandra's narrative is ostensibly an explanation of the actions that landed her in jail, but she refuses to be limited by a focus on the murdered man and the act of violence. She will not be reduced to a singular moment, act or identity: "Mi vien fatto, talvolta, di temere che io mi dilunghi troppo nella narrazione degli avvenimenti che precedettero il mio matrimonio con Francesco. Ma è pur certo che non si conoscerebbe nulla di me, del mio carattere e, insomma, di quello che sono, se passassi sotto silenzio come vissi, ciò che sentì in quel tempo."[108] Refusing to be defined in terms of a single event, she enacts a critique of the norms of legal discourse that would have her correspond only to the aggression against her husband, ignoring the abuse she suffered as well as her experience beyond the space and moment of the crime.

Like De Céspedes' novel, *Un quarto di donna* takes the form of a first person narrative of an unhappy woman. Unlike Alessandra, however, Ferri's narrator does not reflect on the practice of narration. Instead, she figures her ability to narrate in terms of the knowledge to which she has access. Giving voice to a sentiment echoed in *Dalla parte di lei* this novel begins with the woman's claim that she *likes* her life as it is, that she *asked for it* to be this way, but that sometimes it gets away from her and overwhelms her.

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herself. For a comparative study of *Dalla parte di lei* and *Quadreno proibito* see: Ulla Akerstrom, *Tra confessione e contradizione: uno studio sul romanzo di Alba De Céspedes dal 1949 al 1955* (Rome: Aracne, 2004); and Dana Rae Watrud, "Whose Story Is It? The Transition from Feminism to Socialism in Three Novels by Alba de Céspedes," *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences.* 62.2 (2001): 596.

[107] "My present condition serves me well; it affords me the freedom to examine myself to the core and without restraint, and to write down thoughts and actions that, in different times I might have avoided sharing with a man. Because from their first meeting, a man and a woman establish, involuntarily, the understanding that they will both rehearse the parts they aspire to perform, refusing to show themselves as they are for fear of destroying the persona they have invented with such care…I believe, therefore, that no man should have the right to judge a woman without first understanding the different cloth from which women are cut." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 95.

[108] "At times I fear I linger too long on the narration of the events that preceded my marriage to Francesco. But it is certainly true that nothing would be known of me, my character and, well, what I am, if I skipped over in silence how I lived and what I felt then." De Céspedes, *Dalla,* 77.

> Il mio globo mi piace, anzi lo amo e lo riamo continuamente. L'ho voluto così, pulito, scarno, abbondante di valori, inzeppato di principi, cresciuto nel suo tempo, pieno di buone intenzioni, frettoloso. Così frettoloso che certe volte mi scappa dalle mani. E mentre corre sulle ore, rotola sul pranzo e sulla cena, sul buio della notte e sulla luce del giorno, io certe volte mi ci stanco dentro e finisco per non dominarlo più. È questo il momento in cui perdo i margini della mia gioventù e piuttosto che un pensiero, un sorriso, una novità, una boccata d'aria, cerco un tranquillante[109]

This statement expresses the uniquely modern, Western, hyper-valuation of personal responsibility that has the effect of obscuring oppression and preempting discourses of structures of inequality. Ferri's text voices the dangerous consequences of this rhetorical substitution of values. Acknowledging the pressure of self-determination, Ferri's protagonist writes, "mi sveglio e sono stanca. Una stanchezza che è quasi passione fantasimo, perché di questa stanchezza io porto intera la mia responsabilità, dal momento che ho scelto io di vivere due vite insieme, di casa e di lavoro, senza che nessuno me lo chiedesse, ed è difficile, sempre più difficile vivere da sola due vite insieme."[110] The underlying idea is that the narrator has the power to shape the contours of her life now that women are free to work and are no longer commonly referred to as second-class citizens. Accordingly, a woman's complaints are reduced to nothing more than her own sense of dissatisfaction and her own inability to make the right choices –they are not to be understood in terms of larger socio-political systems that perpetuate limitation and inequality. This marks a significant difference from Aleramo's and De Céspedes's texts, both of which are situated in eras when a woman's submission to home and husband was a publicly acknowledged mandate and not marked as a choice.[111]

Through the process of narration, Ferri's protagonist begins to distinguish between those wants and desires she is expected to have, and those wants and desires she *does* have but that are not represented in, or supported by, available repertoires of language. By the end of the novel she recognizes a compulsion to reinscribe normativizing mandates as her own. "Sembrano piccoli cori," she says, "la rappresentazione esatta di quell'infinità di idee convenzionali sul bisogno insito nell'uomo e nella donna della famiglia."[112] Though she recognizes that it is tradition and convention that make marriage and heterosexuality seem necessary, she does not suggest

[109] "I like my world, in fact I love it again and again. I wanted it this way, clean and sparse and overflowing with values, steeped in principles, a product of its time, full of good intentions, fast-paced. So fast-paced that sometimes it slips out of my hands. And as it runs through the hours, and rolls over lunch and dinner, in the dark of night and the light of day, I sometimes feel tied and am unable to tame it. And in those moments I lose sight of my youth and instead of a new thought, smile, or breath of air, I look for a sedative." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 3.

[110] "I wake up and I'm tired… I bear full responsibility for this tiredness, from the moment I chose to live two lives simultaneously, of home and work, without anyone asking it of me, and it is difficult, always more difficult living two lives by myself." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 5.

[111] Divorce was not legalized in Italy until 1974. Prior to that date a man could end a marriage for a variety of different reasons, but a woman had no say in the matter and certainly had no claim to property, wealth or child custody – as evidenced in Aleramo's text, where Sibilla loses everything in exchange for freedom.

[112] . "They seem like little choruses," she says, "the precise representation of the infinity of conventional ideas about the innate need men and women have for a family." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 8

an alternative. In other words, while she ultimately differentiates between normative and individual desires (those imposed from "without" and those generated from "within"), she finds herself unable to articulate or claim *any* desire as her own.

Un quarto di donna follows the narrative arc typical of the "female awakening" narrative in which a woman protagonist acknowledges feelings of profound unhappiness or dissatisfaction and connects those feelings to larger socio-political systems of oppression. The mapping of the personal onto the political is a foundational tenet of feminism. Unlike the utopian goals of radical feminism, however, in literature as in life, the end result varies. Change is not always the outcome. What is crucial to this narrative formula is the move from self-estrangement toward a deeper knowledge of the self, and the idea that such a move and such a knowledge are possible. As Ferri's narrator writes, "Il mio guaio è tutto qui, non sapere mai nulla di ciò che mi è successo dentro."[113] It is only through the process of narration, I contend, that such knowledge becomes possible.

Ferri's narrator reinforces the notion, emphatically stated by De Céspedes's Alessandra, that there are different discursive registers for men and for women: the rational and sentimental respectively. "Il mio mondo," she explains, "è fatto di gesso e si cancella facilmente. Una preponderanza di sentimenti. Una miseria di presupposti. Gli uomini hanno il buon governo della memoria. Le donne no."[114] The idea that there are differently gendered ways of thinking and understanding the world is one that is foundational to Western philosophy as it allows for the structuring divide between the physical and the metaphysical. But while the gendering of this divide is unremarked upon in Western philosophy, it is held up as an obstacle to be examined by feminist theorists who point to the ways in which only half of this binary – the rational, male – is granted the space and audience of legitimate discourse.[115] This discursive divide adheres to a male/female binary, where men speak in the rational and women in the sentimental. For Alessandra, multi-gendering is an embodied experience, ascribed to the invasive presence of her brother sharing her body. Ferri's narrator, on the other hand, feels the gender divide as a subjective void: she recognizes herself in neither space. In both cases the women are left feeling isolated and overwhelmed with feelings of gender-related inadequacy.

Ferri's protagonist experiences this sense of isolation both physically and psychologically, and it is *because* of the multiple modes of experience, as a public and a private subject, that she is unable to easily articulate her pain. "L'idea di una visita medica," she declares, "mi procura un senso di avversione. Penso che non riuscirei a

[113] "My whole problem is this: I never know about anything that is going on inside me." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 32.

[114] "My world is made of chalk and erases easily. An excess of emotions. Men have the skill of memory. Women don't." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 23.

[115] There is a tradition of feminist women speaking to this discursive divide particularly in politics, business and the sciences (traditionally male-dominated areas). These women have voiced a dissatisfaction and discomfort with being forced to conform to a language and mode of reasoning that feels imposed and corresponds to a tradition of transmission of patriarchal power. A few important instances of this articulation include: Evelyn Fox Keller's autobiographical essay, "Anomaly of a Woman in Physics," in which she speaks to the sexism inherent in conventional scientific discourse and academia; and Chiara Valentini's *Le Donne Fanno Paura* (*Women Are Scary*), which is an analysis of women in the workplace that begins with a discussion of how the language and methodology of academic economic analysis is tacitly gendered in a way that preempts an analysis of women's experience. An analysis of Valentini's text can be found in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

presentarmi intera davanti allo schermo della mia malattia, sarei incapace di denunciare un dolore esatto."[116] She is describing a resistance to the rigidity of phallocentric, rational-based medical discourse. According to the rules of this discourse, she would be forced to name and compartmentalize the illness that plagues her and that she understands as multiple and various, as "una gran confusione di desolazioni, di inquietudini e di improvvisi."[117] She would have to limit herself to "gesti essenziali miranti a una razionalità, protetti da ogni divagazione," and abandon any attempt at describing the multiple and contradictory aspects of her experience.[118]

Ferri's narrator feels protective of the turmoil she is experiencing and worries that if she were to put it into scientific language it would be appropriated by powers that govern women's bodies and language:

> Io non vorrei…prendere un elenco del telefono, fissare un appuntamento con un medico, a una data ora, e recidere il mio capolavoro di manie con una medicina qualunque. Mi da sgomento troncare questo tenace e doloroso contatto umano che ho preso con me stessa. Questa malattia vorrei rimanesse una confidenza tra me e me.[119]

The narrator wants to keep this "masterpiece of manias" private and personal. Keeping this in mind, I want to consider what it means for a woman to claim the right to privacy. "A woman's private domain," Parati explains, "is paradoxically not private as it can be directly manipulated from the outside."[120] The body – the personal sphere of the self – is, for women, fundamentally not a private space both in terms of how it is dealt with (medically, legally, socially) and in terms of how it is talked about (medically, legally, socially).

This is because the female body sits uneasily between the public and the private spheres. Traditionally relegated to the domestic, women are expected to describe themselves in the language of the private sphere; but woman's body is a decidedly *public* object, described and governed by a public discourse of law and reproduction. In this sense, women are paradoxically located in the public and the private in the same way Alessandra's prison cell is a space of public isolation. As De Lauretis writes, "women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation." [121] The 'proper' space for women is not theorized, so women are always already unrecognizable to themselves except in their discomfort. In a moving passage, Ferri's narrator describes getting an illegal abortion, implicitly enumerating the consequences of discourse of the body and women's frustrating relationship to modes of representation.

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[116] "The idea of a medical visit," she declares, "provokes a sense of aversion. I don't think I would be able to present myself wholly in the face of my illness; I don't think I would be able to identify a specific pain." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 52.
[117] "a chaos of despair, discomfort and unpredictable misfortune." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 52.
[118] "essential gestures, aimed at rationality, safe from any divergence". Ferri, *Un quarto,* 52.
[119] "I wouldn't want…to make an appointment with a doctor, for a set date and time, and undercut my masterpiece of manias with any old medicine. It upsets me to think of ending this tenacious and painful human contact that I have established with myself. I would like this illness to remain an intimate thing between me and myself." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 54.
[120] Parati, *Public History,* 35.
[121] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10.

The scene is permeated with the protagonist's anxiety regarding an increasing lack of control over her own body. From her first meeting with the doctor she identifies this loss of power in her own moments of silence: "È appena il principio e io devo ancora dire 'mi ha parlato di lei una mia amica, lei comprenderà che non sempre i figli possono nascere.'"[122] This question of formulaic dialogue, ritual words (that which she "has yet to say") speaks to the distance built into discourse about the body. Though the dialogue concerns her literal embodiment (her pregnancy) the language available is predetermined and independent of the individual woman. The dynamic between doctor and patient is one of gendered control and submission that exacerbates her inability to speak as she would like and is manifest in her physical obedience. In the following passage describing her first visit, the doctor's commands stand in sharp contrast to her own silent obedience:

> - Si tolga il vestito per favore.
> È un ordine e mentre io mi nascondo come posso dentro un piccolo paravento fiorito, lui continua a parlare: - D'ora in poi lei farà ciò che le dirò io…piccola signora… quanti anni ha?[1]
> …Sono io invece che mi arrendo a lui e mi stendo con le gambe in su, pronta a lasciarmi dilatare dalle sue mani.
> - Piano piano… un piccolo fastidio… respiri forte… congratulazioni, lei sembra una bambina.[123]

The doctor's references to her as a "little girl" and a "little lady" are demeaning and sexualizing. He asks her age as one would a child, and then finds his answer by poking and prodding her vagina and suggesting she feels like a young girl. This language not only reinforces gendered power dynamics, it also creates a rhetorical obstacle preventing her from laying claim to any expertise or say over her own body. A woman may be able to refuse a man's request that she take off her clothes (even if the refusal is only rhetorical), but the idea of a young girl opposing a doctor's order borders on the absurd.

The doctor does more than take advantage of her through discursive manipulations. He also forces her to pay more than expected for the abortion, and the day of the appointment he "kidnaps" her. When she shows up at his office for the abortion, he suddenly tells her it has to take place in a different, secret office outside the city, forcing her to leave her car and ride with him to the undisclosed location. No doubt this is in part because the procedure was illegal in Italy at the time, but what I want to stress is how completely she must surrender to him. She has no rights to know how, where or what is being done to her. The dynamic of control and submission is brought to a head in the following passage where she describes the procedure of the abortion, and the way in which she is completely ignored by doctor and nurse: "Tra loro due si svolge una conversazione quasi da ufficio, che prescinde da me…Si avvicinano solo per una

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[122] "It is just the beginning, and I have yet to say, 'A friend told me about you. You understand, children can't always be born.'" Ferri, *Un quarto,* 57.

[123] "- Take your dress off please.
It is an order, and while I hide myself as best I can under a small flowered gown, he continues to speak: - From now on you will do as I say…little lady…how old are?
…I surrender to him and lie down with my legs up, ready to let him open me with his hands.
- Slowly, slowly… breathe deep… congratulations, you feel like a little girl." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 57.

iniezione. – Serve per sognare, - mi dice il professore e io piango senza una smorfia".[124] At first she is discursively excluded, and then she is forced out with drugs. As her isolation and helplessness escalate, she is increasingly able to articulate the nothingness she is being forced to identify with:

> Il professore chiede 'il ferro da stiro', lo maneggia con eleganza chirurgica, ma sempre un ferro da stiro rimane…Schizza del sangue. E il mio dolore dura più di quanto possa durare un simile dolore, smarrito tra le urla mie suffocate e le parole d'ordine del professore che intanto taglia delle cose vive mentre emana intorno un odore quasi selvaggio. Sono annientata, cancellata in questa mancanza di dignità generale.[125]

The pain and anguish conveyed so poignantly in this passage are, importantly, connected with her sense of losing her identity and dignity. It is worth noting that she grieves not over the loss of a child, but over the loss of her humanity. This is evocative of the helpless feeling of silence and isolation that provokes Alessandra's murderous rage. I argue that in both texts, the articulation of this sense of erasure is in itself a political act. Narrating the pain of exclusion highlights manipulations of power in discourse while simultaneously refusing to abide by those rules.

Each text evidences the gendered bias of discursive and narrative prescriptions in different ways. As I discussed earlier, De Céspedes distorts and reformulates temporal conventions of narrative by delaying her "confession" and beginning in the space of her childhood. Alessandra refuses the logic of the legal narrative that would have the act of murder be the central focus of her story; instead she appropriates the space reserved for a criminal's confession in order to tell the story of a woman's experience. This move not only undermines the expectations reserved for the genre of criminal confession, but also has the effect of simultaneously dismissing the criminal act and making violence the inevitable outcome of the self-authored female story. This reading is reinforced by Alessandra's insistence that her mother's suicide is to be praised as the only possible expression of female power. Where *Dalla parte di lei* inverts the expected order of events, *Un quarto di donna* troubles the very notions of cause and effect, rejecting the Aristotelian model of plot which requires a causal relationship between beginning, middle and end. The novel begins with descriptions of the narrator's general dissatisfaction and allusions to a possible separation from her husband. By the end of the novel the protagonist does in fact separate from her husband and settle in the unease of a new lifestyle. But, in a narrative twist, she reveals that the separation comes about because her husband confesses to an affair, and not, as the trajectory of the narrative would suggest, because of a moment of personal realization and decision-making on the part of the protagonist. Two chapters before the conclusion she gives a detailed account of an instance of her own marital infidelity, but this is completely dismissed in the

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[124] "The two of them carry on an office-place conversation that stems from me… They come close only for an injection. – It will help you dream. – the professor tells me, and I cry without a grimace." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 63.

[125] "The doctor asks for the 'clothes iron,' he wields it with surgical elegance, but it remains a clothing iron… Some blood sprays. And my pain lasts longer than such pain can last, buried between my suffocated screams and the stoic commands of the doctor who continues to cut living things while the space around is permeated by an almost savage smell. I am annihilated, erased in this complete loss of dignity." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 64.

conclusion when she reveals that the separation was prompted by her husband's affair. This strategy of narrative sequencing guides the reader towards a misleadingly deductive conclusion. In other words, this narrative goes against conventions of cause and effect in plot development and resolution; it is my contention that this move should be understood as a sort of negative female awakening – if by female awakening we understand a broad range of stories and images in which women name, confront and react to their own sense of frustration and pain. The term "awakening" has been used to reinforce the notion that a woman suddenly discovers the "real conditions of her existence" – conditions that had been obscured by social conventions.[126]

In both texts, the liberatory possibilities of this process of recognizing and unveiling the real conditions of existence are preempted by an overwhelming sense of fatality, and the immutable destiny of gender. Ferri's protagonist concludes her narrative with an unmistakable sense of finality: "Il cameriere si avvicina. È venuto il momento di ordinare qualcosa da mangiare. È accaduto già tutto ciò che poteva accadere e non abbiamo ordinato nemmeno il primo piatto."[127] The scene she is referring to is a dinner with her soon-to-be ex-husband, but this statement comes at the end of a narrative that has only been marginally concerned with the figure of the husband. Rather than belatedly repositioning the marriage as the central focus of the narrative, I understand this statement to be a reflection on the process of narration itself as having, for this woman and in this time, only limited possibility. Unlike Alessandra's grand gesture at transforming the space of legislative discourse, Ferri's protagonist seems unable or unwilling to imagine change. Paradoxically, while Alessandra calls for change, the text works to discipline her by making her imprisonment an inevitable outcome. Ferri's text, on the other hand, allows for the possibility of change by establishing women's access to knowledge as an inaccessible but not unimaginable precondition for transformation. Read in light of the dramatic reorganizations of access to education that occurred in 1968 in universities in Italy and across the world, this notion of a possible access to knowledge is evocative of social transformation that exceeds and even leaves behind the text's own protagonist.[128] This leaving behind is, I argue, a leaving behind of the awakening narrative itself as a form of feminism that no longer responds to the notions of activism and selfhood that began to shape and take shape in Italian feminism in the 1970s. As I will explore in the following chapter, an attention to communal living and collective action began to replace the focus on writing and individualism. Simply put, the connection between writing and the self that is so central to *Una donna* and *Dalla parte di lei* began to shift. In this two texts, as Zancan notes, "la riflessione sulla scrittura,

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[126] I am using the phrase "real conditions of existence" intentionally to evoke Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," where he theorizes the subject's relation to, and position in ideology. Following Althusser's lead, I do not wish to set up a binary between metaphysical and physical as corresponding to unreal and real. I want, instead, to point to the new conceptualization of the self as positioned in relation to formations of power.

[127] "The waiter approaches. The time has come to order something to eat. Everything that could have happened has already happened and we haven't even ordered the first course." Ferri, *Un quarto,* 119.

[128] I will discuss the textual reverbertations of '68 in greater detail in Chapters Two and Three where I focus on texts that, in different ways, are presented as interventions in different regimes of knowledge. Of particular salience will be Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo* (*Group Self-Portrait*), an important account of how the experiences of '68 were experienced in Italy – and by women in particular. Filling in the silences of Ferri's text, Passerini offers a polyvocal narrative that alternates between oral histories, memoir, and a feminist intervention into the regimentation of genres.

mentre sul piano dei contenuti immette nel corpo dell'opera la scrittura stessa raffigurata nella relazione intrinseca che la vincola alla identità del suo soggetto, sul piano della forma lavora alle possibilità di intersezione tra le scritture del privato…e i generi codificati dal sistema letterario."[129] The topos of writing serves, in other words, as a political intervention – revealing and transgressing gendered boundaries – *and* as a way of evidencing the affective bond these texts share and thus adding force to the social and political challenges levied. Ferri's protagonist, emerging for a text that affectively echoes these earlier ones but that is silent on this important topic, is a symbolic last figure of this particular form of feminism that depends on the metaphor of writing and awakening to inspire change. Significantly, the absence of writing as a topos in Ferri's text marks it as different from *Una donna* and *Dalla parte di lei* and, I contend, determines the "failure" of the awakening.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have discussed texts in which gender is used as a rubric for mapping and making sense of segregation, where segregation is experienced in multiple ways; restricting women intellectually, politically and socially, and divorcing women from their own bodies by limiting the possibilities of experiencing and articulating the sensual experiences of those bodies. The central issue at stake in each text is access to discourse and the privilege to recognize oneself in narrative. De Céspedes's text points to how discursive identification and recognition have legal repercussions, resulting in biased judicial systems; Ferri's text illustrates the ways in which women are severed from their bodies because of discursive structures and conventions that refuse to recognize women's bodies as sites of enunciation and theorization. In *Una donna*, *Dalla parte di lei* and *Un quarto di donna* the frustration that occasions the narrative is felt as a consequence of isolation, of inhabiting a home (Sibilla), nation (Alessandra), or body (Ferri's narrator) without rights or recognition (as an exile). The site of alienation specific to each text is, as I discussed previously, reflective of the constraints and concerns of the historical moment of writing which, in each case, corresponds to the setting of the novel. Although these narratives are concerned with the details and particularities of an individual's experience in a particular time and place, all respond to the feminist practice of making the personal political by exploring the ways in which their experiences and desires are determined and confounded by larger social and discursive systems and practices. Reading them together we can see a persistent attempt to find discursive expression for sensual, bodily experiences that have not been previously articulated. I propose reading this recurrence as an active site that reverberates in all temporal directions simultaneously, calling attention to the persistent difficulties *and* efforts(energies) that attend women's experiences.

[129] "The awareness of writing serves, within the narrative, to signal the inherent relationship between writing and identity; on the formal level this awareness works in the service of linking writings about (that reveal) the private sphere…with coded genres of the literary sphere." Zancan, *Il doppio,* xxvi.

CHAPTER TWO:
COLLECTIVE AWAKENING

In this chapter, I identify what I am calling a "collective awakening" through a close reading of three collaboratively authored texts: *Una donna sola* (*A Woman Alone*) by Franca Rame and Dario Fo (1977); *Più donne che uomini* (*More Men than Women*) by the Libreria delle donne di Milano (1983); *Baby boomers: vite parallele dagli anni Cinquanta ai cinquant'anni* (*Baby boomers: Parallel Lives from the Fifties to Age Fifty*) by Rosi Braidotti, Annamaria Tagliavini, Serena Sapegno and Roberta Mazzanti (2003). The texts discussed here develop affective bonds through a continual restaging of the importance and impact of collective and relational identification. In other words, these texts resist privileging the individual story – a defining feature of the texts I discussed in the previous chapter – and choose to foreground instead the complicated and potentially productive, provocative, even explosive dynamics of relationships among women. Where De Céspedes and Ferri are in affective dialogue with each other and with Aleramo by virtue of the persistent experience of isolation, these writers, by contrast, perform that affective bonding through the collective practice of articulating the experience of relationships between women. This speaking out – putting words to experiences and identities that had previously gone unspoken and thus unrecognized – became a well-worn practice in radical movements throughout the Seventies and a feature of what has come to be known as "second wave" feminism.[130] I am arguing that, while Aleramo's text is revolutionary in its interrogation of relationships between men and women, these texts are striking because they *do not* make the male-female relationship the centerpiece; their focus is, instead on women interacting with women. This redirection of focus, from the singular to the plural is, I contend, as much a reflection of the social and political trends of the time, as it is an indication of where these texts are situated in the genealogy of Italian women's writing. I refer to all of these texts as being influenced by "the social and political conditions of the time" despite the fact that the first was published in 1977 and the last in 2003 because, as I will make clear, the last text, *Baby boomers*, is autobiographical in nature and focuses primarily on the period of time in which the other two texts were written and published. Where Aleramo has to imagine her sympathetic audience, these writers participate in the strengthening and reorienting of bonds that are already in place.[131] What I am proposing then is that we see this shift in emphasis from

[130] Second wave feminism is generally understood as having started in the United States, coming out of the civil rights movement and sparked in large part by Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and a rediscovery of Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. For a more detailed overview of second wave feminism see: Linda J. Nicholson, *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1997). For a concise overview of first and second wave feminisms in Italy see Andreina de Clementi's "The Feminist Movement in Italy," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 332-340. Clementi writes that "it was the rejection of traditional roles and models, and the discovery of an autogenous feminine identity, founded on self-esteem and recognition of self, that had the disruptive effect that transformed thousands of women into mass-movement militants" (336).

[131] I am intentionally invoking Sara Ahmed's language of reorientation here to call to mind the complexities of sexual desire and political engagement at work in the (re)definition of these affective bonds.

the individual to the collective as a way of speaking to the frustration of stifled desire and silenced language that permeates the texts discussed in the previous chapter.

The communities described in the female awakening narratives of the first half of the century are decidedly patriarchal; in each of the texts discussed in the previous chapter, women are frustrated by their legal and/or social relegation to the private sphere. This gendered division of public and private serves to keep women in a position of continual disenfranchisement (as objects of male possession), while also preventing attempts at change by demarcating the public sphere as simultaneously gender specific (for men only) and as the only forum for legal and civic deliberation. Berlant and Freeman write about the need to strategically reconfigure this gendered division of space and labor: "[C]rucial to a sexually radical movement for social change is the transgression of categorical distinctions between sexuality and politics, with their typically embedded divisions between public, private and personal concerns. The multiplicity of social spaces, places where power and desire are enacted and transferred, need to be disaggregated and specified."[132] The texts that make up the focus of this chapter are engaged in precisely this kind of revision, aimed at transforming not the life of a single and singular heroine, but at upsetting the systematic divisions between public, private and personal that mark the "awakened" woman as singular rather than symptomatic. The 1970s saw a global effort by women to upset these unspoken but rigidly enforced divisions of space and gender. One way they sought to topple these walls was through the thoughtful and intentional creation – or repurposing – of communities of women. As Penny Weiss explains in *Feminism and Community*:

> women's communities show women as positively drawn to each other, as active resisters of oppression.
>
> Both feminist communities and activism rooted in women's traditional roles, relations, and networks blur the distinction between public and private and, related to that, upset the easy association of the private with the female and the public with the male. And once the dichotomy between public and private is smudged, so to do other dualisms become suspect.[133]

Together with this smudging of boundaries between public and private comes a reconceptualization of the self. The abstract individual that is the subject of liberal political philosophy – which structures the modern nation-state – is tacitly but decidedly male. The battles for women's suffrage and women's right to work were organized around the demand that women be recognized as equal to that abstract (male) individual. The subjugation of women that persisted *after* the victories of those battles suggested a need to reimagine the primacy of man as the base unit of liberal philosophy. As women begin to form structures of community that exceed or run parallel to those in place in patriarchal systems, they are also faced with investigating the intellectual and

[132] Lauren Berlant, and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," *Boundary 2*, 19:1 (1992): 154.

[133] Penny Weiss, "Feminist Reflections on Community," in *Feminism and Community*, ed. Penny Weiss et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 16. Weiss's discussion is focused on disentangling assumptions about communitarian versus relational feminism, however both are very committed to the ideal of egalitarianism in community. What all feminisms have in common, whether relational or not, is, according to Weiss, a fundamental challenge to "classic liberalism from a position that is less individualistic and more communitarian than classical liberalism." (Weiss, "Feminist Reflections," 163).

philosophical contours of the new type of subject they inhabit. As Marilyn Friedman puts it:

> Against this abstractive individualist view of the self and of human community, many feminists assert a conception of the self as inherently social. This conception acknowledges the fundamental role of social relationships and human community in constituting both self-identity and the nature and meaning of the particulars of individual lives.[134]

In other words, the privileging of the social and the relational becomes, in itself, a fundamental part of the emerging concepts of the self, so that the political strategy of creating communities of women is inseparable from a rethinking of the subject. Friedman goes on to explain that "if one has already attained a critically reflective stance toward one's communities of origin […] then one has probably at the same time already begun to question and distance oneself from aspects of one's identity in that community and, therefore, to have embarked on the path of personal redefinition."[135] The texts discussed in this chapter feature different forms of female communities, which in turn produce different emerging concepts of the self as social and political.

The first of these texts that I will discuss is Franca Rame and Dario Fo's *Una donna sola,* a one-act play consisting entirely of one woman on stage talking to another woman off-stage about the men that plague her life and keep her locked in the house all day. The only body seen and voice heard belong to one, lone woman, confined to the space of her home; all other voices and bodies are conveyed to the reader by inferences – the protagonist responding to her neighbor, a phone call, a knock at the door. In presenting the story of one woman alone by way of a dialogue between two women, *Una donna sola* highlights the need to think of women in relation to other women. This text pushes towards an awareness of relationality, of each woman's situatedness within a community that extends beyond the home. Written in 1977 and thus before the other texts considered in this chapter, *Una donna sola* points simultaneously to the need for, and absence of, dialogue and support among women. The second text I discuss here, *Più donne che uomini*, responds to that need; written and published by women actively involved in the feminist movement, it reflects on existing and potential practices of collective identification and support among women. *Più donne che uomini* theorizes the reconceptualization of the self as something that is always politically imbricated, and encourages the active formation of alliances among women through the practices of *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising) and *affidamento* (entrustment).[136] In *Baby*

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[134] Marilyn Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community," in *Feminism and Community*, ed. Penny Weiss et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 187.
[135] Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship," 204.
[136] *Autocoscienza* is the feminist practice of consciousness-raising, developed in the United States as a group experience of spoken self-sharing aimed at enabling women's self-exploration and self-knowledge. After a visit to the United States, Carla Lonzi introduced the practice of autocoscienza to Italian feminists in "Sputiamo su Hegel" ("Let's Spit on Hegel"), published in 1974 by Rivolta femminile. *Affidamento* is a uniquely Italian feminist practice developed by the members of the Libreria delle donne di Milano and presented to the public in 1983 in *Sottosopra verde: Più donne che uomini*. Affidamento, commonly translated as "entrustment," is really a practice of feminist mentorship; modeled around the mother-daughter relationship, affidamento urges women to recognize and embrace the inequalities that structure relationships among women, with the aim of creating nurturing, mentoring structures of education and support among women that rival the systems of patriarchal power that structure economic and social

boomers, the final text discussed in this chapter, we see not only a retrospective reflection on these practices, but also a performance of them. Published a quarter-century after Rame and Fo's play, *Baby boomers* is another project of collaborative writing, this time of life-writing by four women who identify as Italian feminists, and who come together to describe changing experiences of feminist understandings of the self in the context of different forms of collectivity among women. This chapter examines each of these texts individually and as they dialogue with one another in the context of a renewed, reimagined women's movement and a rapidly changing Italian social and civic landscape.

The Italian feminist movement of the 1970s played a significant role in transforming broadly held cultural assumptions about gender and privilege. As Luisa Passerini explains, the unprecedented legislation on divorce, abortion, education, equal pay and employment "and the referendums that accompanied them mark a period during which the major shifts of custom and sensibility that had occurred during the preceding decades found visible reflection in the domain of legal rights."[137] These legislative reforms (whether enacted or attempted) point to a major conceptual shift reshaping broad cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman and what relationship each gender can and should have with education, wealth, power and self-determination. Italy was not, however, experiencing these changes in a vacuum; similar things were happening in many countries around the globe and, as I will discuss later, the Italian women's movement drew heavily on the strategies developed by the North American feminist movement, though many central issues, particularly those surrounding race and sexuality rights, were lost or intentionally omitted in translation.

The fifteen years between 1968 and 1983 saw dramatic social, political and economic transformations in Italy and around the world. During these years, the Italian government and its people passed or debated legal reform on abortion, divorce, workers rights, and education.[138] The student and worker protests of 1968 produced reconfigured social landscapes in Italy, where youth began to be valued in new ways and where familial loyalty and tradition were being undermined as they never had been before. Assumptions of gender- and class-specific behavior were being upset as women refused to marry or wear skirts, as workers demanded fair pay and benefits and young men

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spheres. I will elaborate on the particularities of these practices as they become relevant later in this chapter.

[137] Luisa Passerini, "Gender Relations," in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. David Forgacs, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 146. These laws and referendums are remarkable because of their radical focus on topics that had previous been considered taboo or, at best, intractable; they are also remarkable for the record number of women that came out in active, visible support of these proposed changes. Of the successful abortion (1981) and divorce referenda (1974), De Clementi writes, that in both cases "[t]he same scenario with the same actors was presented again – a flood of women poured into the streets, raising the flag of femininity and self-determination," but it is important to note, she adds, that "these changes were not true victories, but rather signaled the end of bigoted and punitive laws." (De Clementi, "The Feminist," 337).

[138] For more on the legislative changes of these years see: "History of Two Law," and "Women at Home: Salaries for Housewives," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader,* ed. Paola Bono et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Roberto Massari, *Il '77 e dintorni: Contesti politici e processi di radicalizzazione*, (Bolsena, Italy: Massari, 2007); Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978*, (London: Verso, 1990); and Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990).

stopped cutting their hair. These changes were reflected in increasing state violence, new and exciting legislation and radical artistic practices. As Giorgio and Bull explain,

> [t]he general sense of a loss of authority brought about by the generational clash which characterized the decade was deeply felt among writers. Writers of different generations sought to reconcile the need for a renewed commitment to social and political reality with the commitment to formal and linguistic experimentation which they had inherited from the 1960s neo-avant-garde.[139]

The formal literary and otherwise artistic experimentation of the 1970s, together with the proliferation of women's writing, the radical activism and legislative changes during that time are, in large part, what keeps this period so critical to discussions of contemporary Italian literature, feminism and culture more generally. I, too, am interested in the experimentation with form of the 1970s, but not with the goal of making order of the disorder of that time. Instead, I see in these different approaches to form, a thematic privileging of the relationality of the subject, and of communities among women. If we think, with Berlant, of genre as "an aesthetic structure of affective expectation," then I am proposing that these experimentations with form be understood also as experimentations with affective expectation.[140] In other words, the interventions each of these texts make into assumptions of women's theater and autobiography, and into concepts of individuality and authorship are complicated by and complicit with new configurations of affect and intimacy. "To rethink intimacy," Berlant explains, "is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living."[141] To this I would add a conditional past – "how we might have been" – to stress the imagined quality of that shared past *as well as* the imagined shared future; in the act of working to create a shared future we also produce an imagined past, creating transhistorical communities that transform the present and enable new futurities. The act of temporally multiple imagining is, in itself, the construction of an affective bond that informs all the texts I discuss here; the intimacy of collaborative writing that produced these texts speaks to the intentionality of affective imaging that defines the political strategies of their historical moment.

In Rame and Fo's experimentation with theater as a platform for women's issues, in the Milan Women's Bookstore's collectively authored manifesto printed next to translations of American feminist Adrienne Rich's work, and in the polyvocal exploration of autobiography in *Baby boomers*, I identify a persistent and concerted effort to bear witness to the power and potential of intellectual and affective exchange among women:

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[139] Adalgisa Giorgio and Anna Cento Bull, "The 1970s through the Looking Glass," in *Speaking Out and Silencing: Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s*, ed. Adalgisa Giorgio et al. (London: Legenda, 2006), 3. For more on the literary experimentation in the 1970s as it relates to discussions of gender see: Luisa Passerini, "Gender Relations," in *Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. David Forgacs, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 114 – 157; Anna Nozzoli, "Verso l'identità: ipotesi sul romanzo femminista degli anni settanta," in *Tabù e coscienza,* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 147-170; and Carol Lazzaro-Weis, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

[140] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

[141] Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 286.

a feminist knowledge-making. In other words, I see these different modes of textual expression as evidence of the urgency driving this bond, of the pressing necessity to experience this affectively imbued practice of relating and identifying.

In placing these texts in dialogue with one another, I am calling attention to a shared affective drive toward collective civic engagement.[142] In other words, I am pushing for a reading of these texts that recognizes the collaborative and the relational in these narratives of female subjectivity as a manifestation of an understanding of women's identity as civic and political: a definition of citizenry as collectively determined rather than individually based. What we see in these texts is a valuing of the ways in which women (and men) are dependent on one another and a belief in the need for collective action in order to enact change. This is a markedly different understanding of the self than the one described in the earlier narratives of female awakening, in which change is enacted by way of equal access, equal rights and personal revelation.

Una donna sola

The partnership between Dario Fo and Franca Rame has been romantic, artistic and political since their meeting in 1951; together they have published a huge number of theatrical texts and produced thousands. Fo and Rame's work has always had a political bent, deploying comedy and drama in the service of socio-political criticism; it is what Chiara Valentini calls "l'unico grosso tentativo italiano di teatro popolare-politico."[143] As Cottino-Jones explains, "the theater of Fo and Rame has been identified as militant and popular – and even popular-national in Gramscian terms – because of its provocative and at the same time realistic discourse and subject-matter. Its intention has been to show the hidden face of power."[144] Always deeply involved with the efforts of the communist party and devoted to the ideals of socialism, their early work often focused on the

[142] In the Italian context there is a tradition of artistic and intellectual civic engagement called *impegno*. The idea of *impegno* came about in the late 1940s, as the nation sought to rebuild itself and searched for new ideals. It has been retroactively applied to or taken up in other moments of national crisis and attempts at renewal. Some of the names most commonly associated with the concept of *impegno* are Pavese, Gadda, Moravia, Gramsci, Pasolini, Calvino and Eco. As Jennifer Burns writes, "[t]he notion of *impegno* dictates that the writer has some responsibility for the response she produces in the reader, and that this respondent treats responsibly the commitment thus made by the writer" (Burns, "Fragments," 5). I have intentionally avoided this term because, though the spirit of *impegno* mirrors the political and artistic coming together I have identified in these texts, there is a strongly patriarchal national heritage that (not unproblematically) accompanies the term *impegno*. This is not to say that there are no Italian women writers to whom this term can be and has been applied, simply that the project I have identified and am interested in discussing with regard to these texts does not square with the type of national reform that is most frequently associated with this term. For more on *impegno* as a literary tradition and civic practice see: Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northwestern Universities Press, 2001). Romano Luperini, *Il Novecento: Apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Turin: Loescher, 1981). Pierpaolo Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini: intellettuali e impegno nell' Italia contemporanea*, (Milano: Mimesis, 2012).

[143] "the only real attempt at an Italian popular-political theater." Chiara Valentini, *La storia di Dario Fo,* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977), 105.

[144] Marga Cottino-Jones, "Franca Rame on Stage: the Militant Voice of a Resisting Woman," *Italica*. 72.3 (1995): 324.

hypocrisy and corruption in the workplace and the government, most notably in *La morte accidentale di un anarchico* (*The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*) (1970) which consisted of a satirical restaging of the real-life murder and cover up of anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, and *Fanfani rapito* (1975) in support of the referendum on abortion and which earned Fo his first Nobel Prize nomination.[145] In the 1970s, however, the themes their work addressed began to shift and expand to include critiques of the "private sphere," calling attention to the connections between economic exploitation and domestic suffering. As Luciana D'Arcangeli explains, "per via del loro impegno intellettuale, sono sempre stati sotto stretto controllo delle forze dell'ordine, spesso sospettati e accusati varie volte, ma mai incriminati, di attività, se non proprio terroristiche, quantomeno di favoreggiamento delle stesse."[146] Their devotion to social justice and the critique of power earned them the distrust of governments and institutions of power around the world including, as Stefania Taviano documents, "the Church, numerous cases of censorship and lawsuits, imprisonment, hatred from various political factions, intellectuals and critics, even kidnapping and rape by a group of fascists in the case of Rame."[147] All of the hardships they faced, including Rame's rape and kidnapping, were transformed by the couple into material for political theater, though the relationship between personal experience and artwork is not always made clear.

The dynamic of the relationship between Rame and Fo changed significantly and publicly in 1977 with the publication and production of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (*All Home, Bed and Church*)*,* the volume of plays in which *Una donna sola* participates. This volume stands out for a number of reasons from the vast body of work Fo and Rame have produced, not least of which being that it marks the first time Rame's name appears in print as publicly acknowledged co-author. Prior to this publication, Fo was credited with authoring their plays, despite statements from both as to the collaborative nature of their creative process in which they claim that the writing and the acting have always been in equal measures collaborative and productive (so that the writing of the text happens in conjunction with and in response to the performance). In their analysis of the effects and techniques of Fo and Rame's creative partnership, Gawler and Kolsky point out that "the role of Franca Rame has not been fully evaluated in the creation of the written text or 'script.' There has been an implied division of labor, sometimes made explicit, that sees Fo in the 'author' role, understood in the more traditional sense of 'writer,' whereas Rame's contribution is often verbal and performance related."[148] Perhaps because of the earlier textual distinction that named Fo as the author and Rame as the actress, scholarship and criticism has by and large adhered to this understanding of their dynamic, and consequently little critical attention has been paid to Rame's hand in the creating and

[145] Fo was nominated again and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997. Rame was not recognized as coauthor by the Nobel committee, though Fo named her as such in her acceptance speech.
[146] "because of their intellectual commitment, they have always been carefully watched of the forces of law and order, often suspected and occasionally accused, but never convicted, of activities that, if not exactly terrorist, at least anti-governmental." All translations are my own. Luciana D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, (Firenze: F. Cesati, 2009), 127.
[147] Stefania Taviano, *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches to Political Theatre*, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 23.
[148] Jacqueline Gawler, and Stephen Kolsky, "Co-Authorship in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*: The Writing of the Monologhi," *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association,* 102 (2004): 86.

authoring of their work. Rame has received more recognition as a writer in her own right by scholars and the media abroad than she has in Italy, though even abroad that recognition has been limited. As D'Arcangeli explains, in Italy "le è stato riconosciuto il solo ruolo di attrice e sempre congiuntamente a Fo, in quanto all'estero lei è riconosciuta come artista indipendente ed ha ricevuto vari premi," although, when Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize, Rame received no formal recognition.[149] One reason for these different treatments of Rame is, D'Arcangeli suggests, an inherent misogyny and a dismissal of feminism and women's rights within Italian "intellectual" discourse. The shifting discourse on women's rights and women's role in society that occupied center stage in Italian cultural debates of the 1970s impacted the relationship between Fo and Rame and came to the fore in Rame's public refusal to play second fiddle to her husband and work partner. Rame famously went on strike, refusing to serve as mother, wife and secretary to her husband, son and the whole of the theater company. Prior to this dramatic public strike, Rame had filled the role of pretty face and helpful, serviceable wife. D'Arcangeli writes that "[l]'emancipazione di Franca corrisponde ad una voglia di aiutare altre donne. Siamo nel 1977, momento più alto del Femminismo in Italia, a fare altrettanto nella speranza, ancora non sopita, di vederle combattere per portare la rivoluzione nelle loro vite e nel paese – anche se di rivoluzione, femminile o politica, non si parla più entro breve."[150] In other words, what D'Arcangeli is calling "l'emancipazione di Rame" corresponds to the broader trend among Italian women in the 1970s to forcibly and publicly reorganize their place in the social and political fabric.

As I mention above, the 1970s saw an unprecedented number of mass protests – marches, occupations and gatherings, led by organized feminist groups, but supported by women of all political affiliations and social classes – centered around issues that had (and continue to have) particular bearing on the livability of women's lives. Issues like access to contraceptives and safe, legal abortion (1978), divorce (1974), equal pay and fair hiring (1977), and compensation for domestic labor were fought for by thousands of Italian women walking bravely, and for many for the first time, into the public sphere.[151] It was in response to this woman-led cultural revolution and to Rame's individual strike that *Una donna sola* was born. The play, first performed at the Palazzina Liberty in Milan in 1977, attracted a lot of attention, in large part because nothing so intensely focused on women's issues, or so explicit about women's sexual desire, had previously been presented on the Italian stage. Gawler and Kolsky note, however, that the press "did not give any real recognition to Rame for her contribution to authorship when *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* opened, and her name would not have appeared on the cover of the

[149] "[S]he was only recognized as an actress, in conjunction with Fo, whereas abroad she has been recognized as an independent artist and has received various awards." All translations are my own. D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi,* 19.
[150] "Franca's emancipation reflects a desire to help other women. We are in 1977, when Italian Feminism is at its strongest, there is a desire, not yet exhausted, to see them [Italian women] fight to bring the revolution into their lives and their towns – even if soon there will be no more talk of revolution, feminist or political." D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi,* 257.
[151] For a more detailed account of the specific legal changes fought for and won during this time and the ways in which those battles mark the 1970s as significantly distinct from other moments in Italian history see: Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943 – 1988,* (London: Penguin, 1990); Biancamaria Frabotta, *La politica del femminismo (1973-76)*, (Rome: Savelli, 1976); and Teresa Bertilotti, and Anna Scattigno, *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta*, (Rome: Viella, 2005).

published volume of the monologues at all had Fo not insisted on it."[152] This detail points not only to the misogyny of the press, but also to the commitment Fo and Rame had to collaborative work, both on and off the page.[153] Of the one-act plays collected in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, the one I will be considering here – *Una donna sola* – immediately caught the attention of the public and press because of its jarring violent ending and its unrelenting criticism of the so-called "domestic" oppression of women. The "donna sola" is forced to contend with an absurd (and yet all-too realistic) number of male oppressors; she is held captive by her cheating husband, molested by her brother-in-law, emotionally blackmailed by a former lover and harassed by a peeping tom and an obscene phone-caller. In the end, with the encouragement of her only female ally, the protagonist "frees" herself by killing all of her aggressors. The persistent use of humor helps curb any attempt at reading this narrative as a set of radical feminist directives, though the commentary this text makes on the unjust treatment of women is unmistakable. The immediate success and intense criticism *Una donna sola* met with upon opening, stand as testament to how deeply it resonated with the concerns of the moment.[154] That it continues to be restaged and translated around the world speaks to the persistence of the concerns raised, concerns and themes that I see as resurfacing with each new configuration of the women's movement, even as they are transformed by the changing concepts of self and womanhood that inform the politics and ideals of the movement.

Most scholars and critics sola understand Rame's Una donna as being about the troubled relationships between men and women, and about the systems of power that structure gendered relationships as unequal. Fo and Rame scholar David Hirst reads the play as "a chronicle of male oppression, a deliberately exaggerated concatenation of abuses which takes familiar situations, multiplies them and assembles them into a grotesque parody which through its distortion mirrors and symbolizes the position of woman in a male-dominated society."[155] Rame herself has said that the subject of the play is man, off-stage but present throughout. Theater historian J. Farrell, like Hirst and Rame, supports a reading of the text as fundamentally about the relationship between the sexes, and develops it a step further, suggesting that the driving ideal for all Rame's heroines is a happy heterosexual union. Farrell claims that:

> Franca's feminism was not especially revolutionary. Heterosexual relationships marked by mutual fidelity, love and commitment, all underpinned by a previously unknown equality in every domain, was the ideal…The witnesses she lined up in her theater may have experienced

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[152] Gawler and Kolsky, "Co-Authorship," 86.

[153] As testament to their commitment to social equality and collective action, Rame and Fo lived in – and helped found – a collective in a former factory warehouse in Milan known as "La commune," or "il Capannone di Via Colletta." In choosing this lifestyle, they were participating in a growing trend of communal living that sought to upset capitalist models of economic servitude and dependency by creating self-sufficient alternative socialities. The trend of communal living as political action was taking place around the globe, but the Italian brand that Rame and Fo participated in was devoted to Marxist ideals in a way that the feminist collectives in the United States were not. For a more detailed account of Rame and Fo's biography, see: John Farrell and A. Scuderi, editors, *Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[154] For more on the reception in Italy and abroad, see: Stefania Taviano, *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches to Political Theatre*, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); and David Hirst, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame,* (London, Macmillan, 1989).

[155] David Hirst, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, (London: Macmillan, 1989), 153.

> misery and dissatisfaction in their married lives but, even in [*Una donna sola*], they craved fulfillment in shared heterosexual life. The passion they expressed was for parity of consideration. There is no ideology of anti-male feeling at any level other than the purely jocose.[156]

I am arguing, against Farrell's reading and Rame's own position, that the central focus of the text is not the relationship between a woman and her oppressors, but the relationship between the protagonist and her female neighbor.[157] The gender-specific nature of this relationship is, I argue, the catalyst for the action of the narrative, and it speaks to the increasing importance being placed, in this historical and political moment, on fostering relationships among women.

As I explained in the previous chapter, Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna* marks the beginning of a particular tradition of modern Italian women's literature, much in the same way Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is regarded as signaling a major shift in writings by and about women in the English tradition. Like Woolf's text, *Una donna* has been invoked and retold again and again by generations of Italian women writers. Ferri's *Un quarto di donna* (1973) and Rame's *Una donna sola* (1977), are two instances of that

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[156] John Farrell, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution*, (London: Methuen, 2001), 208.
[157] Considerable attention has been played to Rame's claims about her own work – in part because her claims are as public as they are inconsistent. Among the most contested are Rame's attitude towards feminism and her collaboration with Dario Fo. Rame has always staunchly maintained that neither she nor her texts are feminist; this position has been repeatedly ignored by scholars and activists (feminist and not), who read in her texts, and see in her performances, themes that resonate deeply with feminist concerns.

Rame's explanations about her collaborative work are slightly more complex. Before *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, Rame's name never appeared on printed material as (co)author. After this groundbreaking 1977 text, Fo and Rame's names appeared together as co-authors on nearly all published material. Rame has responded to this change in contradictory ways, at times claiming she had no hand in authoring anything, regardless of whether her name appeared in print; other times saying she has been ignored and robbed of the respect due to authors simply because she is woman and wife. Critics and scholars have used both assertions to support different interpretations or, more frequently, have dismissed her entirely from any scholarly discussion of the work produced by the couple – making Fo the intellect and Rame the acting, attractive, decorative body. I am not interested in "resolving" this debate. What I want to do is call attention to the relationship between collaborative narration within and without the text. Setting aside the details of how Rame and Fo structure their collaborative process, it is significant that this text is the first to name both as authors, and the significance of this act resonates in the text, irrespective of Rame or Fo's intentions.

Accordingly, Rame's claim that *Una donna sola* is about a man betrays Rame's own failure to recognize how profoundly this (historical, political, artistic) moment is marked by a need for collaborative authorship – understood as authoring texts, communities, identities, and experiences. It may well be that the luxury of retrospective analysis which I am afforded accounts for the different emphasis between my reading and hers, though I suspect Rame's interpretation is colored by her vehement denial of a feminism she understood as being exclusively separatist and anti-male. For more on Rame's complicated relationship to feminism see: Sharon Wood, "Parliamo di donne. Feminism and Politics in the Theater of Franca Rame," in *Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition*, ed. John Farrell et al., 161-180, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Marga Cottino-Jones, "Franca Rame on Stage: the Militant Voice of a Resisting Woman," *Italica*. 72.3 (1995): 323-39; Dominica Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution: Five Performers and the Lessons of Their Subversive Humor*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); Maggie Günsberg, "Center Stage: Franca Rame's Female Parts," in *Gender and the Italian Stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 203-242; and Luciana D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, (Florence: F. Cesati, 2009).

retelling whose titles mark their repetition *and* their difference: the subtle differences and striking similarities of the titles are indicative of the changing concepts of female subjectivity that inform each text. As I discuss in Chapter One, *Un quarto di donna* filters Aleramo's story through the language of psychoanalysis and the feminist practice of *autocoscienza*. It describes a female subject who – as the title suggests – is no longer the unified subject embodied in Aleramo's every-woman. This new woman is a fractured being who experiences her own multiplicity as a consequence of the various decentered forces of oppression she faces.[158] *Una donna sola* makes community and collaboration central to redefining "donna." This text hints at the politics of collective action and the feminist practices of *autocoscienza* and *affidamento*, suggesting, I argue, that women's isolation from other women is a strategy of oppression that must be resisted. Rame's protagonist is able to know herself *as* "una donna" and to tell her Aleramian story only in the presence of another woman. Reflecting the feminist strategies of community building beginning to take shape in the 1970s, Rame's text distinguishes itself from Aleramo's in the same way new feminist strategies of community building stand apart from earlier forms of feminist action. To borrow from Weiss, "(h)aving rejected the self-interested, autonomous individual of liberalism as both mythical and desirable, feminists find that a more social view of the self and a more collective, interdependent, and cooperative model of social relations has an obvious and reasonable appeal."[159] In this same way, Rame's text points to the limitations of Aleramo's ideal, self-sufficient woman, while also highlighting the community of textual women Aleramo's text reveals.

"Ci tenevamo compagnia, si parlava"[160]

Rame and Fo's play begins when one woman, the protagonist and sole actor, notices the presence of a neighbor woman in a facing window. The rest of this one-act play is carried out as a conversation between the two women, though the audience sees and hears only the protagonist, inferring, by way of her responses, what the neighbor woman is saying. Though both women are mothers and housewives, a clear hierarchy is established in which both the protagonist, Maria, and the plot itself, are dependent on the neighbor woman. The play begins with Maria expressing joy at finding this new companion: "Mi

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[158] Braidotti traces the history of this new subject, attributing its emergence to a break with classical humanism and individualism that began as a reaction to WWII, and that characterizes the radical thinking of the 1968 movements – including, but not limited to, the new feminism lead by figures like Irigaray. Braidotti writes that "[t]he first generation of post-war critical philosophers began the analysis and critique of the role of European philosophy in the demise of European identity and values with and in the wake of fascism." This "first generation," she goes on to say, was very concerned with ethics (think of Sartre, de Beauvoir and Arendt) but ignored questions about the structure of philosophy. This poststructuralist line of inquiry, Braidotti explains, was spearheaded by the movements of 1968 and the rise of minority movements: "In poststructuralist thought, the historical era of postmodernity is marked by the return of the 'others' of modernity: woman, the sexual other of man; the ethnic or native other of the Eurocentric subject; […] feminist, post-colonial, native or black theorists produced discourses and practices of their own which challenged his master's voice." [Rosi Braidotti, "Identity, Subjectivity and Difference: A Critical Genealogy," in *Thinking Differently*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin, et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 165-167].

[159] Weiss, "Feminist Reflections," 3.

[160] "We kept each other company, we talked"

fa molto piacere che finalmente ci sia qualcuno…sono proprio contenta che sia venuta ad abitare in faccia a me."[161] Maria explains that she has been very lonely and tried to fight that by keeping the radio on at full volume in every room: "[S]empre acceso a tutto volume…basta che sia, non ho preferenze. E lei? Chiedevo se le piace la musica, " she says to the neighbor, and then responds in turn dismissing her own ability to have discerning taste, and starting a pattern that will hold true throughout the play, in whch Maria compares her own experiences of motherhood, wifehood and womanhood unfavorably with those (unheard by the audience) of the neighbor. "Ah, le piace. A me no. Non ne capisco niente…Sono pure stonata…ma così, mi fa compagnia. E lei come fa a farsi compagnia? Ah, non è sola?! Un figlio? Ah che stupida anch'io ci ho un bambino, anzi due."[162] The evolution of this conversation, from a casual question about music to an honest, and dark glimpse at the experience of motherhood, speaks to the generative and potentially dangerous power of dialogue between women, thus marking female companionship as a central theme from the very beginning. Maria says she always has the music on "a tutto volume" ["full blast"] even though she doesn't particularly like or understand it ("non ne capisco niente"). The music, like the forgotten children and the violent, demanding men, represents the one-sidedness of all of Maria's relationships; none of the people or things in her life provide companionship. "[I]l maschietto," she says, referring to her son, "è sempre con me ma neanche lui mi tiene compagnia."[163] She longs for companionship but only finds reciprocity and exchange with women. Until the arrival of the neighbor, therefore, Maria is "una donna sola," alone and lonely; alone in a world where noise and demands come *at* her, from the radio, her children, her husband, and lonely for companionship which according to the logic of this text, I am arguing, can only succeed among women.

In her study of the use of humor in writing by Italian women, Laura Peja notes that Rame's title is "ironicamente ambiguo: la donna, banalmente in casa da sola, si sente di fatto profondamente sola perché non ha con chi condividere realmente la sua esistenza, e però, paradossalmente e in contrasto col titolo, nel *plot* è tutt'altro che sola," surrounded by men who physically and emotionally abuse her. "Non c'è da stupirsi," Peja continues, "che nel finale si mostri tutto il suo desiderio di realizzare il titolo, e di rimanere sola, liberandosi finalmente di tutte queste presenze solo sgradevoli."[164] This interpretation of the title is provocative but stops short of placing this text in a broader historical context. Maria is not alone in terms of a historical, literary lineage which I mentioned earlier and that begins with Aleramo, but, ironically, that same literary

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[161] "it really pleases me that there is finally someone… I am so happy that you've come to live across from me" (ellipses in the original). Franca Rame and Dario Fo, "Una donna sola," in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, (Verona: Bertani, 1978), 19.

[162] "Always at full volume…as long as it's on, I don't have a preference. And you? I was asking if you like music. Oh, you like it. I don't like it. I don't understand it…I'm also tone deaf…but it keeps me company. How do you manage to keep yourself company? Oh, you're not alone?! A son? Oh, I'm such a dummy, I have a child as well, two actually." Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 20.

[163] "The boy is always with me but even he doesn't keep me company." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 20.

[164] "ironically ambiguous: the woman, predictably home alone, feels deeply alone because she has no one to share her experiences with, however, paradoxically and in contrast with the title, in the plot she is anything but alone… It is not surprising when, in the end, she reveals her desire to realize the title and be left alone, finally freeing herself from the harsh forces around her." Laura Peja, *Strategie del comico: Franca Valeri, Franca Rame, Natalia Ginzburg*, (Florence: Le lettere, 2009), 101.

community marks the persistent isolation of women – united in their isolation. Additionally, the title signals that she is a woman alone because she is the only woman in her world (peopled with male aggressors) while also playing on the double meaning of "sola," suggesting not just isolation and loneliness but also having qualitative implications: *only* a woman (and not a man) – as the protagonist herself points out.

At first, Maria claims to be happy: "Non mi manca niente," she says, "mio marito non mi fa mancare niente: ho la lavabiancheria, la lavastoviglie con nove cicli, ci ho tre pentole a pressione, la cucina col forno elettrico."[165] But it is immediately clear that this long list of objects does not make her life full. Once, she says, she was happy, "avevo una donna che veniva qui a ore, mi ci trovavo così bene…ci tenevamo compagnia, si parlava, si parlava," but the woman left after Maria's brother-in-law molested her and so Maria became, again, "una donna sola."[166] The connection Maria makes between talking and companionship is critical to understanding what constitutes a relationship among Italian women in the 1970s. The connection between language and self-knowledge that was so critical to Aleramo, became fundamental to the feminist practice of *autocoscienza* (consciousness raising) which defined the women's movement of the early 1970s.[167] By the late 1970s and early 1980s, this collective process of self-knowledge began to be theorized as a relational practice of mutual respect and structured mentorship, theorized as *affidamento* (entrustment) by the Libreria delle donne di Milano in an issue of the *Sottosopra verde* newsletter that I will discuss at length in the second portion of this chapter. Rame's text describes the need for this relationality among women, where "relation" refers both to relationships, to creating networks of kinship among people, and to relating, to narrating or giving an account of some knowledge (of oneself or the world). The dynamic between Maria and her neighbor is, I am suggesting, an explicit performance of the conjunction of these two components of relationship.

Maria explains that companionship consists precisely of women talking to one another, and in her neighbor she is delighted to find that partner: "a me piace tanto parlare sa. Anche a lei? Beh, mi fa piacere, allora parliamo."[168] Talking becomes, in this moment, the condition and the very nature of their relationship. Maria shares everything with her neighbor. She tells her details of the constant sexual abuse she endures from her disabled brother-in-law, to whom she is also forced to play full-time nurse. She describes her own past attempts at suicide and her endless list of chores. But the question that recurs most frequently and that seems to preoccupy Maria in a number of different ways

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[165] "I have everything, my husband makes sure I have everything: I have a washing machine, a dishwasher with nine cycles, I have three pressure cookers, a range with an electric oven." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 20.

[166] "I have a woman that would come by the hour, I was so happy with her… we kept each other company, we talked, we talked". Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 20.

[167] For a discussion of the ways in which the practice of *autocoscienza* reflects and responds to emerging theories of subjectivity in Italian feminism see Lucia Re's "Diotima's Dilemmas: Authorship, Authority, Authoritarianism" in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice,* ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2002) 50-75. For a history of the relationship between psychoanalysis and European feminism, particularly the practices of *autocoscienza* and *affidamento* see Maria Serena Sapegno, "Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A European Phenomenon and Its Specificities," in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin, et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 110-123.

[168] "I really like talking, you know? You like it too? Well that makes me happy. Let's talk." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 20.

is the nature of the relationship between women and sexual desire, between women and pleasure. As I have been suggesting, the impetus for this question, the reason this theme resurfaces in so many texts, is that female sexuality and desire have, for centuries, been rejected as sites of intellectual inquiry and have been excluded from systems of knowledge production and transmission. The lack of language and information about these topics is precisely what frustrates the narrative of female awakening discussed in the previous chapter.

The historical moment of Rame's text, sees a global move to begin to discuss female sexuality and desire, in more public forums and with a more frank language; texts like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* begin to revolutionize sexual education in the U.S. and to scandalize or inspire Italian readers.[169] The push to suddenly become familiar with a previously taboo or unavailable discursive register is nowhere more evident than in Maria's hilarious reflection on the orgasm:

> è una parola che io non riesco a dire, faccio fatica: orgasmo. Mi pare il nome di un animale schifoso… che so, una specie di scimmia tracagnotta fra il mandrillo e l'orango: mi pare di leggerlo sul giornale: un orgasmo adulto è fuggito dal circo americano… Un orgasmo ha aggredito una suora allo zoo… Catturato l'orgasmo dopo lotta furiosa coi vigili del fuoco. Quando poi dicono "ho raggiunto l'orgasmo"… mi pare uno che dopo una gran corsa ha preso un tram al volo.[170]

I agree with Sharon Woods reading that this scene "dramatically stage[s] a woman's absence from her own desire, the impossible contradiction of a woman speaking as sexual desiring subject."[171] The frustration I spoke of in the previous chapter – a frustration that is sexual, linguistic and conceptual – is played out here very explicitly around the word "orgasm," but is repackaged in humor and satire rather than angst and melodrama. "The comic," as Cottino-Jones explains, "is a quality often denied women. As a superb comic performer, Rame has overcome the institutional taboo that places the comic muse beyond women's grasp, and has established herself as an internationally recognized comic

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[169] I mention this text because it was an unprecedented publication that called attention to and sought to change the relationship women had/have towards their bodies, responding to increasing politicization of the female body. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was published for the first time in 1971 in the U.S., with the Italian edition following only three years later. It is worth noting that the first translation of the text was to Italian (*Noi e il nostro corpo*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), and it enjoyed the same privileged place in Italian feminist circles as it did with U.S. feminists. Regarded as "la Bibbia della sessualità consapevole che unì le donne di diverse parti del globo," *Our Bodies, Ourselves* came from a growing movement to encourage women to take control of their lives by learning about and learning to speak about their bodies and their sexuality. This nexus of sexuality, language and power is central to the feminist political strategies of the 1970s in the U.S. and in Italy. [Eleonora Cirant, "Negli Usa è tornato Noi e il nostro corpo. Trent'anni fa diventò la Bibbia del femminismo militante. Ma oggi ci dice ancora qualcosa?" *La Repubblica*, January 7, 2006].

[170] "it is a word I am not able to say, it is hard for me: orgasm. It seems like the name of a disgusting animal…I don't know, a sort of monkey bred between a mandrill and an orangutan: I can imagine reading in the paper: an adult orgasm has escaped from the American circus…An orgasm attacked a nun at the zoo…The orgasm has been captured following a violent battle with the firemen. And when they say 'I reach orgasm'…It sounds like someone caught the tram at the last minute after a mad dash." Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 29.

[171] Sharon Wood, "Parliamo di donne. Feminism and Politics in the Theater of Franca Rame," in *Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition*, ed. J. Farrell et al. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 171.

interpreter and writer."[172] This passage is representative of the strategic use of humor throughout the text. In her study of Rame's use of comedy, Peja claims that Maria "è un personaggio comico, e del resto incarna il primo gradino dell'ascesa verso la consapevolezza femminile, rappresentata nello spettacolo."[173] The use of the comedic in this metalinguistic, metasexual moment highlights the newness of this type of sexual vocabulary in women's discursive registers. This is not to say that women didn't previously talk about sex or experience orgasms, but the language they used was different, less direct and more descriptive (Aleramo's Sibilla describes an intensity of feeling and sensual elation, De Céspedes's Alessandra employs metaphor and fantastical allusion to euphemistically represent sexual experiences). The use of the word "orgasm" is indicative of the increasing power of scientific discourse, and the related sense that medical knowledge is the true authority on the body and human behavior. Ferri's text voiced an anxiety about allowing the scientific and medical regimes full control over naming woman's experience of her own body; in Maria's monologue on the orgasm we see some of the effects of granting that power. Maria says she is unable to say the word "orgasm" ("è una parola che non riesco a dire") and then goes on to use it over and over again, as though she feels compelled to use it but can't do so without commenting on the foreignness of it, locating it in an American circus and ascribing to it a dangerous ferocity ("un orgasmo adulto è fuggito dal circo americano"). That the fierce "orgasmo" ends up attacking a nun ("ha aggredito una suora") only underscores the point that, for Maria, this word does not invoke feelings of pleasure or sensual elation but represents an imposition on women's experience of language and sexuality. "I paradossi, la comicità," explains D'Arcangeli, "non fanno che accentuare la gravità della situazione della donna che viene sfruttata da tutti gli uomini che le stanno intorno."[174] Just as the escaped "orgasmo" is tamed by the firefighters, Maria tries to tame this word, tries to make sense of it by situating it in violence and aggression, making it correspond to her own sexual experiences which have been exclusively about submission and male desire.

For men, as Maria sees it, desire is always sexual and, like their conversations and companionship, always one-sided. Her husband, for instance, always wants to have sex and doesn't care if she is interested or not: "vuol subito fare l'amore… e non gliene frega niente se a me non va… se non ne ho voglia. Sempre pronta devo essere come il Nescafé."[175] "[M]i pare di essere adoperata," she explains, "ecco la parola giusta, 'adoperata', come una cosa, come un rasoio elettrico."[176] This feeling of being used, of

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[172] Marga Cottino-Jones, "Franca Rame on Stage: the Militant Voice of a Resisting Woman," *Italica* 72.3 (1995): 325.

[173] "she is a comedic character, and she embodies the first step in the assent towards feminine awareness represented in this performance." Peja, *Strategie del comico,* 101. For more on the function of comedy in Rame's work see: Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing: 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995), 205-207; Jacqueline Gawler and Stephen Kolsky, "Co-Authorship in *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*: The Writing of the Monologhi," *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 102 (2004): 85-103; and David Hirst, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame,* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

[174] "The paradoxes, the humor, only accentuate the gravity of the woman's situation, exploited by all the men around her." D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi femminili*, 206.

[175] "he wants to make love immediately… and he doesn't care if I'm not up for it…if I don't want it. I always have to be ready, like Nescafé." Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 29.

[176] "I feel like I'm being manipulated, that's the right word, 'manipulated,' like an object, like an electric razor." Ibid.

being an object for male consumption is less a complaint for Maria than a description of what she believes to be the norm. "[I]o credevo che fosse così per tutte le donne," she tells the neighbor, "che quello fosse l'amore… cosa vuole che ne sapessi io… nessuno mi aveva mai detto niente."[177] Maria's insistence that she couldn't have known any differently because no one had told her otherwise is an echo of Sibilla's complaint in *Una donna* – in both cases women are isolated *from other women* and therefore cut off from the knowledge that women produce about themselves and their experiences.

As I have suggested, the echoes between this text and Aleramo's are strong, beginning most clearly with the title. Günsberg notes that "*Una donna sola* highlights the emphasis in Italian feminism on individual feminine subjectivity very much in the context of a collective feminine identity. In a manner akin to Sibilla Aleramo's 'I'-narrated novel *Una donna*, Rame's *Una donna sola* is the story of one individual woman, and at the same time that of many women."[178] I want to push Günsberg's point a bit further and suggest that Rame's text be read as an example of how the awakening novel is transformed. The title echoes *Una donna,* but the addition of the word "sola" ("alone" "lonely") signals the importance of community. The model of writing as self-sufficient vehicle for personal introspection, revelation and change is no longer acceptable. The isolation that frustrates Ferri's protagonist in *Un quarto di donna* is revealed here as another site of oppression that must be overcome by women together. This text stages the discursive, psychological overcoming of women's shared condition of isolation, while simultaneously pointing to the limitations of intellectual awakening. "As *Una donna sola* progresses," Günsberg explains, "…The play takes the form of a self-revealing, confessional-style monologue that provides the therapeutic vehicle enabling Maria to simultaneously externalize her anger at her situation, thereby giving her a new sense of self (the first stage of *autocoscienza*)."[179] Unlike the majority of Ramian scholars, Günsberg acknowledges the role of the neighbor in Maria's transformation, explaining that, in contrast to Aleramo's text, "Rame's play…shows the beginnings of a sense of female community, a feature of Italian feminism," she nevertheless downplays the neighbor's power.[180] Günsberg places the neighbor in a role of therapist, much in the

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[177] "I thought that's how it was for all women, that that was love… what could I know about it?... no one ever told me anything." Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 30.

[178] Maggie Günsberg, "Center Stage: Franca Rame's Female Parts," in *Gender and the Italian stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day*, (Cambridge, UK.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 217. Günsberg is one of the only scholars I have come across to think about this text in conjunction with Aleramo's *Una donna*. I am building on this genealogy by identifying Ferri's *Un quarto di donna* as another step in this transtextual narrative.

[179] Günsberg, "Center Stage," 216.

[180] Günsberg, "Center Stage," 217. The female community Günsberg is interested in is the one created between actress and audience, and which she traces very compellingly in a study of the performances of Rame's plays. Sharon Wood also investigates the nature of Rame's relationship with her audience: "The special relationship Rame has developed with her audiences breaks down the further wall, turning her audience into a fundamental part of the show, enabling her to slide between her own voice and that of her characters, between reality, fiction, and metafiction" (Wood, "Parliamo di donne," 164). This is not unlike the effect of the first-person narrator in Aleramo's text, where the narrative "I" allows the narrative voice to move back and forth between the telling and remembering of the story, and addressing an audience in the "here and now" or writing. This style is evocative of oral story-telling which is very much the style Rame adopts in her monologues: we are watching something unfold on stage, but we are also being told about it as we are watching, thus in some way distorting temporality and identification, so that audience/reader, actor/protagonist and narrator are all immediately involved in the action and the thinking about that action.

same way Sibilla's awakening has been attributed to the therapeutic function of writing – with the effect that neighbor and blank page are recognized only as sounding boards, or platforms for the subject's exploration of herself. I am arguing that Maria's neighbor actively engages with and adds to Maria's awakening, to the same degree that Maria's oppressors directly impact her.

One persistent theme in all of the texts I am discussing in this dissertation is the conviction that knowledge is something transmitted among women. The case made in Aleramo's, Ferri's and Rame's texts is that the sharing of knowledge among women is a necessary thing – it directly contributes to the livability of a woman's life. "[C]ome sono contenta di poterle raccontare 'ste cose," Maria says, "sento proprio che mi fa bene."[181] When a woman is alone she is deprived of that education; she is not part of the community of knowledge and as a consequence she suffers – intellectually, emotionally and, as Maria makes clear, physically.

In those rare moments when the neighbor steps away (presumably to tend to a child or other household chore) Maria begins to panic, ("Signora, non c'è più?"), highlighting the intense and immediate bond formed between the two ("Signora! O meno male che si è affacciata").[182] As the two women converse, Maria is confronted by a number of increasingly difficult and dangerous male aggressors (her husband, brother-in-law, an obsessive voyeur and a former lover). In each instance she turns to the neighbor for advice and, though we can never be sure what the neighbor actually says or condones, Maria attributes all her actions to the other's woman's permission and wisdom. "La mia amica che sta di fronte dice che non devo farti entrare," she says to the young man pestering her from the other side of the closed door.[183] The woman becomes, in this way, an authority – a supporting female voice giving credibility and power to Maria's position, giving her the courage to refuse this man entrance.

The fact of Maria's imprisonment within the walls of her house does not change by the end of the narrative – she never achieves that moment of freedom and potential happy futures. As Günsberg writes,

> hand-in-hand with this critique of female enclosure is the implication that Maria is in effect powerless to prevent it. This is made evident by her reason for not reporting either her husband or the male voyeur to the authorities, namely that the law is patriarchal and would undoubtedly favor the two men. Her own illegal, and impotent, solution of violence at the end of the play reaffirms the hopelessness of her situation.[184]

Although Maria is powerless in the face of the law, as Günsberg points out, I would argue that she is transformed by the end of the play; what changes is her response to the violence done to her; for the first time, thanks to her newfound female companionship Maria finds the strength to rebel. When Maria feels driven to suicide because she can no

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[181] "I am so happy to be able to tell you these things, I can feel that it is good for me." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 32.

[182] " Misses, are you gone?" "Misses! Thank goodness you've come back to the window!" Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 36 and 37.

[183] "My friend that lives across from me says I shouldn't let you in." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 37.

[184] Günsberg, "Center Stage," 235. Maria's recourse to violence and the text's refusal to imagine a happy ending – making private prison or domestic prison Maria's only possible residences – places her in clear affective dialogue with De Céspedes's *Dalla parte di lei*.

longer abide the molestation from her wheelchair-bound brother-in-law ("basta, io mi ammazzo… mi ammazzo!"), she hears the neighbor's call and changes course ("Come dice? Ah sì? Eh sì, giusto! Vengo caro. Sì adesso ti faccio divertire… sì, un viaggetto erotico per le scale").[185] The ambiguity about what the neighbor says to Maria complicates any attempt to ascribe responsibility (or culpability) to either woman, highlighting instead the complicity we all assume as social beings responsible for the well being of our neighbors in addition to our own. Together with the neighbor, we as viewers and readers are witnesses and accomplishes to Maria's violent outbursts and to the oppression and exploitation that led her there. As the plays draws to a close Maria awaits her husband's return, gun in hand, comforted by the notion that she is no longer alone: "non, si preoccupi, sono calma" she tells her neighbor.[186] That the closing lines of the text show the women thinking exclusively about each other (Maria wanting her friend not to worry, and the friend worrying about Maria) supports my reading that the relationship between the two women is at the center of the text. This is not a view supported by most other scholars who, like Sharon Wood, maintain "Rame never wavers from her ideal of the primary heterosexual fusion of the monogamous couple. Relationships between women, so consistently explored by Italian feminism either as political lesbianism, the subjective affirmation of *affidamento*, or simply the warmth and solidarity of sisterhood, cannot for her compare with the mutuality of affection and commitment over time."[187] While this is certainly the position Rame claimed for herself, I contend that this text betrays that hetero-loyalty, and speaks instead to the need for relationships of mentorship between women.

I am arguing that Maria's need to see and hear the presence of the other woman (a dynamic that clearly mimics the relationship this play establishes between Rame – co-author and actress – and her female audience) is markedly different from the nature of the monologue that characterizes the awakening narratives. In the narratives of female awakening, the act and process of narrating one's experience and identity involves a remembering and a (perhaps unconscious) comparison of one's own life with the lives of other women. This relationship is not, however, dependent on the exchange of dialogue; the women-subjects of awakening narratives do not engage with, leave room for, or even welcome the advice of a listening audience. Aleramo's *Una donna*, as the foremost exemplar of this narrative approach, acts simultaneously as self-reflective awakening narrative *and* as didactic manifesto. Aleramo's Sibilla uses her own experience of awakening as a model for her readers and for future generations of women; she does not invite criticism or input. Rame's Maria, on the other hand, actively seeks an interactive relationship with her female audience, creating a dynamic *spazio femminile* in which experiences are defined and determined by the collaborative sharing of knowledge between women. The dynamic of the relationship Maria has with her neighbor is not, however, one of egalitarianism and sisterhood. It is a hierarchical relationship in which the neighbor woman's wisdom and advice put her in a position of power and mentorship over Maria – a dynamic that Maria welcomes, turning as she does continually to the

[185] "enough, I'll kill myself…I'll kill myself." What did you say? Oh really? Yes, you're right! I'm coming dear. Yes, now I'll show you a good time…yes, a nice erotic trip down the stairs". Ellipses in the original. Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 40.
[186] "don't worry, I'm calm." Rame and Fo, "Una donna sola," 40.
[187] Wood, "Parliamo di donne," 175.

neighbor woman for advice, approval and validation. This unequal relationship of mentorship between women will be theorized by members of the Libreria delle Donne di Milano as *affidamento* in *Sottosopra verde: Più donne che uomini* that I will discuss in the next section.

Più donne che uomini

The practice of *affidamento,* as I said before, was first theorized clearly in *Più donne che uomini*. Whereas Rame and Fo's *Una donna sola* is a sort of political comedy meant for the stage, *Più donne che uomini* is a newsletter published by an association of feminist women from all walks of life known as the Libreria delle donne di Milano (The Milan Women's Bookstore). The Libreria itself occupies a significant place in the history and cultural imaginary of the Italian women's movement because it was one of the first and remains among the longest enduring centers actively dedicated to the movement. The Libreria focuses primarily on the development of intellectual and theoretical work and this 1983 publication, *Più donne che uomini*, marks that tradition in a significant way.[188]

Founded in 1975, the Libreria delle donne di Milano is a community space for and by women. It is, according to their mission statement, "una realtà politica composita e in movimento…Ma soprattutto è luogo storico della pratica di relazione."[189] The emphasis on relations among women is, as I have suggested, a signature product of feminist political strategies of the 1970s. The brand of relationship building developed by the Libreria delle donne di Milano stands out in its outspoken rejection of egalitarianism:

> Negli anni in cui la libreria è nata c'era bisogno di avere un luogo che desse risalto al pensiero e alla scrittura delle donne. Così ha avuto origine un'impresa femminista che non rivendica la parità, ma, al contrario, dice che la differenza delle donne c'è e noi la teniamo in gran conto, la coltiviamo con la pratica di relazione e con l'attenzione alla poesia, alla letteratura, alla filosofia.[190]

At the heart of this proclamation is the theory of sexual difference as foundational to the experience of female subjectivity; in other words, women experience their sexual

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[188] The focus on the theoretical and intellectual marks the Libreria as different from the many other women's centers established between the mid-1970s and early 1980s who choose to focus – and continue to be dedicated to – political activism or social services as is the case with the Casa delle Donne in Bologna or the Virginia Woolf Center in Rome. For more on the theoretical elaborations of the Libreria see: Ida Dominijanni, "Il femminismo degli anni Ottanta: Un nodo: Uguaglianza e differenza," in *Esperienza storica femminile nell'età moderna a contemporanea,* vol. 2, ed. Anna Maria Crispino (Rome: La Goccia, 1989), 119-27; and, Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, editors, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice,* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing) 2002.

[189] "an organized and active political reality…But above all a historic space for the practice of relating." "Chi siamo," Libreria delle donne di Milano, last modified February 6, 2013. http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/chi-siamo.

[190] "In the years when the bookstore was born there was a need to have a space that honored women's thinking and writing. This is what gave rise to this feminist project direct not at equality, but, on the contrary, at proclaiming that the difference and specificity of women is something we place great stock in, we cultivate it through the practice of relating and through poetry, literature and philosophy." Libreria, "Chi siamo."

difference from men before and as they experience all other aspects of existence.[191] This shared condition of negotiating the primacy of sexual difference does not, however, eradicate all differences among women; on the contrary, it is the only common factor and, as they say in the quote above, all the other particularities of individual identity should be recognized according to the disparate conditions of existence they denote for each woman. This theory of non-egalitarian alliance is one of the more contentious positions adopted by the Libreria and is at the heart of the theory of *affidamento.*[192]

Published in 1983, *Sottosopra verde: Più donne che uomini* borrows from the manifesto in form, consisting of a number of sections in which the achievements and problems of the feminist movement are identified, and culminating in the explanation of their proposal for success: *affidamento*. The publication concludes with a translation of Adrienne Rich's "Condition for Work: The Common World of Women," and Evelyn Fox Keller's "The Anomaly of a Woman in Physics." The inclusion of these American texts signals the increasing influence of U.S.-based feminist thought, as well the degree to which Italian women are aware of their position in a global community of women. This sense of identification in a community that exceeds national boundaries and cultural traditions is a feature of feminist belonging that significantly shapes contemporary women's politics and that truly began in the late 1970s.[193] As I see it, this is the moment

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[191] Italian feminist philosopher and member of the Libreria Adriana Cavarero explains the theory of sexual difference in the follow way: "Questo pensiero [della differenza sessuale], smascherando la logica occultante secondo il quale il maschio si assolutizza ad unico ed universale soggetto, riconosce come originaria la differenza dei sessi e postula la necessità che la donna di comprenda e si rappresenti a partire da questo suo concreto ed essenziale differire." ["This philosophy of sexual difference reveals the deceptive logic by which man makes himself the absolute, unique and universal subject; the philosophy of sexual difference recognizes as foundational the difference between the sexes and posits the necessity for woman to understand herself and represent herself beginning from this concrete, essential differing."] (Cavarero, "L'elaborazione," 180). In other words, the philosophy of sexual difference engages both the symbolic and the material in the elaboration of sexual difference as foundational to the experiences of individual, physical embodiment, social systems of organization and cultural practices of sense-making. It maps the biological and the cultural onto the symbolic to reveal the ways in which all systems of thought are built on sexual difference. [Adriana Cavarero, "L'elaborazione filosofica della differenza sessuale," in *La ricerca delle donne: Studi femministi in Italia*, ed. by Cristina Marcuzzo et al., (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 1987), 173-188.]

[192] Maria Calloni's "Women's Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Biopolitics in Europe," is a very useful study on the shift in focus from equality to difference within feminist and European politics more generally. Calloni explains how these changing pan-European trends and transformations impact attitudes and policies towards women and citizenship. [Marina Calloni, "Women's Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Biopolitics in Europe," in *Thinking Differently*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin, et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 63-79]. For a discussion of equality versus difference specific to the Italian context see Luisa Muraro's "The Passion of Feminine Difference Beyond Equality," in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*, ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2002) 77-87.

[193] Today we can turn to transnational and postcolonial feminist thought as examples of how this beyond-borders turn impacted feminist theories and practices around the world, though these are both critical approaches that have been developed with a particular eye to empire and marginalized, minoritized populations. Italian feminism, though it certainly is and has been in dialogue with other national and beyond-national feminisms, does not reflect the concern with power differentials and the projects of empire that characterize transnational and postcolonial feminism. For more on transnational and postcolonial feminism see: Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, editors, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); and Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

when feminism comes to be experienced as collective affective belonging to such a degree that gender is reframed as a non-geospecific identity; I am claiming, in other words, that "woman" as an identity marker and "feminism" as the affective experience of that identity are transformed, from this moment forward, into a sort of ethnic identity – with a specific history and mode of kinship, and an affective inheritance passed down through the generations.[194] The ethnicity produced here is experienced through tradition, in the repetition of certain aesthetic and political moves that create a sense of continuity even when they are adapted and given new meaning in different historical moments.

In the context of this chapter I am treating *Più donne che uomini* as a sort of bridge between the theoretical and literary; I am reading it as a performative text, similar to the way, in the first chapter, I read awakening narratives as a type of performative text. *Più donne che uomini* "performs" both the community and female mentorship it promotes by way of collaborative writing and the invocation of other (mother) texts like Rich's. In doing so this text also responds to the call for companionship and female knowledge-sharing performed in *Una donna sola.* In simpler terms, *Più donne che uomini* serves simultaneously as theoretical framework, and performative textual object in this chapter.

The collaborative sharing of knowledge that informs *Più donne che uomini* is reflective of a broader theoretical and political move developed in the 1970s by feminist theorists like Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigary, all of whom were very influential in Italian feminist thought particularly in their advocacy of a feminist discourse separate from dominant, phallocentric systems of knowledge, history and narrative.[195] In *Più donne che uomini* this push to create an intentional space of female knowledge takes the shape of *affidamento*, inspired very much by the writings of the Adrienne Rich. To borrow from Suzanna Ferlito, "affidamento seeks to establish a female frame of reference where the transmission of knowledge and authority and the exchange of mutual valorization and trust between women is enabled through existing disparities and power differentials between them."[196] In what has been seen as a very controversial move, however, the philosophical elaboration of Rich's work done by the Libreria omits

[194] In developing this notion of feminism as ethnic identity I am drawing on Anne-Marie Fortier's notion of "ethnic intimacy." Fortier uses Mabel Berezin's notion of a community of feeling to suggest that Italian diasporic identity is "an effect of events, rituals and practices that occurred in these locations [of migration], rather than merely [being] reflected by them" (Fortier, "Community," 65). In other words, Fortier suggests that ethnic intimacy is enacted through sites of community formation. While Fortier looks at Italian social clubs in England, I am proposing that the same logic be applied not only to feminist organizations, but also to texts that (re)perform particular, inherited modes of affective kinship. I will develop this more in detail in the final chapter of this dissertation. [Anne-Marie Fortier, "Community, Belonging and Intimate Ethnicity," *Modern Italy* 11.1: 63-77.]

[195] These three French feminists helped develop, in separate but overlapping ways, the theory of *écriture féminine*, a feminist literary theory that calls on women to embody their gender specificity in language and through writing and, in so doing, to reject the misogynist logic built into phallogocentric writing. This is very much in dialogue with the philosophy of sexual difference and has been similarly criticized for promoting an essentialist understanding of gender. Central to the notion of *écriture féminine* is women's (re)claiming of sexual pleasure through the act of writing; in other words, allowing women's desire to come into being by way of a language by and for women. This last point resonates with the theme of interdependent linguistic and sexual frustration that I have identified in all the texts I have discussed. For more on *écriture féminine* see: Hélèn, Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1:4 (1976): 875-893; and Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Cornell University Press, 1985).

[196] Suzanna, Ferlito, "Affidamento," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, ed. Lorraine Code, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

any discussion of sexuality.[197] By rewriting Rich's explicit focus on lesbianism (as powerful identity and politics) in terms of female bonding, this articulation of Italian feminist thought stresses the mother-daughter relationship as the model for recognizing difference in relationships among women. Luisa Muraro, a member of the Libreria, took this focus on the mother and developed it as a formal theory in *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (*The Symbolic Order of the Mother*). As Lazzaro-Weis explains, "Muraro defines difference not as an identity constituted of specific psychological, social, or cultural differences but as a process of differentiation from a universal."[198] She begins, in other words, by interrogating the assumption at the heart of Western philosophical thought that posits the (abstract) existence of a universal subject. Muraro proposes a symbolic order of the mother as practice or embodiment of theory; conceived in response and contradistinction to the symbolic order of the father, which structures Western philosophy and society, the symbolic order of the mother is a system of knowledge production that seeks to make new/different sense of the world beginning from a female space. Drawing on Adrienne Rich's claim that the most important relationship a woman has is with her mother, Muraro's theory leans heavily on an idea of affective warmth that colors or, in her view, should color the relationship between mother and daughter and thus by extension among women.[199]

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[197] This point has been taken up by Teresa De Lauretis who writes that "unlike North America, where lesbianism has been a visible – if by no means unopposed or undivided – presence within the women's movement, and an acknowledged influence on the development of feminist thought, Italy has had no history of lesbian feminism, though it has a lesbian history that is now beginning to be told, and though lesbians have been active in the Movement all along as women and as feminists, if not as lesbians," (De Lauretis, "The Essence," 29). The risk, she explains, in borrowing Rich's notion of lesbian existence without engaging with lesbian sexuality and history in Italy, is that lesbianism comes to be a stand in for an essentialist concept of woman and female community. She goes on to explain that, although the theory of subjecthood put forth in *Più donne che uomini* and the follow-up *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, flirts with essentialism, it does so with measured caution: The Libreria's "effort to define female desire and subjecthood in the symbolic, without sufficient attention to the working of the imaginary in subjectivity and sexual identity, are many and great…it makes little space for differences and divisions between – and within – women, and so tends to construct a view of the female social subject that is till too closely modeled on the 'monstrous' subject of philosophy and History. However, this is not a biological or metaphysical essentialism, but a consciously political formulation of the specific difference of women in a particular sociohistorical location where, for instance, race or color have not been at issue: and where, if sexuality is now emerging as an issue, it is not merely against, but in part owing to the very strength of its theory of sexual difference," (De Lauretis, "The Essence," 31). Although it was published in 1989, De Lauretis's claim that Italian feminism was only just beginning to acknowledge the complexity of sexual desire and orientation and was not recognizing race or color as "issues" feels very relevant today. [Teresa De Lauretis, Teresa, "The Essence of the Triangle or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain," *Differences* 1:2 (1989) 3-37.]

[198] Carol Lazzaro-Weis, "The Concept of Different in Italian Feminist Thought: Mothers, Daughters, Heretics," in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*, ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, (Cranbury, NJ.: Rosemont Publishing, 2002), 40.

[199] In Muraro's own words: "Non dobbiamo lasciar perdere quel sogno infantile che rappresenta il germe di una cultura femminile dell'amore della madre. Esso ricompare, del resto, nel testo stesso della Rich dove parla del bisogno che abbiamo della potenza materna…il saper amare la madre [mi fa] superare definitivamente la logica intellettualistica; prima c'era soltanto un'altalena. Il saper amare la madre mi ha dato o restituito l'autentico senso dell'essere" (Muraro, *L'ordine,* 24-25). Muraro extrapolates, in other words, from Rich's discussion of the lasting impact of the mother on the daughter, a theory in which the mother empowers her daughter by being an adored ideal, a material model of possibility. [Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, (Rome: Editori Riunti, 2006)]. For a comprehensive critical overview of

The opening words of *Più donne che uomini* emphasize this connection between affect and community. We are, they say, "un gruppo di donne, tra loro in rapporto politico e affettivo."[200] They make clear, in this way, the inherent, unavoidably political nature of relationships among women – trespassing, as they necessarily do, the boundaries between public and private, political and intimate, male and female. They then go on to situate these relationships in a transhistorical community: "Abbiamo combattuto…Abbiamo scoperto…Ma adesso ci manca."[201] The language they use is a language of continuum, such that women are women of all times and places: we fought, we discovered, and now we are missing certain things. By naming themselves as subjects of past discussion, as warriors of previous battles, the women who author this manifesto lay claim to a legacy of women's activism and solidarity. They respond to that call put forth by Aleramo, and in doing so embody her imagined community of future readers. This act of articulation, this verbal and textual claiming of a specific history is a significant political move, a move that opposes any attempt to sever women from the accomplishments and the oppression of other women, distinguished by time or space. By claiming historical legacy, these women embrace the power of community. The problem that persists, they say, is the lack of language: "ci manca il modo di tradurre in realtà sociale l'esperienza, il sapere e il valore di essere donne."[202] The frustration I spoke of in Chapter One, and which causes Rame's Maria such anguish, lies at the heart of this text as well. It is a frustration that is both sexual and linguistic because it stems from not being able to articulate the experience of woman's sexual difference (as different from man). There is a fundamental lack of language because the language that is available is not appropriate to the experience of being gendered as woman. "Nei rapporti sociali siamo in difficoltà," they write, "come in un mondo dove il meglio di noi non si sa."[203] The double meaning of this phrase is telling of the inseparability of language and relationality: the best part of ourselves is not known; the best part of ourselves does not know itself. Women are social beings and so, if we cannot make ourselves known to others, we cannot know ourselves; community and language are thus identified as critical components to the livability of women's lives.

The second section of *Più donne che uomini* is titled "Non si tratta più di discriminazione" ("It Isn't About Discrimination Anymore"). In this section they talk about "il blocco," what I have been calling "frustration." Within each woman there is "un blocco delle proprie capacità…qualcosa dentro di noi fa ostacolo dice di no," and prevents us from succeeding in the social and economic world.[204] It is a blockage of language and sexuality. The "qualcosa dentro di noi" is our sexed, gendered identity as women. The notion of linguistic and sexual frustration being deeply connected to woman's experience of social existence finds resonance in their claim that woman's

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motherhood in Italian feminist thought see Carol Lazzaro-Weis's "The Concept of Difference in Italian Feminist Though: Mothers, Daughters, Heretics," in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice,* ed. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2002) 31-49.

[200] "A group of women politically and affectively bonded." Libreria, "Più donne."

[201] "We fought…we discovered…But now something is missing." Libreria, "Più donne."

[202] "we don't have a way of translating into social reality, the experience, the knowledge and the value of being women." Libreria, "Più donne."

[203] "We struggle in our social relations, as though in a world where the best of ourselves is not known." Libreria, "Più donne."

[204] "a blockage of our abilities… something within us impedes us and tells us no". Libreria, "Più donne."

desire for social recognition cannot find a way of being satisfied – where satisfaction is a term very closely linked to the sexual and the erotic. This theme is developed a bit more in the following section title, "Voglia di vincere" ("Desire to Win"). This section is about recognizing and encouraging female desire for dominance and aggression and, as I will explain, marks a major difference between Italian feminist theory and North American feminism.

By and large, U.S. socio-political theories allow for the recognition and criticism of racism, sexism, religious intolerance and other forms of discrimination, in part because dominant narratives of American cultural and political history tell stories about challenging and overcoming the oppression of difference.[205] What is not permitted is a valorization – or even a recognition – of hierarchy as positive or just in any way. Instead, hierarchies are rewritten as differences, so that all differences can (theoretically at least) be equalized. This social and political mandate is written into the Constitution with the phrase "all men are created equal" and underscores the founding myth that the U.S. was created in response to and against the hierarchy of empire. To admit to the existence and even positive value of hierarchies would undermine the myth of the American Dream that says anyone can be anything, a myth that structures the economy and the juridical and legislative systems.[206] It is critical that we take into account the difference between American and Italian cultural attitudes towards difference as we think about how American texts and cultural symbols are redeployed and assigned new meaning in the Italian context. I also bring it up as a reminder of how ideologies of national belonging permeate all types of cultural production including feminist theory where questions of national identity are often overlooked or left undertheorized. I will develop this discussion in the latter portion of this chapter, but first I want to return to the question of hierarchy and difference in the Libreria's text.

The Libreria proposes engaging difference as a structuring and potentially productive aspect of lived experience; as a positive, intentional and generative recognition of hierarchy as a means to enacting real change. "La solidarietà," they explain, "è un elemento prezioso ma non basta. Servono rapporti diversificati e forti dove…il legame non sia più solo la difesa dell'interesse minimo comune."[207] They make

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[205] In the now seminal *Social Text* article, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" the authors take a critical look at the narrative of overcoming. Pointing to the discrepancy between legislative reform and lived experience, they ask what risks are run when racism is presented as a thing of past, a challenge overcome by the civil rights movement; how do we confront sexism today when all dominant narratives say it was defeated by feminism? The pervasiveness of these narratives in U.S. culture is indicative of a structuring myth that says difference is a source of personal strength that will, paradoxically, be transformed into sameness in the very moment it is used to combat oppression (the colony becomes the empire, the slave becomes equal to his master, in the eyes of the law women become men). [David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Muñoz, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23: 3–4 84-85 (2005) 1-17].

[206] Jasbir Puar engages the question of who can and cannot participate in the American Dream through her theory of homonationalism. Bringing together questions of race, class, gender and sexuality, Puar investigates how the biopolitical management of life demands certain social behaviors and adherence to cultural myths that support the ideological claims and political interests of the state; in particular, she asks who is excluded and what consequences are imposed on those who do not properly adhere to these rules of national belonging. [Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007)].

[207] "Solidarity is a precious thing, but it is not enough. We need strong, diverse relationships where…the bond is not just the defense of the lowest common denominator." Libreria, "Più donne."

the point, in other words, that solidarity in itself is not generative of change because, according to a principle of alliance based on solidarity, the *only* thing being fought for is the one trait or condition that all members share. If women are allied as equal women, the only possible goals of such an alliance can be the experience of womanhood that *all* women share – there is no space to recognize differences among women. I have explained their proposal in this language to highlight the parallels between Italian feminist theory of *affidamento*, and American feminist of color theories of intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality suggests that different systems of oppression (class, gender, race) work in conjunction with one another in shaping the experiences of the subject, and that the convergence of these different forces must be taken into account in order to properly understand the subject.[208] Both the Italian and the American theories criticize a previous trend in women's political action of reducing women to a common denominator – an ideal Woman: "Si tratta appunto della disparità tra donne, della necessità di renderla praticabile e di rendere praticabile l'affidarsi ad una propria simile. Nei nostri gruppi in genere non si ammette la disparità, in nome di un egualitarismo ereditato dai movimenti giovanili."[209] They want, in other words, to deploy the differences among women, to make use of the unequal positions of power and histories of experience that women bring to the experience of collective identification and political action. It is important to note, however, that the "disparità" the Libreria speaks of does not translate to a hierarchizing of racial or sexual or class differences because these differences are, on a fundamental level, not considered relevant to a discussion of women and sexual difference. The differences which can and should be recognized (according to this model) have to do with experience, age and social or symbolic success (how this is measured is a matter of much debate). It is around this tacit sifting of traits and conditions of existence that affidamento differs – on a theoretical and a practical level – from other theories of difference.

The philosophy of sexual difference that informs the Italian feminist thinking of the Libreria delle donne di Milano maintains that sexual difference is the fundamental experience of identity. Other experiences of identity are considered secondary – in the same way that Communist thought makes class the primary identity category and relegates gender and race to secondary traits and, consequently, secondary battles. As Kemp and Bono explain, "[i]t is in its particular concept of difference (and its emphasis on difference as it exists in the symbolic dimension), however, that Italian feminism remains distinct from British and American feminisms, which have often focused not on difference but on equality. For Italian feminism, in the equality-versus-difference debate, the conceptual opposite of difference is not equality, but the notion of equality as it has been described in the paradigms of western philosophical and political thought."[210] Italian feminism rejects equality as the ideal to strive for because, to borrow Cavarero's words, "l'ideale illuminista dell'ugualianza, tanto più per quanto riguarda le donne, fallisce nei fatti." She goes on to explain that, "si tratta di un effetto irrimediabile e del tutto coerente

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[208] For a detailed explanation and history of the theory of intersectionality and its place within Black feminist thought see Kimberlé Crenshaw's *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, (New York: New Press, 1995).

[209] "It is about disparity between women, about the need to make that a lived practice, and to make it possible for women to entrust themselves to other women. In our groups we don't usually admit to inequality, in the name of an egalitarianism inherited from the student movements". Libreria, "Più donne."

[210] Kemp, Sandra and Bono, *Italian Feminism,* 14-15.

al paradosso logico che informa il principio di uguaglianza."[211] Egalitarianism, in other words, makes all men equal, but in an equation in which women are always already absent:

> il principio di uguaglianza non compie il gesto intenzionalmente discriminatorio di posizionare le donne fuori dai suoi canoni, ma si limita a lavorare su un posizionamento della questione politica che, sin dai tempi di Aristotele, è già esclusivamente maschile. In parole semplici, la politica riguarda il *soggetto*, e il soggetto è di sesso maschile.[212]

To be equal is to erase the specificity of woman, to make woman like man without changing or challenging the specific maleness of the abstract, ideal subject-citizen. "Becoming equal," write Kemp and Bono, "thus means becoming like a man. But 'being like' is never going to be as good as 'being'; and, on the other hand, being different is unacceptable if it means being inferior. According to this belief, sexual difference must become a component of the struggle for social equality."[213] The specificity of gender is, for this strand of Italian feminist thought, the primary defining experience and must be recognized as such (rather than covered over by egalitarian ideals). Rosi Braidotti, taking a critical view of this foundational premise in the philosophy of sexual difference, points to the immutability and the ahistoricity of the concept of the subject in this formulation:

> L'ipotesi del femminismo della differenza sessuale è diversa: rifiuta di delegare alla storia o alla biologia il compito ingrato di spiegarci chi e cosa siamo. Non è necessario giustificare o spiegare questo nostro essere-donne o, peggio ancora, ribellarsi contro la condizione detta femminile. Bisogna invece assumerla come punto di partenza, come premessa essenziale all'elaborazione di un progetto politico.[214]

Braidotti is wary of the ways in which the philosophy of sexual difference risks promoting an essentialist view of the subject, a position that forecloses any discussion of gender as a mutable construct. Teresa De Lauretis also critiques the philosophy of sexual difference, warning against pursuing a "politics of unity" based on gender because to do so risks preempting the establishment of solidarity through the recognition of "an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and

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[211] "the ideal of equality, particularly as it concerns women, fails when it comes to the facts…it has to do with an unavoidable effect that goes hand in hand with the logical paradox that informs the principle of equality." Adriana Cavarero, and Franco Restaino, *Le filosofie femministe*, (Turin: Paravia Scriptorium, 1999) 122.

[212] "the principle of equality does not act in an intentionally discriminatory way, placing women outsides its boundaries, but it limits itself to working on a positioning of political questions that, since the times of Aristotle, have always been exclusively male. In simpler terms, politics are about the *subject*, and the subject is of the male sex." Cavarero, *Le filosofie*, 124.

[213] Kemp and Bono, *Italian Feminism,* 15.

[214] "The feminist theory of sexual difference is different: it refuses to give to history or to biology the task of explaining who and what we are. It is not necessary to justify or explain this being-women or, even worse, to rebel against the female condition. We must instead take it up as a place of departure, as a premise essential to the development of a political project." [Rosi Braidotti, *In metamorfosi: verso una teoria materialista del divenire*, ed. Maria Nadotti, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003), 192.]

class…across languages and cultures”.[215] However, she also insists that “differences among women may be better understood as differences within women,” thus echoing the primacy of gender expressed in *Più donne che uomini*.[216] The philosophy of sexual difference maintains that the differences among women, that make each woman different from the next, are secondary and must be tended to accordingly. This relegation of “other” differences as secondary was problematic because it did not provide a forum for negotiating and recognizing the impact of difference among women. The theory of *affidamento* was developed in response to this problem.

The Libreria proposes recognizing differences among women *in the service of* fostering systems of support and success that do not rely on and are not stifled by the structures of patriarchy: “La lotta contro la società patriarcale vuole che diamo forza attuale, nei nostri rapporti, a quell’antico rapporto [con la madre].”[217] The fundamental understanding of society is very much along binary gender lines, and the privileging of the relationship with the mother supports that because it is about offering an alternative (non-male) model of power: “Il riconoscimento della disparità tra donne…È la pratica di una contraddizione…e ciascuna arriva al senso del proprio valore potendo appoggiarsi, come elementi di forza, al valore di altre sue simili.”[218] The point they make here is critical to understanding how the notion of hierarchy is deployed in this text; the mother-daughter relationship is imaged as one of love and unequal esteem, where hierarchy and power do not translate to enmity and oppression. The goal is to foster relationships that inspire and transform: “Con il riconoscimento del più che un’altra può essere.”[219] Key to enabling this positive hierarchy is finding or creating the right language. The fundamental experience of sexual difference has been, up until this point, a negative experience because of the frustration that comes with not being able to describe (and thus to know) that experience of difference:

> nel disagio diffuso si avverte che la cosa che fa ostacolo, che non c’entra con i giochi sociali, è in definitiva il fatto di essere e avere un corpo di donna…si svolge tutto un lavorio per far stare il proprio corpo, un corpo di donna, in un posto dove quello che ha la parola è un essere di uomo.[220]

In the section titled “Estraneità” (“Foreignness”/ “Estrangement”), they discuss the consequences of woman’s estrangement from her own body and her own desires, where estrangement is understood as lack of language. The available language, they say – restating a claim articulated by feminist thinkers before them, including, most notably for the Italian context, Luce Irigaray – is man’s language; in other words, language takes

[215] Teresa De Lauretis, *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986) 9.
[216] De Lauretis, *Feminist Studies*, 14.
[217] “The fight against patriarchal society asks that we give actual strength, in our relationships, to that ancient relationship [with the mother].” Libreria, *Più donne*.
[218] “Recognizing the disparities among women…Is practicing a contradiction…and each one arrives at the understanding of her own value by being able to lean on and draw from, as a source of strength, the value of her peers.” Libreria, *Più donne*.
[219] “Through the recognition of what more another woman can become.” Libreria, *Più donne*.
[220] “in the widespread unease one notices that the thing which acts as obstacle, that does not belong to social games, is, definitively, the fact of being and having a woman’s body…a huge effort is expended on trying to make one’s body, a woman’s body, fit in a place where the one who has the word is a male being.” Libreria, *Più donne*.

man as its primary subject, ignoring the experience of sexual difference.[221] The problem of linguistic failure is a recurring theme in the texts I am considering; in fact, the creation of relationships and affective bonds within and across these texts is motivated, in part, by a desire to fill the linguistic gaps. "Articolare le emozioni fa parte del percorso per arrivare all'agio," *Più donne che uomini* tells us. "L'agio, infatti, è la terza cosa tra una selvaggia voglia di vincere e la sottomissione, tra le fantasie di onnipotenza e il fallimento."[222] Putting words to the experience of womanhood is, in other words, the critical step towards change for this text just as it is for Aleramo's Sibilla. The connection between linguistic expression and sexuality also remains central, though in the Libreria text it is less explicit. The use of the term "agio" ("ease"/"comfort") is, I am suggesting, a reminder of the inseparability of the body and the word; unease and comfort are physical *and* psychological conditions. The lack of "agio" is related, here, to the blockage or frustration I spoke of earlier: "il blocco della parola, ansia, il disagio, 'parlano' di una estraneità e di una resistenza. Si è trattato finora di una resistenza muta."[223] The problem, they claim, is that language – like liberal political philosophy – has been structured to reflect the experiences of an individual male subject: "il fatto di essere donna, nell'affermazione sociale, è irrilevante e tale deve risultare. Strana esistenza sociale la nostra, di esseri che non sono uomini ma non possono risultare donne."[224] There is, in other words, a profound lack of language for being a woman where woman is understood as different from man and socially, relationally informed.

This is the focus of the section named for Adrienne Rich's text "A Common World of Women." In this section they stress the connection between the in/ability to articulate or narrate oneself and the condition of gendered existence: "La frigidità di alcune ha rivelato, insieme alla violenza che la sessualità maschile esercita sulla donna, la muta resistenza del corpo di lei e ci ha spinte ad una lotta politica comune per esprimere la resistenza e cambiare il rapporto personale con l'uomo."[225] What this text is calling for, in other words, is the formation of a community of women that is sustained and gains force through the acts of recognition and admiration among women. The problematic assumption is that gender is the base unit of experience and identification. Put another way, there is no room in this equation for the woman who understands her gender to be so significantly shaped and transformed by her experience of race or class or sexuality that it comes to mean something different for her than for other women. This becomes particularly problematic when confronted with the social and political context that informs Rich's text and, as Kemp and Bono point out, the theory developed by the

[221] For a thoughtful discussion of Irigaray's impact on Italian feminist thought see: Maria Serena Sapegno's "Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A European Phenomenon and Its Specificities," and Rosi Braidotti's "Identity, Subjectivity and Difference: A Critical Genealogy," in *Thinking Differently*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 110-126 and 158-182.

[222] "Articulating our emotions is part of the path to arrive at ease. Ease, in fact, is the third thing between a savage desire to win and submission, between fantasies of omnipotence and failure." Libreria, *Più donne*.

[223] "the blockage of the work, anxiety, unease, all 'speak to' a feeling of foreignness and a resistance. Until now it has been a mute resistance." Libreria, *Più donne*.

[224] "the fact of being a women, in social affirmation, is irrelevant and must always be irrelevant. Ours is a strange social existence, for we are beings who are not men but cannot turn out to be women." Libreria, *Più donne*.

[225] "The frigidity of some has revealed, together with the violence that masculine sexuality exerts over women, the mute resistance of her body, and has pushed us to a common political battle for the expression of our resistance and to change the intimate relationship with man." Libreria, *Più donne.*

women of the Libreria makes use of Rich's "not always explicitly stated, assumption of her notion of a 'lesbian existence' and a 'lesbian continuum,' as opposed to lesbianism as a clinical concept, or as a matter of personal sexual preference." They go on to point out, however, that the Libreria has been accused "of silently passing by, rather than confronting Rich's own lesbianism."[226] In other words, the confrontation with the institution of heterosexuality that is so central to Rich's thinking is strikingly missing in the Italian reformulation.

Published in 1979 in the volume *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, Rich's "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women" speaks to the power of language and the dangers of silence. In particular, Rich advocates for lesbian women to give voice to and to narrate their experiences of sexuality as a way of validating that experience. Validation, she suggests, is found in the telling and hearing; the relating of women and between women. Although Rich focuses on her own experience as a lesbian woman, she develops a notion of lesbian existence that is not exclusively bound by sexual practice or desire, but is also concerned with shared knowledge among women. Traditional (patriarchal) social structures place men in positions of power over men *and* women, so that in order for women to succeed they must entrust themselves to the mentorship of a powerful man. Rich writes that while male mentorship of women may help individual women secure more lucrative jobs or otherwise "succeed" in tradition social structures, such mentorship only provides women with the tools to "live, work, perhaps succeed in the common world of men," leaving each woman isolated from other women.[227] Rich offers the notion of lesbian existence as an alternative to this system of isolated success. She develops this idea in her essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," where she writes, "[l]esbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women."[228] Lesbian existence is, in other words, posited as a strategic revolutionary technique, aimed at undermining patriarchal systems of oppression by establishing structures of mentorship and support among women. Key to establishing these gynocentric structures is, in Rich's formulation, articulating female experience and creating a practice of shared knowledge among women. Rich's call to action and articulation participates in a growing movement, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to critique the narrow focus of North American feminism. Rich and others like Audre Lorde, Norma Alarcòn and the Combahee River Collective upset the hegemony of the women's movement by demanding that (non-hetero) sexuality, (non-white) race and (non-wealthy) class be recognized as valid and different subject positions informing each woman's experience of gendered existence.[229] The women's movement, they argued,

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[226] Kemp and Bono, *Italian Feminism,* 13.
[227] Rich, "Conditions for Work," 210.
[228] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies* Reader, ed. Henry Abelove et al., (New York: Routledge, 1993), 239.
[229] As Griffin and Braidotti write, "The move in feminism from notions of universal sisterhood and equality of oppressedness within patriarchy, to an understanding of the role that differences among women play in the formation and maintenance of power structures and inequality that affect women differentially, was *inter alia* spearheaded by black American feminists" (Griffin and Braidotti, "Whiteness and European Studies," 222). For a more focused history of these transformations in the North American context see: Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000); bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking*

cannot claim to speak and fight for all women without recognizing that not all women experience gender, discrimination and oppression in the same way. It is from this intellectual, political revolution – waged through text and for linguistic and political specificity – that theories of simultaneity, border identity and eventually intersectionality were born. I mention the theory of intersectionality in particular because I see it as representing some of the most significant differences between the modes of Italian and American feminist thought that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. Developed in 1989 by Kimberly Crenshaw, the theory of intersectionality also predicts some of the major differences between current Italian and American approaches to gender politics and social activism, particularly with regards to queer theory and racial difference.

To borrow from Patricia Hill Collins, "[i]ntersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice."[230] The subject, in turn, is constituted by the intersection of these oppressions, so that the Black woman cannot be understood (or advocated for) without a consideration of her blackness *and* her womanness. The beginnings of this theory can be traced to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1981). This text, relevant to our discussion for a number of reasons, is widely regarded as marking a dramatic shift in U.S. feminist thought. Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* is a collection of writings from all genres by a diverse group of women. The common theme organizing each contribution is a critique of feminisms that equalize women; feminism that purports to be egalitarian is, they claim, based on an assumption of privilege and an unacknowledged racism that is masked over with a language of sisterhood.[231] This focus on difference *and* community is best captured in the words of Audre Lorde:

Black, (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

[230] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 18.

[231] In "Sisterhood and Friendship as Feminist Models," Maria Lugones offers a very useful explanation of the problematic consequences of using sisterhood as an organizing notion. Lugones explains that "[s]isterhood and friendship have been proposed by feminists as *the* relationships that women need to foster or recognize among ourselves if our liberation from sexist oppression is to end. Sisterhood is thought of sometimes in feminist discourse as a metaphorical ideal and sometimes as a metaphor for the reality of relationships among women" (Lugones, "Sisterhood," 135). Lugones goes on to make the point that sisterhood does not accurately describe the relationships between white women and women of color, nor does it mean the same in different cultural and linguistic contexts. The Italian feminist model proposed by the Libreria delle donne di Milano rejects the notion of sisterhood in favor of the mother-daughter model/metaphor precisely because they want to describe *and* appreciate the inequalities among women. American feminists, on the other hand, either praise or critique sisterhood as a metaphor/ideal because it makes all women the same (in name only); the difference lies in their attitude towards equality as an ethical and political goal.

In Italian we have the terms "sorellanza," and also "commara." The former is rarely heard, used almost exclusively by feminist groups in the 1970s precisely as a translation of the English "sisterhood;" it is a politically imbued term and carries little of the cultural understandings of family bonds that the English term suggests. "Commara," on the other hand, is an old term, used to describe the relationship of affection,

> As women, we have been taught to either ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.[232]

Lorde's words, calling for a rejection of the notion that difference is bad, and for the active formation of alliances among women, are pulled from her contribution to *This Bridge Called my Back* – an essay titled "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in which she stresses the power of language and the need for women to refuse the parameters of mediated liberation by creating new systems of support and revolution. "What began as a reaction to the racism of white feminists," write Moraga Anzaldúa in their introduction, "soon became a positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color to our *own* feminism. Mere words on a page began to transform themselves into a living entity in our guts."[233] The connection between language and body – between collective writing and collective action – that is described in this quote ("words on a page began to *transform* themselves into a living entity") resonates loudly with the visceral quality of Rame's play (the orgasmo running rampant down the street), and with the physical power and bond described between the words and women of Libreria ("si svolge tutto un lavorio per far stare il proprio corpo, un corpo di donna, in un posto dove quello che ha la parola è un essere di uomo").[234] Each text stresses the powerful ways language is used to control, exclude or determine a subject's experience of the world; each text also seeks, to differing degrees, to encourage their women readers to harness that power for themselves. Moraga and Anzaldúa write:

> We see the book as a revolutionary tool falling into the hands of people of all colors. Just as we have been radicalized in the process of compiling this book, we hope it will radicalize others into action. We envision the book being used as a *required* text in most women's studies courses. … we hope to eventually see this book translated and leave this country, making tangible the link between Third World women in the U.S. and throughout the world.[235]

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support and loyalty among women whether related or not. It refers to systems of kinship and community that exceed legally recognized affiliation. To call someone your "commara" does not denote a political alliance. Etymologically the word means co-mother and is often used to denote the godmother, but the term is also used more broadly to refer to all those women who act as your "support circle." In English we have no such word – we have friend and sister and neither of these are precise, which is why Lugones takes issues with "sisterhood" as a metaphor for relations among feminist women. [Maria Lugones, "Sisterhood and Friendship as Feminist Models," in *Feminism and Community,* ed. Penny Weiss et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 135-146.]

[232] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga et al. (New York: The Kitchen Table Press, 1981), 99.

[233] Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, "Introduction," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga et al. (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1981), xxiii.

[234] "A huge effort is expended trying to make one's body, a woman's body, fit in a place where the one who has the power to speak is a male being." Libreria, *Più donne.*

[235] Moraga and Anzaldúa, "Introduction," xxvi.

The hope expressed here that this text would become a widely read and used "revolutionary tool" did come true in the U.S. where it precipitated radical changes in the women's movement as well as in race-, ethnicity- and sexuality-based activism and where it has become "a required text in most women's studies courses." It did not, however, achieve the global potential they dreamt of and was never translated into Italian. I am lingering on *This Bridge Called My Back* in the context of this discussion of the Italian women's movement in part to stress the trends that were informing feminist thought around the world in this historical moment, and in part to highlight the differences. *This Bridge Called My Back* occupies roughly the same affective place in transforming American feminism that *Più donne che uomini* occupies in the Italian context. As Teresa De Lauretis writes about *This Bridge Called My Back:*

> [T]he shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade may be said to have begun…with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* …The shift in feminist consciousness that was initially prompted by works such as these is best characterized by the awareness and the effort to work through feminism's complicity with ideology, both ideology in the general (including classism or bourgeois liberalism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, and I would also add, with some qualifications, humanism) and the ideology of gender in particular – that is to say, heterosexism.[236]

De Lauretis correctly identifies in this text and its historical moment a shift in feminist consciousness that begins from a place of self-criticism. The liberal individual that had been the subject of earlier feminist consciousness as I discussed in the previous chapter, and the reductive egalitarianism of communist and democratic ideology were found lacking. Both texts emphasize their own textuality even as they demand a physical reorganization of the social and political world, and a privileging of relationships among women that are mindful of and shaped by the differences between women. The heavy influence of American feminist thought and practice on Italian feminism demands that we consider how these two texts relate to each other in their historical moment, and how they inform the current experience of the women's movement.

Central to the radical project of *This Bridge Called My Back* is the forging of relationships among women; as Moraga explains in the introduction to the 1983 edition: "we created a book which concentrated on relationships between women."[237] *This Bridge Called My Back* is, as Barbara Smith notes, "a document of and a catalyst for [the] coalitions" that formed among women of color at this time. [238] Published by Kitchen Table Press, the text performs the form of collectivity it seeks to promote and is, in this way, very much in dialogue with the textual communities I have been identifying in the

[236] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technology of Gender*: *Essays on Theory Film and Fiction*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 10.
[237] Cherrie Moraga, "Refugees of a World on Fire: Forward to the Second Edition," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga et al. (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1981).
[238] Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology,* (New Jersey: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), xliv.

Italian context. The 2003 text *Baby boomers*, to which I will turn in the next section, revives this tradition.

Baby boomers

Baby boomers, written as a collection of memoirs by four women involved in the Italian feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, is, I argue, a narrative performance of the practice of creating a space for female discourse described, in different ways and with different intentions and outcomes, in *Una donna sola* and *Più donne che uomini*. In *Baby boomers* we have a text that simultaneously occupies three temporal spaces: reflecting on the experiences of coming into feminist womanhood in the 1970s, putting that in dialogue with experiences of nation and gender in the 1990s and early 2000s, and projecting hopes and fears for what these categories will mean for women in a developing European Union and an increasingly connected global community. I have described three phases of this text in a chronologically progressive order, but this order is not necessarily reflected in the four essays that make up the text; each essay is organized around an affective impulse that resonates with the author's experience of history, feminism and community. In the separate essays and in the collectively authored introduction that comprise this text, we are, again and again, confronted with the project of collaboration so that each woman (as protagonist and narrator) effectively speaks through her text to the voices in the texts surrounding her own. It is in this harmony of voices that I see a performance of a particular kind of feminist citizenship.

The text begins with a declaration of intentions: "Noi…con *Baby boomers* abbiamo voluto tentare un ibrido fra la scrittura privata e quella collettiva."[239] The focus on the experience and practice of writing points to how deeply ingrained textuality and subjectivity have become in the experience of Italian feminism. "La parola," they explain, "è la nostra passione comune: strumento per la condivisione di esperienze e sentimenti, ma anche per la trasformazione di noi stesse e del mondo…ciascuna ha fatto sua quell'autocoscienza che il femminismo ha inventato come strumento politico e nuovo modo di costruire le relazioni umane."[240] By bringing up feminism and language within the first three paragraphs this text establishes the key terms and intellectual frameworks at work in shaping understandings of subjectivity and history in these narratives. These terms – "la scrittura," "la parola," "il femminismo" – and the power invested in each of them are the affective bonds that link these narratives to one another. These terms have surfaced as themes in all the other texts I have discussed; what makes *Baby boomers* unique is, in part the authors' conscious interest in the specificity of their historical moment. While Aleramo and De Céspedes describe the challenges of their times, and Ferri and the women of the Libreria give voice to changing concepts of the self, *Baby boomers* engages with questions of history, age and chronology in a critical and self-reflective way:

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[239] "We…with *Baby boomers* wanted to try a hybrid between private and collective writing." Rosi Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers: Vite parallele dagli anni Cinquanta ai cinquant'anni,* (Florence: Giunti, 2003), 5.
[240] "The word is our common passion: a tool for sharing experiences and emotions, but also for the transformation of ourselves and of the world…each one of us took as her own that consciousness-raising that feminism invented as a political tool and new way of structuring human relations." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers*, 6.

> Un denominatore comune…si è rivelato più significativo delle nostre differenze [di casa, famiglia, ecc.]. Siamo 'le ragazze di 50 anni' descritte da Marina Piazza, protagonista di quel profondo cambiamento introdotto dalla cosiddetta rivoluzione femminile, l'unica tra quelle avvenute nel Novecento che, secondo lo storico Eric Hobsbawm, ha avuto successo e non ha prodotto vittime.[241]

They identify their community as being, in part, defined by generation (and regeneration), where generation (and generative-ness) is understood as politically and ideologically specific, in addition to being marked by age: "Siamo parte di una generazione che ha attraversato a grande velocità la transizione da un passato pre-moderno e pre-industriale a un futuro fatto di rivoluzioni tecnologiche, *new economy* e globalizzazione."[242] Importantly, their understanding of generation is gender-specific.[243] They admit to sharing with their coeval male counterparts the condition of living in a globalized, new market world ("Una condizione che naturalmente condividiamo con i coetanei maschi"), but, unlike their male peers, the women in this generation know themselves in relation to the women of previous generations: "ma…[noi dobbiamo] imparare a essere donne, compagne, mogli, amanti, madri diverse da com'erano le nostre, e da come loro ci avevano insegnate a diventare."[244] The theme of knowing oneself in relation to another woman and another generation of women is central to this text and is an elaboration of the project of creating relationships of knowledge among women that I have identified in *Una donna sola* and *Più donne che uomini*.

Baby boomers, however, distinguishes itself from the other texts I've discussed in this chapter because, although it is collaboratively written, it also takes the form of autobiography, thus challenging assumptions of what it means to participate in a collective endeavor as well as our expectations of autobiography.[245] In the previous chapter, I discussed some of the tensions that accompany women's autobiographical and life-writing practices in the context of the fictional or semi-fictional literary works of Aleramo, De Céspedes and Ferri, where the line between lived experience and creative invention was blurred and invited unresolvable comparisons between author and

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[241] "One common denominator…showed itself to be more significant than our differences [of home, family, etc.]. We are 'the girls of the Fifties' as described by Marina Piazza, protagonists of that profound transformation initiated by the so-called female revolution, the only revolution of the Twentieth century that, according to the historian Eric Hobsbawn, was successful and left no victims." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers,* 6.

[242] "We are part of a generation that has crossed, at great speed, the transition from a pre-modern, pre-industrial past to a future made up of technological revolutions, *new economy* and globalization." Emphasis in the original. Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers,* 6.

[243] It is worth noting that the Italian word for "gender" ("genere") is contained within "generazione." Braidotti offers an interesting look at the ways in which the terms for "sex" and ""gender" have been differently, and problematically, translated and transposed across political and linguistic borders. Rosi Braidotti, "The Uses and Abuses of the Sex/Gender Distinction in European Feminist Practices," in *Thinking Differently*, ed. Gabrielle Griffin et al (London: Zed Books, 2002) 285-310.

[244] "but…[we have to] learn to be women, companions, wives, lovers, mothers in ways that are different from our own mothers, and from what they taught us to become." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers,* 6.

[245] For more on the expectations and gendered traditions of autobiographical writing, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Kristi Siegel, *Women's Autobiographies, Culture, Feminism*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

narrator/protagonist. In the case of *Baby boomers*, the authors make a claim to fact (rather than fiction), aligning themselves entirely with the voices and bodies in their text. In this sense, *Baby boomers* is the most traditionally styled example of autobiographical writing considered in this dissertation. In another sense, however, *Baby boomers* destabilizes the genre by toying with and pushing at the limits of the "auto" – of the solitary, singular subject of biographical narrative. "Per tutte noi," they write, "la narrazione autobiografica rappresentava una sfida: l'abbiamo intesa come un bilancio individuale e collettivo insieme; una mescolanza felice di parole e silenzi, d'autocoscienza e di scrittura solitaria."[246] In Rame and Fo's project of collaborative writing, both names appears as individual authors but they refuse to identify who is responsible for what, blurring all the lines of individual authorship within the text. *Sottosopra verde: Più donne che uomini* does away with individual names entirely, speaking always in the plural but signing with one name, as the Libreria delle donne di Milano. *Baby boomers*, on the other hand, notes the name of each contributor as author and what exactly she wrote while, at the same time, reflecting on the process of collaboration, taking into consideration the relationship between author and reader. In this sense, I hear an echo between *Baby boomers* and *Una donna* that goes beyond the parallel of life-writing; the engagement with the (imagined) reader that inform Aleramo's text resurfaces here as an engagement with a reader who is also an author. In other words, each author is writing her life (is narrating herself) in dialogue with the other authors of *Baby boomers.* This is a new form of relationality and of life-writing that is possible in this moment of feminist writing only because of (and thanks to) the importance the women's movement has always given to writing. This tradition resurfaces in the introduction, where they describe literature and reading as a shared formative experience:

> Dietro la scelta di vivere insieme le nostre storie personali c'è anche la comune appassionata lettura di alcuni libri importanti, come l'autobiografia di Simone de Beauvoir e il *Diario di Anna Frank*, grande autoritratto di una ragazzina che fece della scrittura di sé un messo di sopravvivenza e di testimonianza. E soprattutto, abbiamo condiviso la proposta avanzata con *Autoritratto di gruppo* da Luisa Passerini, che per prima ha realizzato un'autobiografia generazionale scritta da più voci, in quel caso da lei stessa raccolte e intersecate alle proprie vicende.[247]

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[246] "For all of us, autobiographical narration represents a challenge: we understood it as a balance between individual and collective; a happy medley of words and silences, and consciousness-raising and solitary writing." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers*, 7.

[247] "Behind the decision to collectively live our personal stories, is also the common, impassioned reading of certain crucial texts, like Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, important self-portrait of a young girl who used life-writing as a strategy of survival and testimony. And above all, we shared the proposal put forth in Luisa Passerini's *Group Self-Portrait*, that was the first text to realize an autobiography of a generation, written by many voices, in that case collected by Passerini and interspersed with her personal experiences." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers,* 7.
I will discuss Passerini's text at length in Chapter Three. I decided to discuss that text in the context of feminist revisions of historical and other discipline-specific texts rather than in this chapter because, although Passerini's text does describe a collective history – as the *Baby boomers* make clear – it does so through the specific experiences of one woman in a way that is, I argue, a reflection of a move away from the collective that is particular to the 1980s.

The closeness these women experience through the texts they read is another side of what I have been calling feminist affect. Whether read independently or together, a community is created through the shared knowledge that other women are reading and being energized by the same text. The awareness of sharing an affective response to a text (even if it isn't the same response) is in itself generative in different temporal directions simultaneously: a sense of shared memory is created through the reading so that the language and events of the text make up a collective past experience that is lived in the present and that paves the way for a future described, imagined and defined by the textually invoked community.

Life-writing and reading are identified, in this text, as tools for women's self-knowledge and for the transmission of feminist affect, both of which are necessarily acts of socio-political revolution: "un'apertura al mondo e in particolare alle donne più giovani, attraverso un discorso che colloca ancora una volta esperienze personali e intime in uno spazio storico: un gesto ancora una volta politico."[248] The life-stories conveyed in *Baby boomers* are of girls growing up to be feminist women, some have families, some do not, all reflect on their relationship to Italy as a locus of culture, a political nation and a memory of a particular kind of feminism. "Siamo nate," they write, combining their lives into one chronological narrative, "alla metà degli anni Cinquanta in un'Italia alle soglie del boom economico e cresciute nell'Europa divisa dal muro di Berlino e dalla Guerra Fredda. Studentesse poco più che adolescenti durante il '68, femministe dagli anni Settanta, infine *middle youth* qui e ora, al passaggio verso il nuovo millennio."[249] A recurrent theme in this text is, as the quote suggests, a need to put Italian feminism in dialogue with other global feminisms and a push to rethink the shape and focus of Italian feminism in light of the (then-emerging) European Union.[250] The local-global dynamic is complicated and, in many ways, deceptive, as it helps reinforce the notion of local specificity and difference from an Other, while simultaneously collapsing that difference by pointing out that the global is a collection of locals. In their discussion of contemporary transnational feminism, Grewal and Kaplan write:

> How one separates the local from the global is difficult to decide when each thoroughly infiltrates the other. Global-local as a monolithic formation may also erase the existence of multiple expressions of "local" identities and concerns and multiple globalities. In this particular way, global-local binaries dangerously correspond to the colonialism-

[248] "a window to the world, and in particular to younger women, through a discussion that, once again, locates personal and intimate experience in a historical context: once again, a political move." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers*, 8.

[249] "We were born in the middle of the Fifties in an Italy that was at the beginnings of the economic boom, and in a Europe that was divided by the Berlin Wall and the Cold War. Students just barely entering adolescence during '68, feminists in the Seventies, and finally *middle youth* here and now, at the passage to the new millennium." Braidotti et al., *Baby boomers*, 7. The term "middle youth" is a mistranslation (on behalf of the authors) of the American term "middle age."

[250] In the decade since this text was published the European Union has gone, according to many, from being an early realization of a widely-shared socialist-inspired dream, to a fragile and threatening mega-corporation. A collection of thoughtful essays on the shape and trajectory of the European Union, particularly as it concerns women, is *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 2002).

> nationalism model that often leaves out various subaltern groups as well as the interplay of power in various levels of sociopolitical agendas.[251]

Grewal and Kaplan caution against a local identification that is constructed against an abstract notion of the global because this type of identification is, they argue, a tool of the empire and patriarchy that has been used to keep women separate and subordinate, anchored to the geographical specificity of their differences. The *Baby boomers* come at this question in a less direct way, giving voice to some of the emotional and conceptual struggles that accompany feminist identification in an increasingly transnational politics. Each woman situates herself differently in this global context. Tagliavini and Braidotti begin with place – ascribing certain parts of their identities to the influence and specificity of place. Braidotti links the politically unstable, multicultural history of Friuli to her sense of transience and mutability: "Il fatto di essere cresciuta vicino a una frontiera mi ha lasciato in eredità un forte sentimento d'instabilità, oltre che la sensazione netta di poter vivere molte vite."[252] Braidotti concludes her piece by proposing her theory of nomadism as a feminist philosophy that carries strong echoes of the "instabilità" and *possibilità* that inform her early descriptions of Friuli.[253] Tagliavini traces her commitment to social work back to her youth in "Emilia Rossa" where she learned "una specie di modello socialdemocratico alla svedese nel cuore dell'Italia del nord."[254] She explains her current work at the Centro Documentazione delle Donne in Bologna as being a continuation of the work she saw her grandmother do:

> Questa idea della giustizia sociale, del fare per gli altri, era centrale nella vita di mia nonna che aveva fatto dell'insegnamento, e dunque della battaglia per l'alfabetizzazione di massa, non solo la sua professione, ma quasi una vera e propria fede. Adoravo la nonna senza riserve e credo di avere molto profondamente assorbito fin da piccolo la sua idea di militanza civile o di cittadinanza attiva, che avrei scoperto più tardi teorizzata negli scritti della sua coetanea Hannah Arendt.[255]

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[251] Inderpal Grewal, and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 11.

[252] "The fact of having grown up near a border left me with a strong sense of instability, as well as the concrete feeling of being able to live many lives." Braidotti, "Una vita a zig zag," 139.

[253] Braidotti proposes nomadism as a mode of feminist theory that responds to the transnational experience of the contemporary subject: a subject that is in constant flux. In a performance of transnational thinking Braidotti draws on both gender theory and the philosophy of sexual difference in her effort to develop a theory that speaks to the constitutive differences among women without letting go of the political and biological condition of being, or becoming-woman. Her theory is inspired by rhizomatic approach of Deleuze and Guattari and is aimed at creating beyond-national feminist alliances that will work for global conceptual and structural change rather than what she sees as the limiting practice of nationally bound legislative-focused feminist efforts. Braidotti develops this theory in *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and again in *Thinking Differently* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

[254] "a sort of model of Swedish-style socialist democracy in the heart of northern Italy." Tagliavini, "Una giovinezza emiliana," 9.

[255] "This idea of social justice, of doing for others, was central to my grandmother's life; she had made teaching, and therefore the fight against illiteracy, not just her profession but her mission. I adored my grandmother without reservation and I believe I have deeply absorbed, beginning in childhood, her idea of civil militancy, or active citizenship, that I would later discover theorized in the writing of her peer Hannah Arendt." Tagliavini "Una giovinezza emiliana," 14-15.

Tagliavini moves from her grandmother to Arendt, connecting the two in her own affective and intellectual development and conveying how, for her, citizenship and civic duty are deeply linked to gender and women role models. The identification of women role models is a recurrent theme in each of the four essays and one that resonates with the practice of *affidamento*, but here the relationship with the role model is not always hierarchical. The *Baby boomers*, writing after the publication of the Libreria's manifesto, are in many ways concerned with distinguishing themselves from that style of feminism. One of the ways this comes through is, I am suggesting, in their different relation to images of a feminist past and to representations of feminist power.

One image that is particularly recurrent in this respect is that of finding power and self-confidence in groups of women – an image that is longed for in the other texts I have discussed but strikingly absent or nascent at best. Sapegno finds her powerful communities at a young age, in the Scouts: "la comunità tutta femminile [degli scout] non è una famiglia, ma un pezzo di società governata da regole. Ognuna ha il suo ruolo e le sue responsabilità e l'accento è sull'avventura, sullo sviluppo della personalità e dell'autonomia, in relazione alle altre."[256] Sapegno's description of her participation in the Scouts emphasizes the ways in which individuality (self-realization and autonomy) is now understood as being dependent on and relating to other women (or girls). Her awareness of the necessity and benefit of this reciprocal dynamic is, I have been suggesting, a feature of the feminism of her historical moment, dependent on and engaged with the texts and affective residue of previous generations. Another recurrent scene where the power in communities of women is identified is precisely in (re)reading texts by women. In Mazzanti's recollection of reading as a young girl she describes an interesting relationship both with what and with *whom* she reads:

> agli albori dei Sessanta, troverò un'amica che mi è complice nella passione per la carta stampata … La complicità libresca con la mia amica mi fa capire meglio quello che avevo intuito fin da piccola: io appartengo a quello che leggo, e ancor di più a quello che la lettura mi suscita dentro, parole nuove, scenari e invenzioni essenziali per poter vivere anche nel resto dell'esistenza.[257]

Mazzanti's sense of "belonging" to what she reads reinforces the feminist premise that affective recognition, gendered identification and knowledge production are deeply rooted in and connected to the experience of literature. "[L]eggere e pensare sono il modo in cui mi riconosco, e chiedo agli altri di confermarmi," writes Mazzanti,[258] expressing the search for recognition and identification – for recognizable representations of the self

[256] "the exclusively female community [of the scouts] is not a family, but a section of society governed by rules. Each girl has her role and her responsibilities and the focus is adventure and the development of character and independence in relation to others." Sapegno, "Emotional rescue," 95.

[257] "at the dawn of the Sixties I would find a friend who is also my accomplice in my passion for the printed word…The literary complicity with my friend helps me better understand what I had intuitively gathered since childhood: I belong to what I read, and, even more so, to what reading provokes within me, new words, scenarios and inventions are critical to the ability to survive and be able to live the rest of my existence." Mazzanti, "La gente sottile," 53.

[258] "Reading and thinking are the ways in which I recognize myself, and ask others to recognize me." Mazzanti, "Le gente sottile," 53.

– that underlie the importance of literature in the history of the women's movement. Mazzanti explains the personal and political significance of reading about women:

> Le biografie, le memorie, i romanzi in cui le donne del passato infrangevano le proprie ambizioni contro la solida durezza della realtà e spegnevano le energie in sacrifici, remore e paure, mi procuravano la nitida percezione di una perdurante identità di schemi fra loro e noi, e l'altrettanto netta certezza che 'noi' non ci saremo cadute, in quella trappola da vittime paralizzate, anzi avremmo riscattato perfino le antenate, ideali e carnali, dietro le nostre bandiere di ribelli e vagabonde.[259]

What Mazzanti is describing is, in other words, a refusal to let the women of literature be women of the past – a refusal to let the past be a thing unchangeable.

Interestingly, the two texts that are mentioned repeatedly are both autobiographies: Simone de Beauvoir's and Anne Frank's. Strikingly different in age of author and tone, these stand out also because they remind us, once again, of the extent to which the Italian cultural gaze was focused abroad beginning in the 1970s; as Sapegno writes: "nelle mura dell'Italietta si è aperta ormai una breccia da cui inesorabilmente passano informazioni."[260] There is virtually no mention of any Italian women writers, despite the fact that all of the contributors have written about or worked on the preservation and (re)distribution of writing by Italian women of all generations.[261] Tagliavini and Braidotti both mention Franca Rame, but only in passing and as Fo's partner rather than as a female role-model in her own right. What is stressed, however, is the influence of foreign cultures. De Beauvoir and Frank, as well as Woolf are pointed to as the texts that inspired personal awakenings – that made each reader aware of herself as a woman and as limited by virtue of that gender specificity. The U.S., on the other hand, is continually identified as the source of revolutionary inspiration for feminist activism.

Tagliavini, like the women of the Libreria, mentions Adrienne Rich as an important figure in her intellectual and political transformation. Unlike the Libreria, however, Tagliavini looks to Rich for help in reconciling the split she experienced between her identity as an individual and as a mother: "Per fronteggiare queste complicate ambivalenze mi è stata di grande aiuto Adrienne Rich, una studiosa femminista straordinariamente intelligente che di figli maschi ne ha fatti ben quattro e che sui molteplici, complessi, contradditori vissuti della maternità ha scritto un libro

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[259] "Biographies, memoirs, novels in which women of the past had their ambitions clash against the hard wall of reality, and they expended energy in sacrifice, remorse, fear, these inspired in me the clear perception of an enduring identity of plans between them and us, and the equally clear certainty that 'we' wouldn't fall into that trap of paralyzed victims, that we would instead avenge our ancestors, imagined and real, under our rebel flags." Mazzanti, "La gente sottile," 65.

[260] "In the walls of our little Italy a crack had opened through which information was tirelessly flowing." Sapegno, "Emotional Rescue," 101.

[261] Sapegno is well known for her studies of the Petrarchian poetess Vittoria Colonna and the novelist Dacia Maraini, to mention just a few. Roberta Mazzanti is the vice president of the Società Italiana delle Letterate (Italian Society of Women in Literature) and the original director of Guinti publishing's Astrea Serie which focuses exclusively on women's literature. Annamaria Tagliavini is the director of the Biblioteca delle Donne (Women's Library) in Bologna. Rosi Braidotti is famous for her persistent engagement with the writings of Italian feminist philosophers Adriana Cavarero and Luisa Muraro.

fondamentale: *Nato di donna*."[262] This use of Rich is one way in which the authors of *Baby boomers* represent a very different strand of Italian feminism than do the women of the Libreria. There have been some significant and dramatic ruptures between the feminists of the Libreria delle Donne di Milano and the feminist groups of Bologna and Rome (represented here by Tagliavini and Sapegno respectively) as well as those abroad (Braidotti and De Lauretis most notably).There are a number of reasons for the isolation of the Milan group, but what interests me here are the ways in which American cultural revolutions of the 1970s were differently absorbed, incorporated and transformed by each group. My focus on the American influence is, as I suggested previously, driven by a desire to rethink the role of the Italian women's movement's current struggle with racism, xenophobia and an increasingly diverse population. I will return to these questions in the final chapter of this dissertation, but this conversation cannot be thoughtfully approached without first recognizing the powerful role of American culture on the global scale in the social, political and economic transformations of the last four decades.

As I have suggested, the attention to race (racial difference and oppression) is one factor that has characterized North American feminism for the last few decades and one that is strikingly absent, or nascent, in the Italian context. Recoded as ethnicity and masked by the racialization of culture, race plays an undeniable strong role in the organization of political and philosophical thought in Europe. As Griffin and Braidotti write in a 2002 essay on whiteness, "[t]he culturally constructed and biologically seemingly validated racism which has informed, at least intermittently, the politics of most, if not all, European countries over the past two hundred years is an issue which we as Europeans have not even begun to address adequately."[263] It is my contention that, perhaps because of the centuries of cultural-racial conflation, this issue cannot be addressed without also engaging in a profound reflection on the significance of national identity and that, conversely, the question of national identity cannot be thoughtfully confronted without also confronting the ongoing history of racism in Europe. In the context of this discussion of *Baby boomers* we are, therefore, faced with the trifold question of what it means to be Italian, and how race and gender impacts that meaning. To borrow again from Griffin and Braidotti:

> Many people think and feel, without question, that they belong to a particular and identifiable group. But the cost of such homogenization is high, and often particularly high for women. Virginia Woolf's dictum 'As a woman I have no country' suggests both the invisibilization of women within (nationalist) politics and the appropriation and objectification of women for such politics. Under the mantle of homogenization women thus experience their subjection and their vulnerability.[264]

In the life-writings of the *Baby boomers,* we see the beginnings of a new mode of inquiry; questions about national belonging (and invisibilization) arise in the context of

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[262] "As I confronted these complicated ambivalences I found immense help in Adrienne Rich, an extremely intelligent feminist scholar who had four male children, and who wrote about the multiple, complex and contradictory experiences of maternity in her foundational text: *Of Woman Born.*" Tagliavini, "Una giovinezza emiliana," 44.

[263] Griffin and Braidotti, "Whiteness," 226.

[264] Griffin and Braidotti, "Whiteness," 230.

debates on race politics and new forms of civic justice, but where in the U.S. these questions led many towards a generative black feminism, in the Italian context the racial is, once again, subsumed and (mis)translated to fit a European model of feminist inquiry.

For Mazzanti, coming of age in Milan in the 1977, political awareness and revolutionary inspiration are directly linked to learning about U.S. civil rights:

> La passione politica, il coinvolgimento intellettuale, la sensazione di un'acqua rinnovatrice nella quale potevo nuotare anch'io, mi arrivarono dagli Stati Uniti – prima dai libri, dai documenti, dalla cultura sedimentata in parole scritte, note, immagini, poi dalle persone, dagli spazi, da quello che scorreva nelle vene dell'America e che vedevo e ascoltavo direttamente. Mi ero innamorata della Balena Bianca, del Potere Nero, degli anarco-sindacalisti dell'IWW, avevo ritrovato gli Indiani adorati da bambina sotto le pelli più 'corretto' dei Nativi.[265]

Mazzanti does not mention the accomplishments of American feminists, but is inspired instead by the stories of African American, Native American and working class Americans struggling for equal rights: "l'America prepotenza capitalista e imperialista era contemporaneamente la terra della protesta, delle grandi lotte sindacali, della tensione fra assimilazione e diversità, fra massificazaione e individualismo."[266] In the context of the chaotic and increasingly violent Italy of the 1970s, Mazzanti draws inspiration from these stories of American struggle and tension. Sapegno identifies the beginnings of this trend of American influence on Italian youth and Italian revolution in the late 1960s, first through an infiltration of clothing and language: "se per un verso c'è ancora il 'tailleurino', d'altra parte sono cominciati i mercati 'americani', dove si vende cioè roba americana, con i primi jeans, i maglioni e i giacconi da marinaio, tutta una serie di oggetti d'abbigliamento rigorosamente *unisex*: parola nata allora e del tutto sconosciuta prima, come termine e, ben più significativamente, come concetto."[267] And then with the unprecedented response to war in Vietnam: "Con il Vietnam la politica inventa la sua versione giovanile, non del tutto coincidente con i movimenti legati ai partiti."[268] Like Mazzanti, Sapegno points to the African American civil rights movement as a source of inspiration for Italian feminism: "con l'aiuto iniziale delle riflessioni sul lavoro casalingo non retribuito e ancor più con quelle del movimento dei *Black Americans*, si compie il

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[265] "Political passion and intellectual commitment, the feeling of a rejuvenating elixir in which I too could swim, all this came to me from the United States – at first from books, documents, from the culture sedimented in written words, notes, images, and then from people, from spaces, from that thing that ran in the veins of America and that I saw and heard directly. I had fallen in love with the White Whale, with Black Power, with the anarcho-syndicalists of the First World War, I had rediscovered the Indians so loved as a child under the new, more 'correct' name of Natives." Mazzanti, "La gente sottile," 72.

[266] "America, capitalist and imperialist superpower, was also the land of protest, of huge union battles, of tensions between assimilation and diversity, between the masses and individualism." Mazzanti, "La gente sottile," 73.

[267] "if, on the one hand, there is still the 'tailleur,' on the other hand there are new 'American' markets, where American things are sold: the first jeans, sweaters and sailor coats, a whole assortment of decidedly *unisex* clothing – a word born then and entirely unknown previously as a term and, even more importantly, as a concept." Sapegno, "Emotional Rescue," 101.

[268] "With Vietnam, a new youthful politics comes into being, and it does not entirely map onto movements tied to political parties." Sapegno, "Emotional Rescue," 102.

salto più difficile, quello che fa davvero la differenza: accettare di essere una donna."[269] But here again there is a distortion of the US race debate:

> Per arrivare al rovesciamento forte 'Donna è bello' (*Black is beautiful* era il grido dei neri e *Donna è bello* si intitolò un fascicolo pubblicato a Milano che conteneva le traduzioni di alcuni documenti del femminismo europeo e nordamericano) era necessario e imprescindibile il fatto, semplice e terribile, di accettare una collocazione socialmente e simbolicamente svalutata e pensarsi perciò come appartenere a un genere, e di conseguenza soggetta a un destino potenziale, che si era sempre percepito come una condanna.[270]

Race is effectively erased from the equation once the slogans are adopted and appropriated by Italian feminism, much as sexuality, race and context vanish in the Libreria's reformulation of Rich's insights.

Braidotti, unlike her peers, came of age while living abroad (in Australia) and has a very different relationship to both the American and the Italian context. Recalling the moment she left Italy as an adolescent, she writes: "il 15 maggio del 1970 la mia vita italiana si spezzò, anzi venne frantumata nello spazio di alcune ore…da un interminabile tragitto in nave fino a Melbourne, in Australia."[271] This melodramatic scene conveys Braidotti's attitude towards national identity as something fragile and malleable, something she comes to define in terms of affective and political, ideological belonging rather than being strictly a matter of inherited birthplace:

> L'italiano, rinchiuso nel cerchio magico della mia intimità, preso d'assedio dalla prepotente e onnipresente lingua inglese, non ebbe mezzi per crescere a svilupparsi come avrebbe dovuto e come io avrei voluto: si potenziò, ma solo a circoli chiusi. Ci volle del tempo per liberarlo e fu solo negli anni Ottanta, a seguito del mio 'riaggancio' all'Italia, voluto e sostenuto dalle amiche del movimento femminista e specialmente da Anna Maria Crispino, che la lingua rinchiusa in me ha ricominciato a respirare e a crescere.[272]

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[269] "with the initial help of discussions about unpaid housework and, even more so, the thinking of the *Black Americans*, the most difficult leap is accomplished, the one that truly makes a difference: the acceptance of being a woman." Sapegno, "Emotional Rescue," 107. Italics in the original.

[270] "To arrive at the conceptual upheaval "Woman is beautiful' (*Black is beautiful* was the chant of the blacks and *Woman is beautiful* is the title of a newsletter published in Milan that had translations of some documents of European and North American feminism), it was first necessary and unavoidable to accept the terrible and simple fact of belonging to a socially and symbolically devalued gender, and, consequently, to be subjected to a possible destiny that had always been understood as a sentencing." Sapegno, "Emotional Rescue," 107. Italics in the original.

[271] "On May 15th 1970 my Italian life was broken, actually it shattered in the span of a few hours…by an endless voyage on a ship all the way to Melbourne, Australia." Braidotti, "Una vita a zig zag," 156.

[272] "Italian, locked in the magic circle of my intimate being, taken hostage by the domineering and omnipresent English language, did not have a way to grow and develop as it should have and as I would have wanted it to: it had potential, but only in closed circles. It took time to free it, and it was only in the Eighties, following my 'reattachment' to Italy, wanted and supported by my friends in the feminist movement, particularly by Anna Maria Crispino, that the language locked in me began to breathe and grow." Braidotti, "Una vita a zig zag," 160.

The question of national belonging in Italy is, as I have suggested, very much at the heart of current clashes and debates over im/migration and cultural difference; debates that have largely been ignored by the Italian women's movement – particularly in its heyday in the 1970s and early 1980s which comprise the focus of both this chapter and of *Baby boomers.* Braidotti's attention to the fragmentary and contextually dependent affective dimensions of national identity invite the question of how Italian identity has been understood by the Italian women's movement. What it means to be Italian has, by and large, been undertheorized by the Italian women's movement; certain texts, like the ones I have discussed in these two chapters, have been marked as "Italian" women's literature and have been deployed as strategic inspirational texts for the movement, without giving room to consider who is excluded from this image of "Italian" identity. In the short history of Italy's nation-state, language and shared cultural memory have been held up as the marker of national unity.[273] In the following chapter, I will discuss the ways the women's movement has shattered the myth of shared cultural memory by pointing to women's exclusion from the great narratives of Italian history. The final chapter then asks the question of how race is implicated in the notion of language as national identifier by considering texts written by women in Italy who come to Italian as a second language, as well as texts that take the language beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

In this chapter, I have identified an unstable, self-transforming trend in the textualization of the subject that responds to shifts in the focus of feminist political thinking of the latter half of the last century. In particular I have sought to highlight a shift from man/woman relationships to woman/woman relationships; a shift from individual to collective power; and I have attempted to show that these shifts are reflective of the socio-economic and political climate in Italy and abroad that, in the twenty years between 1965 and 1985, first began to resemble the global experience of political capitalism we know today. I began with term "collective awakening" to stress the ways in which these shifts are dependent on and constitutive of new modes of self-recognition that cannot be thought without a feeling of obligation to the social. In other words, the self that occupies the life-story becomes, in this moment and in the narratives discussed here, defined by a feminist citizenship that rejects individualism and moves forward in relation to the selves and stories around her.

[273] For more on the question of language and national unity in the Italian context see: Maurizio Vitale, Maurizio, *La questione della lingua*, (Palermo: Palumbo, 1960).

CHAPTER THREE:
E INTANTO LE DONNE

"a theory of the relationship between experience, social power and resistance is precisely one possible definition of feminist"[274] – Teresa De Lauretis

To theorize experience is an attempt to make sense of existence. The texts I have discussed thus far approach that process by way of narrative; by telling stories of women's lives the authors practiced a kind of theory-making that aimed at finding the factors – and exposing the unreasonableness – that structure women's experience. The specificity of that experience of being gendered as woman has been, as Teresa de Lauretis suggests in the quote above, a quality of resistance (and subjugation) and struggle with and for power. In a subtle but powerful way, De Lauretis asks that we define "feminist" as theory, as a process of sense-making concerned with the gendered experience of women's relationship to power. In this chapter, I want to put this definition of feminist to work in a study of a different, less typically "theoretical" arena: history. This chapter is a study of three texts, *Autoritratto di gruppo* (*Group Self-Portrait*) (1988), by Luisa Passerini; *Piccole italiane: un raggiro durato vent'anni* (*Little Italian Women: A Twenty Year Detour*), (1994) collectively authored by a host of women; and *Le donne fanno paura* (*Women are Scary*) (1997), by Chiara Valentini.[275] I am grouping these three texts together because I identify in each what I am calling "feminist revisionism," by which I mean a two-pronged critique aimed at revising nationally shared narratives of Italian history while also revealing the norms and structures at work in different disciplines by which misogynist narratives of national identity are produced and upheld. Put in simpler terms, each text tells stories that have been left out of official histories – stories of women – and in doing so sheds light on the reasons for these exclusions.

Using revision to convey social critique is a practice with a long tradition in the women's movement; revision of the literary canon, and of literary norms and genres has – as I discussed in previous chapters – been a key feature of feminist work. What is at stake in this continuous return to revision is women's inclusion in the production of knowledge. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, "given the clear masculine orientation of the humanities and social sciences, feminists may have been disappointed by the apparent absence and exclusion of women and femininity from most discourses constituting the so-called 'sciences of Man.' Not content with merely noting those exclusions, feminists today pose the question of what can be done to enable us to participate in knowledges and knowledge production *as women*."[276] Feminist revisionism is the answer to Grosz's question of what can be done; the particular qualities that distinguish feminist revisionism are its ability to act in multiple temporal directions at once, working at revising narratives of the past while simultaneously pointing to future modes of production and investigation. Teresa de Lauretis stresses this complex temporality in her description of a

[274] Teresa De Lauretis, "Upping the Anti (*sic*) in Feminist Theory," *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 364.
[275] The title used in the English-language publication Passerini's text reads: *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*, adding a national and temporal specificity absent from the original.
[276] Barbara Caine, Elizabeth Grosz, and Marie de Lepervanche, *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledges*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin: 1988), 55.

feminist theoretical optic: “it is an admittedly feminist project of ‘re-vision’, where the specifications *feminist* and *re-vision* already signal its historical location, even as the (re)vision projects itself outward geographically and temporally (universally) to recover the past and to claim the future.”[277] De Lauretis is describing what I understand to be the performative element of feminist revisionism, where the recovery of the past is done by way of enacting new methodologies that call attention to the ideological foundations that inform them. This two-fold task, of critiquing the way things are and performing the way things should be, is tackled differently, and with different degrees of success in the three texts discussed in this chapter.

In the previous two chapters, I discuss the way different textual and political themes bring to light changing, and contextually specific, concepts of woman (as social, national, gendered subject). The textual form (the generic mode) common to the three texts discussed in each chapter is an indicator of the concept of the self at work in those texts. The first chapter identifies narratives about individual women’s lives where the concept of the self has to do precisely with individuality and singularity of subjects as women. The second chapter, in a similar vein, teases out the relationship between collectively authored texts and a collective understanding of the subject. In this chapter, I examine three texts that don similar formal markings, by way of their participation in the shared project of feminist historical revision; in other words, each text bears the mark of the historiographic project, with titles announcing specific time periods and groups of people to be studied, and truths to be unveiled. They differ, however, in the concepts of identity that operate within the text. I hope to show how the decade that gave rise to these texts (1988-1998) bears critically on the philosophical concepts that inform the political (social/civic) aims of each text. Specifically, the reinvigorated neoliberalism that came to assert itself on the global scene in this decade takes shape in interesting, and at times problematic, ways within these texts.

None of the three texts focuses on moments of so-called "achievement" in women's history, but neither do they highlight particular failures. The "events" are all different both in terms of their global and temporal scope and by virtue of the impact on the lives of women and their. But the effect, the work of revisionism each does, is the point of intersection between the three. *Piccole italiane* is a rewriting of the history of fascist Italy. It is also a new configuration of the aesthetic and formal characteristics of history textbooks. Passerini’s *Autoritratto di gruppo* is a new history of ’68. It is also a reimagining of the boundaries and the aesthetic or formal characteristics of historiography. Valentini’s *Le donne fanno paura* tackles the history of women in the Italian workforce and political scene in the ‘80s and ‘90s. It is also a critique of the focus of demographic practices, the bent of media narratives and a challenge to existing standards for gender equality. All three texts act simultaneously on three different levels: they perform – aesthetically and formally – a new type of historiography even as they critique entrenched models, and they tell the stories of women, stories that, because they are of women, have been silenced and excluded. This particular mode of paying critical attention to the present while working on the past speaks, I am suggesting, to a feminist revisionism that is specific to this moment in the last decade or so of the 20th century.

In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Scott identifies three uses of feminist historiography, what she calls “her-story,” which are very useful to understanding the

[277] De Lauretis, “Upping,” 361.

different approaches that characterize these texts: "Some historians gather evidence about women to demonstrate their essential likeness as historical subjects to men […] these historians attempt to fit a new subject – women – into recognizable historical categories."[278] *Piccole italiane,* as I will discuss, responds to this type of feminist historiography, arguing that women have been left out of histories of Fascism, and that women deserve the same attention and space men have been accorded in the study and memory of this historical moment. A second strategy Scott identifies "takes evidence about women and uses it to challenge received interpretations of progress and regress."[279] *Le donne fanno paura* displays this strategy as it contests the dominant narratives of success and emancipation by highlighting often-ignored statistics of women's oppression. Scott's third category is more complicated because less direct in its aim and approach: "A different sort of investigation, still within the 'her-story' position, departs from the framework of conventional history and offers a new narrative, different periodizations, and different causes. It seeks to illuminate the structures of ordinary women's lives as well as those of notable women, and to discover the nature of the feminist or female consciousness that motivated their behavior."[280] *Autoritratto di gruppo* performs this type of narrative historical retelling, while also revealing a porousness in traditionally firm conceptions of periodization; while Passerini's focus, or object of study, is '68, the research and reflection her text offers moves in and out of decades, rejecting a compartmentalized view of time in favor of a more holistic approach to time and experience. The innovation Scott describes in this last type of her-story refuses traditional hierarchies of topic or subject (public over private), and instead weaves back and forth between the personal, the collective, the intimate and the official accounts of past experience. In some ways, however, Passerini's text veers away from Scott's category, adding to it, as I will argue. Scott explains that "[t]he central aspect of this approach is the exclusive focus on female agency, on the causal role played by women in their history, and on the qualities of women's experiences that sharply distinguish it from men's experience."[281] As I have just suggested, *Autoritratto* refuses to be bound by binaries, including those of gender; the discussion of women's experience in this text is not framed as an opposition to male experience, as Scott's category would have, but as an additional and previously-unthought dimension of collective memory. I will expand on this point shortly, in my close reading of Passerini's text.

Although the texts I am focusing on respond in interesting, and even radical ways, to the categories Scott outlines, their critical performances are not, however, without limitations; the texts demand that women's experiences be included in the national narratives of history and progress, but they do not call for a further questioning of the parameters of national belonging, nor do they challenge the premise of progress on which narratives of national history rely. I will develop my discussion of these limitations towards the end of this chapter. First, I want to focus on the successes of these texts and on the particularities of the historical moment that gave rise to them.

In the 1980s, after the excitement of the radical and powerful feminist groups of the 1970s, the violent reaction of the government and the conservative right in the early

[278] Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 19.
[279] Scott, *Gender*, 19.
[280] Scott, *Gender*, 19.
[281] Scott, *Gender*, 20.

1980s, Italian feminism moved away from mass demonstration and legislation-based activism. There was, instead, a turn toward the academy in a move that sought the academic institutionalization of feminism, not through the creation of new, feminist departments, but through the integration of feminist thought and feminist scholars in the established institutions and disciplines. Marina Addis Saba explains this turn as reflexive, as an elaboration of the practice of consciousness-raising into an intellectual, formalized study of the gendered-self. "Women's studies in Italy, as in all Western democracies," Addis Saba writes, "rose phoenix-like from the combustion of this innovative consciousness generated by the *gruppi di autocoscienza*, consciousness-raising groups, which affected in many cases a transfer of allegiance from a heterosexual, patriarchal perspective to an identification with women. Gender thus became the litmus test of knowledge."[282] Significant numbers of women began working in the academy and focusing on and talking about women's issues in academic contexts. Italy did not see the establishment of Women's Studies departments (like the ones that rose up across the U.S.), but it did see an increasing interest in creating "official" (academic, intellectual) histories and documents of women's participation in the national experience. I am pausing around the word "official" to draw attention to the need for legitimacy and institutional recognition that informed this transition from protestor to professor.
As I noted in the previous chapter, academic recognition means being deemed worthy and meritorious by a sanctioned institution, and thus affording the subject significant political and social backing in her quest for rights. In the decade between 1982 and 1992 a number of visible, important steps towards organization were made, like the 1982 national feminist meeting in Modena dedicated to the question of academia and activism, the formation in 1989 of the *Società italiana delle storiche*, (*Association of Italian Women Historians*), and the lobby, in 1991, on the part of students and faculty for the establishing of academic chairs in women's studies at Rome and Cassino.[283] Despite these and other efforts, recognition from on high was not easily won. As Addis Saba writes, despite the increasing interest in women's studies, and the formation of a number of organizations of women scholars, "[a]cademia played deaf and closed itself to feminist renewal, while the discipline of history became increasingly divided and sectarian."[284] The texts considered in this chapter engage with the question of legitimacy in different ways, at times challenging the authority of the academy by defying the traditions of genre and discipline, at other times reproducing form while subverting norms of appropriate or worthy content.

The earliest of the three texts, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, is also the most well-known. The author, Luisa Passerini, is an accomplished historian with a background of political activism. Her text is part oral history of the student and worker revolutions of '68, part historiography of the connection between '68 and the radical feminism of '77,

[282] Marina Addis Saba, "Women's Studies in Italy: The Story of Feminist Historiography," trans. by Susan Noak et al., *Women's Studies Quarterly.* 20, ¾ (1992): 118.
[283] For more on the Modena meeting see: Silvia Mantini, "Women's History in Italy: Cultural Itineraries and New Proposals in Current Historiographical Trends," trans. James Schwarten, *Journal of Women's History* 12.2 (2000): 170-198. For more on the *Società italiana delle storiche* visit their webpage at http://www.societadellestoriche.it/. For more on the Rome-Cassino lobby see: Marina Addis Saba, "Women's Studies in Italy: The Story of Feminist Historiography," trans. by Susan Noak et al., *Women's Studies Quarterly.* 20, ¾ (1992): 116-126.
[284] Addis Saba, "Women's Studies," 122.

part autobiography and part memoir. These different themes are kept as distinct narratives throughout most of the text, each one proceeding for a bit before pausing to give way to another and then resuming. At times they overlap and even combine, as the chronological moment of one narrative catches up to the present time of another. The effect is, in some ways, disorienting, as Passerini upsets expectations imposed by both autobiography and historiography, thus calling attention to the problems inherent in assuming History speaks for all, while Autobiography speaks for one, as well as to the risks of adhering to norms of periodization.[285] This question of generic affiliation is problematized, in different ways, by all three of the texts considered in this chapter; what distinguishes Passerini's text from the other two is in part – and this is my contention – its position just before the fall of the Left in Italy. The other two texts are both informed by this dramatic event in no small part because the Left has always been understood, within the narratives of Italian history, as the ally of women.

In *Le donne fanno paura*, Valentini takes issue with this presumed alliance while also investigating the ways in which the new right has deployed women and made use of narratives of emancipation. Valentini is a well-known journalist and her text reflects that training through an investigative analysis of histories of women in the workplace and in political life over the last two decades of the twentieth century. In particular, she looks at how these histories have both come from and have produced distorted narratives that proclaim the successful emancipation and modernization of the Italian woman while effectively preempting any discussion of the lived experiences and inequalities that women continue to face. In a similar vein, *Piccole italiane* contrasts official historical narratives – this time of the Fascist era – with the untold stories of women. This text is collectively authored by a number of Italian women from a variety of different professional and academic backgrounds (including the aforementioned Valentini), and picks up, in this way, on some of the themes I developed in the previous chapter.[286] In

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[285] This point is one that has been taken up extensively by scholars of queer theory and which has given rise to renewed debate in the field spear-headed by Carla Freccero and Valerie Traub. These scholars have approached the question of historical periodization by way of identity politics and narrative representation. On the one side of this debate is the idea (championed by Carla Freccero) that established norms of historical periodization ignore, or encumber the representation of those whose histories do not coincide with dominant timelines. At the heart of this position, which I very much endorse, is the claim that time does not operate uniformly and that different people experience time according to their own specificities and to their relationship with structures of power and knowledge-control. In the other camp is the position (espoused by Traub) that this push against periodization is a move towards ahistoricity which, in turn, risks downplaying the claims of specificity that are so critical to marginalized peoples. I will return to this topic in the following chapter when I explore the notion of historical contingency and memory location that is so critical to current discussions of queer and immigrant histories. Among the many texts central to this debate are: Valerie Traub's "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA* 128.1 (2013): 21-39; Carla Freccero's, "Queer Times," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (2007): 485-94; and the "History and Temporality" panel between Traub and Freccero at the "Queer Method" conference (University of Pennsylvania, Nov. 1st, 2013).

[286] The authors of *Piccole italiane* are: Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (journalist and novelist); Elena Doni (journalist); Elena Giannini Belotti (journalist and novelist); Laura Lilli (journalist, poet and novelist); Dacia Maraini (journalist and novelist); Cristina di San Marzano (journalist); Mirella Serri (journalist and literary scholar); and Chiara Valentini (journalist). They speak of their project of collaborative writing in terms that echo the points I raise in my discussion in Chapter Two: "due ricercatrici hanno collezionato dei dati che poi sono stati rivisti e riscritti da ciascuna di noi, dopo esserci incontrate molte volte e avere discusso una linea comune […] questo vedersi e discuterne insieme è stato molto importante per la

many ways, this text most closely mirrors traditional history textbooks, and in fact, this mimicry is, as I will demonstrate, an intentional strategy of intervention used by these women – none of whom are historians by training; the women responsible for *Piccole italiane* are novelists, poets, journalists, activists, and philosophers.[287]

Of the authors discussed in this chapter, only Passerini is a historian by training but her text is, paradoxically, the one that least resembles a traditional history textbook. Despite these differences in approach (disciplinary training and textual form), these texts share a preoccupation with the position of women as objects of knowledge and subjects of knowledge production. The investigation of women's dual placement as subject and object took on new significance in the last decade or so of the previous century, as the shifting of national borders and the reorganization of global markets and modes of communication began to impact perceptions of identity and belonging. As Paola Bono writes, "[t]he need has emerged of analyzing anew the relationship between 'women' – plural and different, each woman historically placed and identified according to multiple components – and 'woman,' trans-historical product of an hegemonic discourse."[288] The project of rethinking woman's position in this way is, fundamentally, one of historical revisionism; it involves revisiting existing narratives in light of new political concerns and changing visions of utopian futures.[289]

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chiarezza degli intenti e anche perché ci ha permesso di riportare all'oggi alcune memorie personali legate alle storie delle nostre madri, delle nostre nonne, dei nostri padri e dei nostri nonni" ["two researchers collected data that was then reviewed and rewritten by each of us, after we had met many times to discuss a common thread (…) this seeing each other and discussing together was a very important part as it brought clarity to our goals and also because it allowed us to bring to light certain personal memories tied to the stories of our mothers and gradnmothers, our fathers and grandfathers"] (*Piccole,* 8). The act of writing collaboratively is critical to the integrity of the feminist vision, the "linea comune," that guides their work; it also constitutes a feminist practice, making public the private experience of history, memory and identity.

[287] In the introduction the authors acknowledge their unusual position as non-historians writing history: "Qualcuno potrebbe dire che non è compito nostro fare questo lavoro storico. Eppure noi crediamo che l'elaborazione della memoria del passato comune non tocchi solo agli specialisti, soprattutto in un momento in cui tende a giocare sull'amnesia dei più per reintrodurre nel discorso comune lo stile dell'intolleranza e dell'aggressività," ["Some could say that it is not our place to do this historical work. Nevertheless, we believe that the elaboration of the memory of the shared past is not just the responsibility of specialists, particularly in a moment that tends to play on the amnesia of the many as it reintroduces intolerance and aggressiveness in public discourse."] All translations are my own. (Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 9). They defend their right to this type of work by approaching history as *memory*, thus challenging the privileged position History has long held as an empirical collection of facts. Importantly, they also situate the project of remembering within the context of a concern for the present and future, cautioning against erasing the specificity of women's sufferings from narratives of a shared national past.

[288] Paola Bono, "Women's Biographies and Autobiographies: A Political Project in the Making," in *Across Genres, Generations and Borders: Italian Women Writing Lives*, ed. Susanna Scarparo et al. (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 14.

[289] The question of woman's dual and contradictory position has, as I discussed in previous chapters, been tackled by philosophers following the path carved by Luce Irigaray; though not Italian, Irigaray occupies an important position in the intellectual and affective history of Italian feminism and did important work in calling attention to woman's structural exclusion from discourses of knowledge. The work of philosophers, like Adriana Cavarero and Luisa Muraro who, in different ways, followed Irigaray's lead, is decidedly philosophical in nature and, as a result, has been critiqued for being ahistorical. The turn towards the historical by many feminists (including the authors discussed here) may be understood in part as a response to this critique.

Why History?

"Even though Western women are partly and implicitly inscribed in the histories of their civilizations, they did not produce the narration of their specific history."[290]
– Maria Marotti

As we attempt to answer the question, "Why History?" it is important to remember the path carved by the Italian feminist movement as it turned from a very public activism in the 1970s to a more subtle, academic feminism in the mid-1980s. Some have criticized this move away from the piazza as being an elitist trend, while other saw this as a moment of necessary self-reflection on the part of an increasingly diverse movement. Women entered the academy in a new and meaningful way beginning in the 1970s in the United States and the United Kingdom, but only became a notable presence in in Italy in the mid 1980s, though even then, as I have noted, there was no official "women's studies".[291] As Amalia Signorelli explains:

> in the 1980s, women's bookshops, libraries, archives and documentation centers, new journals and small publishing houses were founded, research by women and on women began to establish itself both in universities and in other centers, some of which are still open and vibrant. Women's writing from the past was retrieved, read, reread and reflected upon. Intellectual mothers were rediscovered: not only Sibilla Aleramo and Virginia Woolf, but figures as far back in time as Diotima and Hypatia. All this work was enriched by international exchanges, which now reached beyond the United States and France.[292]

What Signorelli is highlighting is the reflexive aspect of this move from piazza to library; where previously the energy of the women's movement had been directed at changing the present and future by championing real lives and legislative changes, the 1980s saw a focus on the past and a concern with representation. In her study, *Feminists Revision History,* Ann-Louise Shapiro describes the turn towards the academic in the American and British context: "Emerging in conjunction with the feminist movement of the late 1960s, academic feminism, across and within disciplines, has defined itself as a theoretical/political enterprise that challenges what it sees as the fundamentally male-centered bias of traditional scholarship."[293] Unlike the path carved by American and British feminism, in Italy academic feminism did not emerge "in conjunction with the

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[290] Maria Marotti, "Introduction" in *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*, ed. Maria Marotti et al., (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 15-16.
[291] Today many Italian universities offer courses in women's studies, feminist theory and gender studies but those courses are, almost exclusively, housed in other departments such as Language and Literature, Cultural Studies, History or Political Science. As Marina Addis Saba writes, "Demands for chair positions and courses in women's studies have been addressed […] But the education ministry has not yet acted. In other words, although women's studies is widespread in Italy, among a number of autonomous and university groups, libraries, and centers *officially it does not exist*" (Addis Saba, "Women's Studies," 122).
[292] Amalia Signorelli, "Women in Italy in the 1970s," in *Speaking Out and Silencing: Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s,* ed. Adalgisa Giorgio et al., (London: Legenda, 2006), 59.
[293] Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Feminists Revision History,* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 1.

feminist movement of the late 1960s," but came later, after the heyday of popular feminism. I do not want to perpetuate a narrative of Italy as following behind other Western feminist paths; when Italy does hit similar milestones, the aim and result are markedly different. Within the Italian academy, the late 1980s saw a particular energy around feminist historical research. The most important name in this arena is the *Società italiana delle storiche* whose founding members included Luisa Passerini. This group championed new approaches in historical research – approaches that challenged existing hierarchies of archive and evidence, and that encouraged the inclusion of personal, subjective, cultural and artistic materials in the construction of knowledge about specific historical moments. This is a very important backdrop to the discussion that preoccupies this chapter, but a focus on the *Società* would be distracting because my intention here is to look at the textual form, the aesthetic of the text rather than the method of research. Keeping this in mind, the three texts I have selected are distinguished from the bulk of work produced by the *Società* precisely because they challenge aesthetic expectations and defy norms of disciplinary training.

One of the products of this academic turn was an increasing attention to reviewing and critiquing literary canons and historical narratives. There had, of course, been efforts to write "women's histories" before this time (most notably Franca Pieroni Bortolotti's multiple histories of women's movements before WWII).[294] What marks this period is, in my view, the structural critique that informs these new histories. One of the important consequences of this work is, to borrow from Shapiro, "to bring the critical challenges of feminist theoretical work to the discipline of history, that is, to rethink the traditional preoccupations and presumptions of historians in terms of critiques posed by feminist scholars."[295] Joan W. Scott discusses this mode of historiographic scholarship in relation to the development and popularity of post-structuralism within the feminist community. Post-structuralism makes the production of knowledge its object of study. "Instead of attributing a transparent and shared meaning to cultural concepts," Scott explains, "post-structuralists insist that meanings are not fixed in a culture's lexicon but are rather dynamic, always potentially in flux."[296] As Scott goes on to explain, this is a particularly attractive theoretical approach for feminist historians because it allows for a transformative production of history; a study that looks back while also changing the way we look forward. This productive critique is an expression of the reflexive self-awareness that informs and defines feminist thinking. Teresa De Lauretis writes about this particular quality of feminist thinking in a very useful formulation:

> there is an essential difference between a feminist and a non-feminist understanding of the subject and its relation to institutions; between feminist and non-feminist knowledges, discourses, and practices of cultural-forms, social relations, and subjective processes; between a feminist and a non-feminist historical consciousness. That difference is essential in that it is constitutive of feminist thinking and thus of feminism

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[294] Among Bortolotti's many titles on the political history of women in Italy are: *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia: 1848-1892* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1963); *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1974); *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1978).

[295] Shapiro, *Feminists,* vii.

[296] Scott, *Gender,* 5.

> […] Another way to say this is that the essential difference of feminism lies in its historical specificity – the particular conditions of its emergence and development, which have shaped its object and field of analysis, its assumptions and forms of address[297]

In this passage De Lauretis points to a connection between feminist thought and historical specificity; understanding the way these two components relate to and inform one another allows us to identify the filter of new political strategies and utopian goals within different moments of feminist history. Scott explains that feminist scholarship is always political and that it broadens traditional notions of the political (typically limited to "high politics," the state and government), because the aim of feminist scholarship in any field is the investigation and redistribution of the power that controls knowledge production. History, as Scott explains, is a particularly significant field for feminist (and other minoritarian subjects) because, "history […] creates meanings through differentiation and in this way organizes knowledge about the world. The form that knowledge has taken – the remarkable absence or subordination of women in the narrative of the 'rise of civilization,' their particularity in relation to Universal Man, their confinement to studies of the domestic and private – indicates a politics that sets and enforces priorities, represses some subjects in the name of the greater importance of others, neutralizes certain categories, and disqualifies others."[298] This means that telling women's stories is an inherently political act because it is a response to a politics of exclusion.

E intanto le donne

The "absence or subordination of women" from the history of Italy during Fascism is the impetus for *Piccole italiane*. In the introduction, the authors make clear that what is at stake is not simply the correcting of facts or the addition of women to the historical narrative, but a reshaping of current attitudes about national and cultural formation. They begin, in fact, with a critique of the present: "molti giovanissimi addirittura si sono fatti l'idea di essere nati, intelligenti e solitari, già perfettamente autosufficienti dalla testa di uno splendido dio del tempo, senza conoscere il buio e il travaglio di una gravidanza materna."[299] It is this alarming sense of autogenesis, of historical disconnect, that prompts the production of *Piccole italiane*: "Questo libro nasce dal desiderio di rinverdire la memoria collettiva in un momento in cui sembra particolarmente opaca e stanca."[300] At the heart of this project is this attention to the health, the vitality of collective memory that is "opaca e stanca." The preoccupation with memory is, as I have been suggesting, closely related to the question of identity; recognizing oneself (or one's genealogy) in narratives of collective experience is critical to forming a sense of national identity and belonging; it allows for affective participation.

[297] De Lauretis, "Upping", 359.
[298] Scott, *Gender,* 9.
[299] "So many young people have come to believe that they were born intelligent, alone, and perfectly self-sufficient, sprung from the head of a splendid god of time, without ever knowing the darkness and labor of a maternal pregnancy." Cutrufelli, *Piccole,* 5.
[300] "This book is born from the desire to revive the collective memory in a moment in which it seems particularly opaque and tired." Cutrufelli, *Piccole,* 5.

Piccole italiane sheds light on a moment in Italian history that has been obscured and, in so doing, forces a reassessment of commonly shared, affectively experienced concepts of national identity. *Piccole italiane* was produced by a community of women brought together under the initiative of novelist and journalist Dacia Maraini. In 1992, Maraini founded Controparola, a group of "scrittrici e giornaliste, impegnate per una presa di coscienza femminile che è conquista della memoria e testimonianza della propria identità."[301] The specificity of fascism as their focus in this text has to do precisely with the link they identify between a self-involved, temporal isolationism that characterizes the present, and a gendered silence that reigns over the past:

> Per ricordare […] i tanti entusiasmi che si sono ritorti contro le donne, i tanti disinganni, le tante mortificazioni patite in nome del NUOVO da parte di chi spregiava la democrazia chiamandola 'vecchia' e 'molle' e 'corrotta' solo in quanto democratica, abbiamo messo insieme questo libretto. Invitiamo a leggerlo per rammentare che, contrariamente a quanto si suole dire, la storia può ripetersi e che il sonno della ragione produce quei mostri che, per quanto si camuffino o si rendano attraenti e nuovi, rimangono i soliti tristi nemici delle donne.[302]

This mission statement conveys what I see as a strong belief in the power of modernity, in the myth of neoliberalism and democracy as the promise of and vehicle to combat oppression. This has become, over the last half-century, an intensely American message, and one that has met with multiple contradictory attitudes within the European Union. The formation of the European Union and the subsequent renegotiations of national identity bear strongly on the texts I am considering in this chapter which, not incidentally, were produced in and around the years of the official emergence of the EU. Together with these changes comes, as I mentioned before, a renegotiation of subject; as De Lauretis notes, "the notion of identity, far from fixing the point of an impasse, becomes an active shifter in the feminist discourse of woman."[303] Identity is, she elaborates, "an active construction and a discursively mediated interpretation of one's history."[304] This connection between subject and discourse, the individual and the group, is reflected in the ways these three texts negotiate the relationship between micro and macrohistories, refusing traditional dichotomies of discipline and genre that have depended on the image of a stable subject traveling through history without changing. Challenging the gender of the subject of history is the first step towards reimaging stories of personal and national

[301] "women writers and journalists, dedicated to the development of a female consciousness that can be the master of the memory and testimony of her own identity." Mission statement from the Controparola Facebook group (https://www.facebook.com/controparola). Controparola is responsible for a number of texts in its nearly 20 year history. The last title published was *Donne del Risorgimento* (2011). The group is currently falling into disuse, the last posting in the Facebook group was in July of 2013, and the website is no longer running.

[302] "To remember […] the various impassioned cries that were turned against women, the disillusions, the many humiliations that were suffered in the name of the NEW on behalf of those who disparaged democracy, calling it 'old' and 'weak' and 'corrupt' simply because it was democracy; this is why we put this little book together. We invite you to read it to remember that, contrary to what is said, history can repeat itself and when reason sleeps monsters are produced that, no matter how they disguise themselves, or make themselves attractive and new, always remain the sad enemies of women." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 15.

[303] De Lauretis, "Upping," 365.

[304] De Lauretis, "Upping," 366.

origin while simultaneously allowing for future transformations in the subject. I will return to this discussion and to the question of how notions of modernity and neoliberalism figure into the narratives these texts produce.

The move to revisit a particular historical period as a way of calling attention to dangerous parallels in the present is not, in and of itself, a new or particularly feminist move in the field of historiography. What is worth paying attention to is how *Piccole italiane* presents its narrative by way of a visual, textual critique of the norms and traditions of historiography and "official" memory-making. After the introduction, the text is divided into two separate historical narratives; on the one hand there is the official history of fascism as it has traditionally been told, which they label with the title "La storia" (History). On the other hand there is the story of women's experience of fascism, which they mark with the title "E intanto le donne" (And Meanwhile the Women). The two historical narratives are presented side by side, on facing pages, so that the left page is always "La storia," and the right side is always "E intanto le donne." These two are further distinguished by the use of different fonts, with "La storia" being in italics whereas the other is not. Both histories begin in 1919 and proceed at an approximate even pace until they reach 1945; this is followed by a short appendix that includes some documents describing specific efforts by women to combat fascism, as well as efforts by fascists to define and defend their own misogyny. Throughout the text, the official narrative is organized around significant dates, so that each entry is marked simply by the date. For instance, one of the first entries (for the year 1919) reads in the following manner:

> 15 aprile. *La prima prova del nuovo movimento avviene durante uno sciopero generale a Milano. Un gruppo di sansepolcristi, di cui fa parte il poeta futurista Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, assalta la sede dell'"Avanti"*[305]

The revision (or intervention) narrative follows the dates indicated on the facing page, but the entries are organized around particular themes indicated by way of specific subtitles:

> LE PRIME FASCISTE
> Il programma di San Sepolcro rivendica il pieno diritto di voto per le donne, oltre che la facoltà di essere elette.
> All'adunanza di Mussolini le donne sono nove in tutto. Il personaggio più significativo è Margherita Sarfatti (<<l'altra donna del Duce>>, come sarà definita molto tempo dopo). La Sarfatti è una bionda veneziana di origine ebraica, critica d'arte e animatrice di un importante salotto culturale[306]

[305] "April 15th. The first appearance of the new movement occurs during a general strike in Milan. A group from San Sepolcro, among whom is the futurist poet Tommaso Marinetti, attacks the offices of *Avanti*." Cutrufelli, *Piccole,* 20

[306] "The First Female Fascists: The agenda of San Sepolcro demanded the full right to vote for women, in addition to the right to be elected. In all there are nine women at the meeting with Mussolini. The most important among them is Margherita Sarfatti, ('the Duce's other woman,' as she will later be described). Sarfatti is a Venetian blonde of Jewish roots, an art critic and hostess of an important cultural salon. " Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 21.

The entry continue but the difference is already clear. The contrast between the two entries on facing pages is striking on a visual level, with the women’s history being twice as long as its counterpart:

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Both entries are considerably more extensive than the few lines I reproduced here, but the length of the facing entries is not always even; more often than not the entry on the side of the official history is short and pointed, conveying just the information necessary to describe the political (civic and military) highlights of the moment. The entries on the facing side are considerably more extensive and varied in focus, in part because they are introducing events and names that do not have the same cultural resonance as the events and names of the established male-centric history. Take, for instance, the entry of April 15th, 1919, which I cite above. On the side of “La storia” there is a passing mention of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti; the brief identification of Marinetti as “il poeta futurista” (“the futurist poet”) serves to signal that this is, in fact, the same Marinetti known to all Italians; relying, in this way, on a shared repertoire of cultural markers. The entry on the women’s side also contains a reference to an important cultural figure, but, because she is a woman, the text does not assume her name will trigger a widely shared memory. The woman in question, Margherita Sarfatti, is introduced by way of an extensive description, beginning with the claim that she is an important historical figure – a note which would seem redundant if it were accompanying a man’s name in a historical narrative, where his presence would suffice to signal his importance. Of Margherita Sarfatti, the authors write that she is “[i]l personaggio più significativo” at the meeting for women’s rights with Mussolini, “(‘l’altra donna del Duce’, come sarà definita molto tempo dopo).”[307] Sarfatti’s introduction is not limited to her ties to Mussolini (though that is how she has been best remembered in official histories); Sarfatti’s introduction goes on to include a physical description, as well as a political, intellectual biography:

> La Sarfatti è una bionda veneziana di origine ebraica, critica d’arte e animatrice di un importante salotto culturale. Avrà una grande influenza sulla formazione di Mussolini e sull’arte del regime. Inizialmente socialista e molto vicina al riformismo di Anna Kuliscioff, Margherita era

[307] “the most important person” “the Duce’s ‘other woman’ as she will later be described”. Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 21.

stata interventista durante la guerra. Un percorso simile a quello di altre più modeste fasciste[308]

These details about Sarfatti's Venetian and Jewish origins, as well as those pertaining to her political views contribute to filling in the picture of women's complicated relationship with fascism; the quantity of these details also highlights the extent to which feminist historical revision is tasked not only with adding to an existing narrative, but also with creating a new national archive of popular (commonly accessible) names, dates, events and images.

This is a task that is not without hurdles; in addition to having to find the often buried or haphazardly preserved material of historical inquiry, feminists producing historical narratives are charged with being mindful of the way those narratives are presented. Grosz cautions against producing a women's history that parallels existing (male) histories: "It is almost as if there is an underlying belief here that if gynocriticism and patriarchalism could be combined, between them they could provide *the whole truth*."[309] The danger Grosz points to is in giving legitimacy to a mode of knowledge production that systematically excludes women, leaving women to deal with "women's history" without challenging "official" narratives. In a similar vein, Marotti cautions that "[i]t is important, in this respect, to avoid rewriting women's history following the blueprint of general history, this is, simply by replacing male protagonists with female protagonists while leaving historical periods untouched."[310] The point made here is an important one and it would not be entirely misguided to accuse *Piccole italiane* of doing just this: on the right we have "general history" and on the left female protagonists have replaced their male counterparts and historical periods are left untouched. The use of the same "blueprint" is unmistakable as it dictates the aesthetic of the text. I want to suggest, however, that this obviousness is an indication of how *Piccole italiane* begins to play with the "replacement as revision" method. By placing the "traditional" historiography next to the feminist one, a point is made about the exclusion of histories that might not otherwise be as clearly stated. In other words, *Piccole italiane* does exactly what Marotti says feminist historiographers ought to be wary of, and yet succeeds where she predicts they might fail because it keeps the other narrative present, it engages with the (hi)story it seeks to revise and in doing so forces the reader to be active rather receptive. Juggling two texts at once, the reader is asked to do the work of weaving them together, a task that cannot be done without raising questions of why there are two, and why one has heretofore been excluded.

In his tome on Italian memory and identity, Mario Isnenghi writes, "chi voglia ricostruire ciò che ha avuto o ha rilievo nella memoria di un popolo non può ragionare

[308] "Sarfatti is a Venetian blonde of Jewish roots, an art critic and hostess of an important cultural salon. She would come to have a strong influence on Mussolini's intellectual formation and on the regime's art. She started as a socialist, a supporter of the Anna Kluiscioff's reformism, Margherita had been an interventionist during the war. She followed a path similar to many other more modest women fascists." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 21, 23.

[309] Caine, et al., *Crossing,* 56. Italics in the original.

[310] Maria Marotti, "Revising the Past: Feminist Historians/ Historical Fictions" in *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*, ed. Maria Marotti and Gabriella Brooke, (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 53.

solo in termini di storia politica. Anzi, la memoria è il regno della storia sociale."[311] In *Piccole italiane* we see a weaving back and forth between these two categories of history: "storia politica" ("political history"), and "storia sociale" ("social history"). In the right column, representing political history, is January, 1940 and the deals being cut between Mussolini and Hitler; on the left is an account of ration cards and women's responsibilities for domestic governance:

Gennaio. *Mussolini tenta di prolungare il più possibile la non belligeranza: spera in una pace di compromesso tra tedeschi e anglo-francesi. Ma ormai l'entrata in guerra dell'Italia sembra inevitabile. Il rifornimento di carbone diventa difficile: l'Inghilterra blocca le forniture.*

Marzo. *La Germania offre all'Italia tutto il carbone necessario per l'industria. Il 8 marzo Mussolini incontra Hitler al Brennero. Il Führer lo spinge a intervenire nel conflitto.*

LE CARTE ANNONARIE
Nel corso dell'inverno, anche se la guerra non è ancora dichiarata, le condizioni di vita peggiorano. Comincia il razionamento delle merci essenziali: già a gennaio inizia la distribuzione delle "carte annonarie". Servono solo per il caffè, ma in seguito saranno indispensabili per qualsiasi genere di consumo. Per il pane, la pasta, ma anche per il sapone da bucato e la stoffa. Le donne sono chiamate a custodire gelosamente le preziose tessere. I giornali ne spiegano l'uso e si rivolgono alle "madri di famiglia", esortandole a conservarle con cura perché non è possibile averne un duplicato.[312]

The narrative presented here is divided along lines that correspond very closely to traditional binaries not just of political and social, but also public / private and, of course, male / female. It is no coincidence that these binaries all line up, placing women securely in the private, social sphere. One reason for this is that, in Fascist Italy, women were not making official political decisions – they were forcibly relegated to the domestic sphere. Part of the work *Piccole italiane* does, therefore, is to the show how those political decisions (made by men) impacted women in a number of ways, including forcing them to see to the use and protection of the ration cards. What is not offered in this text is a suggestion that things might have been, or could one day be, otherwise. There is, in other

[311] "whoever wishes to piece together the things of significance in the memory of a people cannot reason only in terms of political history. On the contrary, memory is the realm of social history." Mario Isnenghi, "Presentazione," in *I luoghi della memoria: personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*. v.3, (Rome: La terza, 2010), ix.

[312] "January. *Mussolini tries to delay military intervention: he hopes for a peaceful resolution between the Germans and the Anglo-French. But entry in the war seems inevitable. Coal is dwindling: England is blocking supplies.* March. *Germany offers Italy help with coal for businesses. March 8th Mussolini meets Hitler at Brenner. The Führer urges him to get involved in the conflict.* / RATION CARDS Over the course of the winter, even though war has not officially been declared, conditions are getting worse. Essential goods are being rationed: January sees the first distribution of 'ration cards'. At first they are only for coffee, but soon they will also be necessary for any type of purchase. For bread and pasta, as well as detergent and fabric. Women are called upon to be careful guardians of the precious cards. Newspaper columns explaining how to use the cards are addressed directly to the 'mothers of the family', urging them to protect the cards with care because duplicates cannot be obtained." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 122-123.

words, no space for a narrative which would show women in a position of power. By reproducing these traditional binaries, the text reinforces ingrained divisions between political histories and social histories. Even in those moments when the right page tells the presumably political history of women fighting for the right to vote, the left side counters with a list of battles and invasions:

5 aprile. *Riprende l'avanzata degli Alleati.* 13 aprile. *Il comandante delle forze alleate chiede alla Resistenza di rimandare l'insurrezione.* 19 aprile. *Insorge Bologna e, di seguito, numerose altre città.*	IL VOTO ALLE DONNE Il 1° febbrai, su proposta De Gaspari-Togliatti, un decreto luogotenenziale riconosce il diritto di voto alle donne. Pochi giorni dopo a Bondeno, in provincia di Ferrara, le donne occupano il municipio, bruciano i registri di leva e manifestano contro i rastrellamenti. In ottobre a Firenze si tiene il primo Congresso dell'Unione Donne Italiane. All'organizzazione aderiscono già più di 400.000 donne[313]

The events narrated on the right, describe a decidedly public political action of women organizing in large numbers over a marked period of time with the goal of enacting broad civic transformation. Much less detail is offered in the narration of the events on the left side; the significance and impact is assumed to be self-evident, presumably because they have been so frequently narrated elsewhere. By placing these narratives in separate columns, along a binary that has been structured around the public/private divide, the text implicitly (and perhaps unintentionally) reinforces the notion that suffrage is only a concern for women, whereas war is of shared, national concern. This split points to women's uncomfortable position with respect to the nation: they are simultaneously within and without the sphere of national belonging; they are expected to participate affectively in the project of national improvement, but they are excluded from the stories of that improvement.

The Fascist period marks this contradictory position in an unmistakably explicit way: "da una parte il duce esigente chiedeva alle donne di restare in casa, di sacrificare ogni loro ambizione professionale alla cura dei figli e della famiglia, dall'altra chiedeva loro di lasciare quella casa e quei figli per presentarsi in piazza, farsi contare, indottrinare, rendendole di fatto partecipi di un ideale esercito femminile alle dirette dipendenze del capo di stato."[314] Implied in this dual role is a gendered difference: in the

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[313] "April 5th. *The Allies continue to advance.* April 13th. *The commander of the Allied forces asks the Resistance to delay their insurrection.* April 19th. *Bologna rises up and is, subsequently, followed by a number of other cities.* / VOTE FOR WOMEN. On February 1st, at the urging of Gaspari-Togliatti, an official decree is issued giving women the right to vote. A few days later in Bondeno, in the province of Ferrara, women occupy city-hall and burn all the military records and protest against the draft. In October the first meeting of the Congress of the Union of Italian Women is held in Florence. Membership tops 400,000 women." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 148-149.

[314] "on the one hand, the demanding Duce asked women to stay home, to sacrifice their professional ambitions for the care of children and family; on the other hand, he asked women to leave that home, and

home, women are expected to don the cloak of femininity and maternity; in the piazza, those same bodies are expected to appear as masculine or, at best, neutral subjects, ready to be reformed according to the demands of a state that holds up virility as the national ideal. The image of woman, leaving the domestic, typically feminine sphere, and fighting for the nation has been used to justify women's own complicity with the regime: "È una contraddizione questa che non è mai stata risolta dal fascismo e di questa contraddizione le donne si sono avvalse per ricavare un poco di libertà per sé, qualche briciola di una dignità personale sempre messa in discussione."[315] This contradictory attitude towards women has been used to explain the complicated relationship Italian women had with the Fascist state. The authors of *Piccole italiane* point to the allure fascism offered in its promise to break with the traditions and codes of an old, conservative Italy: "la gioia di calpestare antiche regole morali considerate obsolete, legate alla memoria di una vecchia Italia conservatrice, andava conquistando i cuori di molte ragazze dell'epoca."[316] They cite Victoria De Grazia's study of fascism and futurism to explain how this image of a subject unburdened by the restraints of tradition resulted in a misleading sense of sympathy between women and futurists, which in turn led to, or helped foster the false-alliance between women and fascism despite the State's active work against women's emancipation: "sarebbe stato quel tanto di modernismo, di indipendenza, di crudo estetismo che accompagnava la gesta dei primi fascisti imbevuti delle idee futuriste ad affascinare le donne degli Anni venti."[317] These promises quickly disappear with the institutionalization of Fascism: "Tutte cose che scompariranno ben presto dalla cultura del Fascio, una volta che questa si sarà trasformata in dittatura e avrà fatto accordi con la Chiesa e con gli industriali."[318] *Piccole italiane* identifies, in other words, a false promise of freedom and emancipation that led many women to, at first, be ardent supporters of a

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those children, and come to the piazza, to make themselves count, to let themselves be indoctrinated, thus making them part of an ideal army of women, responsible directly to the head of state." *Piccole,* 12.

[315] "It is a contradiction that was never resolved by fascism, and women took advantage of this contradiction to reclaim a little bit of freedom for themselves, a little crumb of dignity that would always be questioned." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 12.

[316] "the joy of stomping on old moral rules, suddenly considered obsolete and tied to the memory of a old, conservative Italy, conquered the hearts of many young women of that time." Cutrufelli, *Piccole,* 11.

[317] "it must have been that bit of modernism, of independences, of raw aestheticism that colored the actions of the first fascists, drunk with the ideas of futurism, that attracted the women of the Twenties." Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 10.

The De Grazia study cited in *Piccole italiane* is *Le donne nel regime fascista*, (Venice: Marsilio, 1993). Among her many other important works on women and fascism are *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), and "Alle origini della cultura di massa: cultura popolare e fascismo in Italia," which she co-authored with Luisa Passerini (*La Ricerca Folklorica*. (1983): 19-25.

For more on the attraction and contradiction of women and fascism see: Maria Fraddosio, "Le donne e il fascismo: Ricerche e problemi di interpretazione," *Storia contemporanea*, 1 (1986): 95-135; Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body: Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers*, (London: Routledge, 2004); Maria Macciocchi, *La donna nera: consenso femminile e fascismo*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976); Robin Pickering-Iazzi, *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

For readings focused more on futurism and women see: Lucia Re, "Futurism and Feminism," *Annali d'italianistica* 7 (1989): 253-272; Janaya Lasker-Ferretti, *Between Word and Image: Women Futurists and Parole in Libertà 1914-1924*, (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

[318] "All things that would soon disappear from the culture of the Fascio, once it transformed into a dictatorship, and struck deals with the Church and Big Business." Cutrufelli, *Piccole,* 11.

regime that very quickly turned against them. The pain and, perhaps, the shame of having to admit to this "illusione emancipazionista,"[319] the nationally shared reluctance to confront this tragic misstep has helped occlude the period in women's history, and has produced, instead, a culture of silence around women's experience of fascism. The contradiction is, therefore, not just in women's attitude toward fascism and the Fascist state's treatment of women, but also in the ways this historical period is remembered and dealt with in the national imaginary.[320]

The contradictory position of women in relation to the state is one that persists outside of fascism and that has been theorized by feminist scholars as a constituent feature of Western philosophical thinking. If the subject of Western philosophical thought is (tacitly) understood to be male, then women are an embodied contradiction, simultaneously subject to the prescriptions of political thought and social organization, and, on the other hand, excluded from the privileges of ownership and agency that accompany the subject position. Teresa De Lauretis discusses this contradictory position of women in terms of potential and reformulation of power and space. De Lauretis proposes using the filmic term "space-off" to think about the possibilities of women's contradictory position. The space-off is the space which exceeds the frame, the unseen and yet inferable; De Lauretis suggests that we view this eccentric female space, this unnamed and therefore female sphere that intersects with and is ignored by the male-centric ideology, as a site of production for the articulation of a new register of representation where the female subject is both imagined and imbued with the power of imagination and creation.[321] In *Piccole italiane*, physical space is integrated into the aesthetics of the text, the strategic use of font and format and the establishing of visual difference on the page signal a self-conscious awareness of the need for a new or other

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[319] "illusion of emancipation". Cutrufelli, *Piccole*, 11.

[320] Fascism, and in particular the Fascist era, has been a delicate topic in Italy since the fall of the regime. The complicity of the entire nation has made it difficult for the country to have open, frank conversations about the events and intentions of the period. The first significant scholarly effort to confront this reluctance was put forth in the 1960s, by the historian Renzo De Felice, whose impressive four-volume biography of Mussolini offered a nuanced explanation of Fascism as being a complex, historiographic (rather than political) object of study. [Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965)]. The 1990s, however, saw a renewed interest in the Fascist era; among the most notable texts published in this period are those of historian Emilio Gentile, whose refusal to bring a defensive attitude to the study of fascism has inspired a new type of national self-inquiry about the period; his titles include: *La grande Italia: ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997); *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)* (Rome: Laterza, 1975); and *Fascismo: storia e interpretazione* (Rome: Laterza, 2002).

[321] De Lauretis uses filmic language to describe women's contradictory relationship to ideological representation as follows: "In classical and commercial cinema, the space-off is, in fact, erased, or, better, recontained and sealed in to the image the cinematic rules of narrativization […] But avant-garde cinema has shown the space-off to exist concurrently and alongside the represented space, has made it visible by remarking its absence in the frame or in the succession of frames" (26). The representation of gender, she goes on to explain, is the movement back and forth between these two spaces, within and without (but equally constituted by) hegemonic discourses. "Thus, to inhabit both kinds of spaces at once is to live the contradiction which, [De Lauretis has suggested], is the condition of feminism here and now: the tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions – the critical negativity of its theory, and the affirmative possibility of its politics – is both the historical condition of existence of feminism and its theoretical condition of possibility. The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere" (26). [Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987)].

space in which to think and write these previously untold histories. This self-conscious quality is, as De Lauretis suggests in the quote that opened this chapter, a constitutive feature of feminism. However, while the aesthetic choices that characterize *Piccole italiane* act as acknowledgment of this need, the text I will turn to now, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, works to inhabit that space of difference and of elsewhere. I see Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo* as performing a kind of occupation of this space-off, creating a narrative that inhabits the contradiction as an active and productive space, an experience worth narrating and inhabiting precisely because it is a place where the category of subject is lived and critiqued simultaneously, where the exclusions and privileges that shape the experiences of the different genders are identified and challenged.

A History of One's Own

Feminist revisionism is, as I said before, a two-pronged project. It revises history as it has been told, rewriting narratives to include women's experience, and, at the same time, revising disciplinary norms by critiquing and proposing new methodological lenses and utopian futures. It does all of this by naming women as subjects of theory and therefore as authors of official narratives, as participants in the powerful position of knowledge-making and narrative shaping. As Graziella Parati writes, "this 'I' inscribed into theory is a gendered identity that becomes subject of a discussion on the definition of the role of women as critics once they translate their female or/and feminist 'I's' into a public theoretical text."[322] In Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo*, this "I" takes a range of shapes, occupying different positions in the various narratives Passerini weaves together.

Autoritratto di gruppo is a divided along three distinct, though not always separate narratives. The first of these is the present tense, wherein the author /narrator/protagonist reflects on her work and the process of writing the text we are reading; this narrative thread reads as a sort of diary, cataloging the experience of love, sex, pain and friendship she lives through as she writes as well recounting the sessions she has with an analyst that begin and end with the start and close of the text.[323] The

[322] Graziella Parati, *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 126.

[323] Much has been made within the feminist community of the role of psychoanalysis in this text but, while this strategy certainly resonates with the important role of psychoanalysis in Italian feminism, it is not the focus of this study. Veronica Pravadelli's article on the tension between the self and the collective is an example of the way the psychoanalytic narrative can dominate readings of *Autoritratto*. Pravadelli begins with the promise of complex reading of "subjectivity in relation to history," and the claim that the "compositional texture of this work is particularly interesting in relation to time and to subjectivity" (Pravadelli "Taking Gender," 372). She suggests, and I agree, that the non-linear structure of Passerini's narrative is a reflection of her presentation of the self as "neither stable nor linear, but multiple and fragmented" (Pravadelli "Taking Gender," 373). This compelling discussion is redirected, however, by an attempt on the part of Pravadelli, to psychoanalyze Passerini. The "multiple and fragmented" character that initially captures our attention is suddenly explained by way of psychoanalytic deduction ("the lack of identification with the mother and femininity certainly explains her refusal to have children" (Pravadelli "Taking Gender," 375)). The impulse to treat *Autoritratto* this way is, I think, suggested by the text itself, by the structural inclusion of the psychoanalytic sessions and the narrator's constant self-reflection. To give in to this impulse, however, is to risk reading the text according to a hierarchy and division of genres that, I

second narrative arc is the product of Passerini's historical research on the Sessantotto ('68), a periodization she will problematize through her work.[324] Third is the story of Passerini's life; it is an autobiography that reaches from the lives of her parents and grandparents, her own childhood and through to the "present moment" of writing the text. This narrative is distinguished from the other two *visually* because it is printed in an

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contend, *Autoritratto* seeks to destabilize. In Pravadelli's article, for instance, the psychoanalytic thread is read as the autobiographical portion of her text and, as such, supported by but divided from and superseding the historical account of '68. Although Pravadelli's title suggests a reading of the two together, in the "quest for female subjectivity between the self and the collective," her focus becomes a distillation of the self, distinguished and contextualized by the collective. In this way the radical narrative strategy that characterizes *Autoritratto* is read as a backdrop for an autobiography in the tradition of Aleramo. [Veronica Pravadelli "Taking Gender Seriously: Luisa Passerini's Quest for Female Subjectivity Between the Self and the Collective," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 19 (3): 371-389.]

[324] Passerini's focus is, as I noted, on the "Sessantotto." This term refers to a historical period (1968) and, more specifically, to the student-worker revolutions that, for so many Italians, dominated this period. I am interested in the mode and consequence of *Autoritratto* in the broader library of feminist textual production, so I will not deal much with the events of '68. I do, however, want to briefly note that in this text Passerini approaches her object of study with an eye to how it impacted and was impacted by the women's movement. In both cases (with the student movement and the women's movement), she identifies the "formarsi della nuova cultura," ["formation of a new culture"] (Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 38). Sessantotto is, in other words, a moment of production and (re)generation for all Italians, regardless of the political divisions that followed, and it is because of this cultural coming-into-being that Passerini focuses on '68. This is not, however, simply a task of remembering an important moment; in fact, Passerini did not directly participate in the activities of '68 as she was living abroad, and because she considers herself to be older, by a few years, than the protagonists (though her own work shows the wide range of ages of participants in the movement). Her physical and perceived distance from the events are the impetus for some very interesting reflections on the possibilities of affective participation and the power of History to create or enable community: "Perché parlare di qualcosa che non ho condiviso, in quel che vuol essere autobiografia, sia pure di gruppo? […] Perché il '68 è l'inveramento di qualcosa vissuto e prefigurato oscuramente da noi, più vecchi di qualche anno, nel periodo precedente; è il passaggio dai pochi ai molti, se non ancora a una maggioranza, dal singolo al collettivo, dal privato al pubblico. E anche perché c'è una vena del '68 inteso come fenomeno mondiale che ha mutato e muterà il corso delle nostre vite, dentro un processo che non è finito, e per questo è difficile da cogliere. Ricostruirlo è un modo di continuarlo e di spiare le prossime mosse" [Why talk about something I didn't participate in? In the context of what claims to be an autobiography, even if of a group? […] Because '68 is the realization of something lived and vaguely imagined in the period before this, by those of us who are older by a few years; it is the passage from the few to the many, even if not yet a majority, from the individual to the collective, from the private to the public. And also because there is an aspect of '68 which is understood as a global phenomenon that changed and will change the course of our lives; it is part of an unfinished process, which is why it is so difficult to pinpoint. Rebuilding it is a way to allow it to continue and to try to identify the next steps"] (Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 87-88). In this passage Passerini brings together her object and her methodology, she hints, in other words, at the performative dimension of her work (enabling the cultural work of '68 to continue in the process of rebuilding and remembering). Passerini's words suggest that this this type of reciprocity between object and scholar, this community building between past and future, is a phenomena specific to '68; this seems to place the power of persistence and influence on the event itself, as Mario Isnenghi explains in his volume on national memory: "Una memoria collettiva – sia nazionale che di partito, o di chiesa, comunque di un grande gruppo sociale – nasce da eventi che hanno la forza di coinvolgere e rendersi memorabili" ["A collective memory – national, political, religious, or, at any rate, belonging to a large group – is born from events that have the power to involve people and make themselves memorable"] (Isnenghi, *I luoghi*, viii). I argue that, while the events of '68 are unquestionably memorable, the sharing of experience through memory that Passerini performs is a feature of Italian feminist textuality, one that is seen in Aleramo's *Una donna*, and that persists in the historiographic work I have identified here. [Luisa Passerini, *Autoritratto di gruppo*, (Florence: Giunti, 1988).] All translations of Passerini's *Autoritratto* are my own.

italicized font, so that the reader is instantly cued into the transition to narrative, as though it were an artifact inserted, intact, into the text. A similar formal technique is used with the interviews collected for the historical research on '68; these interviews are signaled by way of large margins on either side, so that they are visually distanced from the narrator's words. The effect is, again, to mimic the inclusion of an outside source or an artifact, though, of course, both the interviews and the autobiographical account are products of Passerini's work (the work she has done translating, from speech to text, her own memories as well as those of her interviewees).[325] Another important organizing feature of the text as a whole is the use of chapters, headings and subheadings. These divisions and titles indicate that a particular chapter or section will be dedicated to either the diary-narrative, or the research narrative; for instance, the section "Democrazia, potere e conoscenza" ("Democracy, power and knowledge"), begins, as the title suggests, with an account of the shifting power within the university setting: "Veniva attaccato soprattutto il metodo delle autorità academiche 'di tipo privatistico, autoritario e non scientifico', perché non teneva conto delle istanze espresse dal movimento studentesco sul rapporto tra università e territorio."[326] This passage, which describes the focus of contested power within the university, sets the stage for Passerini's discussion of the themes identified in the section heading: democracy, power and knowledge. Similarly, the chapter titled "Specchi" ("Mirrors"), that opens the text, is concerned with the narrator's self-reflection, which leads her to begin the psychoanalytic sessions that will organize much of the text. The autobiographical narrative is never announced or isolated in this way, instead it weaves freely and often unexpectedly in and out of chapters and sections ostensibly reserved for one of the other two. I am emphasizing the layered narrative architecture of the text because I want to stress the ways *Autoritratto* confounds generic categorization. In other words, to label this text as either autobiography or historical textbook, novel or journal is to impose boundaries and expectations that *Autoritratto* frustrates at every turn. It is critical, therefore, that we keep the complicated map of narratives in mind as we consider the text's participation and challenge to these different genres and disciplines.[327]

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[325] The artifact occupies an interesting position in the tradition of writing histories and establishing legitimacy. An artifact, as the word suggests, is viewed as *fact*, is given the status of uncontestable, empirical proof; valuable capital for those engaged in the project of claiming rights and recognition for people, places and ways of being previously oppressed and ignored. Passerini acknowledges and toys with our devotion to fact by showing the malleability and subjectivity of historical narrative (as events "change" depending on the who and when of their narration). Her perseverance in using oral histories as a critical part of her historiographic process is part of this challenge to the norms and expectations of "legitimate" evidence. Michel Foucault touches on some of the more theoretical aspects of this question *L'archéologie du savoir,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). For a more focused study on the question of oral history specifically see Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998), which includes contributions from Passerini.

[326] "What was under attack, above all else, was the 'privatizing, authoritarian, non-scientific' attitude of the academic authorities, because this stance did not take into account the views expressed by the student movement on the relationship between university and space". Passerini, *Autoritratto,* 89.

[327] The variety that characterizes Passerini's narrative structure demands that, when we look for precedent we look to numerous and diverse sources and styles; we must consider precedent in terms of women writing historiographies of women; precedent in the form of women being rejected by the academy for breaking the rules of discipline, and being rejected by the women's movement for assuming different practices and theories of feminism; and finally, we must look for other examples wherein autobiography serves as a political act of charting a history of women. I have named Sibilla Aleramo as an example of the

In Graziella Parati's important study, *Public History, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography*, Passerini's text is read first and foremost as autobiography: "Passerini constructs an autobiographical hybrid context that destroys the separation between theory as a superior public discourse, and a woman's autobiographical practice as an inferior and marginal act of creativity."[328] Parati claims, quite correctly, that *Autoritratto* is a challenge to established norms of the genre and, as such, also brings into question the sets of values and ideals that inhere in those norms. "In Passerini's work," Parati writes, "the movement is from the theoretical toward the personal within an autobiographical context that privileges the 'fictionalization' of the public and the private."[329] Parati's choice to place Passerini in a lineage of Italian women who have used autobiography to make claims about women's rights has the double effect of highlighting the importance of the genre for the women's movement and, at the same time, of revealing the instability of the category. My point, in other words, is that to call *Autoritratto* an autobiography is hardly a given; the title alone tests our ability to think of the self, the "auto" as anything but singular. *Autoritratto di gruppo* (translated literally as "Group Self-Portrait") conjures up both a singular author capturing the spirit of many, and many authors sketching a single portrait. Both of these efforts are, of course, represented in Passerini's text, so that what we are left with, in the end, are two portraits, overlaid one on top of the other, shifting in and out of focus. This multi-subject narrative counters expectations of traditional autobiography, which demand the story of one life, the life of the author. Derek Duncan writes that *Autoritratto* "is, amongst other things, a history of the autobiographical body, and an attempt to rescue bodies from the amnesia of traditionally conceived life narratives."[330] Duncan's focus on the body reminds us of the inseparability of word and flesh in the Italian women's movement (a point I discussed at length in Chapter One, in the context of earlier autobiographies and life-story narratives). The insistence, by both Duncan and Parati, on classifying this text as autobiography risks, in my view, denying the power it has to transform and upset expectations in other disciplines, particularly history. As Joan W. Scott writes in her forward to the English translation of *Autoritratto*, "Luisa Passerini is not an ordinary historian."[331] With this opening statement Scott marks both Passerini *and* the text as belonging to the field of historiography. Passerini, she says, challenges the norms of that field and "seeks […] to push the boundaries of history beyond what they have been conventionally."[332] Scott identifies this effort in Passerini's treatment of the individual narrative and its relation to the collective: "While others have read individual and collective actions as the reflection of economic structures or cultural institutions, Passerini has argued for greater

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latter form of precedent in my previous discussion of the question of autobiography, and I briefly mentioned Franca Pieroni Bortolotti's role as the first historian of Italian feminism. For a compelling explanation of how Bortolotti might be seen to straddle the line between subject and object of her own work in a style similar to Passerini's, refer to Anna Rossi-Doria's article "L'intreccio tra la vita e l'opera di una storica," ["The connection between the life and work of a historian"] in *Studi Storici* 40. 4 (1999): 1161-1172.

[328] Parati, *Public,* 125.

[329] Parati, *Public*, 126.

[330] Derek Duncan, "Corporeal Histories: The Autobiographical Bodies of Luisa Passerini," *The Modern Language Review*, 93. 2 (1998): 372.

[331] Scott, "Forward," in *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*, by Luisa Passerini, translated by Lisa Erdberg, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), xi.

[332] Scott, "Forward," xi

interpretive complexity. Her work insists at once on the specificity and complexity of individual subjectivities and on their historicity."[333] In particular, Scott praises Passerini for her effort to change the *way* historiography is practiced, to revise the methodologies that produce history. By situating *Autoritratto* firmly within the discipline of history, Scott echoes a claim that each of the texts discussed in this chapter make: that women's lives comprise history and, as such, their texts must be read as belonging to (and changing) the library of historiography. In other words, these texts are part of an attempt to assert a space for women in the official house of History, where the "life story" of humanity is told; this is a different (albeit related) project from the one of telling the stories of individual women and revolutionizing the genre autobiography.

Passerini's text undoubtedly participates in both of these projects; at the off-centered point of intersection between these two is psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, as I noted previously, plays a big role in the narrative construction of *Autoritratto* and, as such, it has captivated the attention of many readers. For Scott, the presence of psychoanalysis in this text is a way of highlighting the complicated relationship between memory, narrative and identity: "when viewed through the lens of psychoanalysis, what is rationally remembered is not a simple reflection of social position, economic structure or political event; it is instead a way of selectively organizing experience to produce and explain one's self."[334] This interplay between memory and identity can be seen in Passerini's reflections on her experience of telling her personal life as well as the process of collecting and making sense of interviews: "La memoria ha registrato i contraccolpi: le sofferenze per i dislivelli, le frustrazioni subite o viste subire. Ma non solo. Perché la memoria parla da oggi. Parla dal punto di vista di un'identità che si è costruita, identità politica nel senso antico del termine: di una cittadinanza che si era data e che non è facile cancellare totalmente. Identità condivisa, partecipazione al farsi della propria vita e invenzione di una cultura."[335] Passerini is, in other words, highlighting the ways in which identity, on all levels, – national, cultural, civic, psychic, collective *and* individual – is narratively produced. The practice of psychoanalysis is, similarly, a narrative articulation of identity.

While Scott sees psychoanalysis as a tool deployed by Passerini in the writing of "something that is, arguably, closer to lived history than anything we are accustomed to reading," Graziella Parati takes a slightly different view.[336] Parati uses psychoanalysis as a lens through which to read a political, utopian project in *Autoritratto*; she sees in Passerini's work the textualization of matrilinear *dis*order, one in which gender is imagined without subordination. She engages with Luisa Muraro's proposal of a new symbolic order of the Mother to describe this matrilinear disorder, though Parati is quick to point to the differences – historical and philosophical – that distinguish Passerini and Muraro. She notes, for instance, that "Muraro speaks from within a feminist context, and

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[333] Scott, "Forward," xi
[334] Scott, "Forward," xii
[335] "Memory has recorded the blowbacks: the sufferings of inequality, the frustrations endured and witnessed. But not only. Because memory speaks from the present. It speaks from a point of view that it has constructed for itself, a political identity, in the ancient sense of the word: of a citizenship that has been taken up and that is not easily erased. A shared identity, a sense of participation in the construction of one's own life and the invention of culture." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 38. "
[336] Scott, "Forward," xiii

Passerini's feminist voice comes from without a movement."[337] This distinction has been treated as an important one by Italian feminists of a certain generation, for whom Passerini's outsider status is determined by her physical absence from Italy during the most visible years of the women's movement, in the 1970s, when those women were gathering in the streets. Today, I think, this rigid divide is less understandable, in part because the idea of feminism as a coherent movement is not easily recognizable in the world of fragmented, identity-based activism. This new political landscape began to take shape most significantly in the late 1980s/early 1990s, when the Communist Party lost its power, and, at the same time, theories of identity politics started finding practical expression in the development of a new grassroots activism. Passerini's text describes a period of transition, from '68-'88, during which the very notion of a "movement" underwent a radical transformation; her position as an "outsider," never an official participant in the mass-movement despite ideological and political allegiances, offers a uniquely thoughtful and long-range vantage from which to consider this shift.

I argue, therefore, that the narrative structure of *Autoritratto* pushes against this insider/outsider logic, by exploring the limits created in the interplay between memory and identity. Passerini writes that "Alcune storie di vita fanno convergere, quasi coincidere, il piano simbolico e il reale, indipendentemente dai dati biologici, dall'età e dai padri in carne e ossa."[338] What is being hinted at here is the experience of participating in a community of women separated by time or place but linked together through the practice of self-narration. In Chapter One, I discussed this in terms of a transgenerational dialogue echoing in the texts written by Aleramo, De Cespedes and Ferri; in Passerini's text the separation is spatial rather than temporal but the community-building activity persists. It is a process of affective remembering in which experience is paradoxically linked to the body (as the shared site of women's experience) and removed from the self. In and through this decentered mode of experience a diasporic community is produced, and it is maintained through a tradition of shared, affective memory; this is not unique to the Italian women's movement, but is characteristic of it.

Parati's strategic decision to place Passerini in dialogue with Muraro brings to light another defining feature of the Italian women's movement: using the philosophy of sexual difference as the critical lens through which to examine women's experience. Parati teases out the connections and differences between Passerini's work and the work done by Muraro, Adriana Cavarero and the women of the Diotima group to make the compelling case that Passerini's historiography participates in a lineage of Italian feminist writing – by way of the philosophy of sexual difference – despite the omission of these names or theories from *Autoritratto*. Addis Saba explains that Italian "feminist historians employed sexual difference as a research tool. They created a border-crossing discipline, intertwining present and past, private and public, emotion and intellect, anthropology and biography, material culture and ethnography."[339] At the heart of this intersectional practice is a reconceptualization of the subject that takes experience as a site of theory. In Passerini's text, the psychoanalytic setting acts as a performance of the experience of feminist theory of the self that simultaneously affirms and throws into

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[337] Parati, *Public*, 148.
[338] "Some life stories have the effect of making the symbolic and the real come together, almost coincide, regardless of biological dates, of the age of flesh and blood fathers." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 46
[339] Addis Saba, "Women's Studies," 119.

question assumptions about gendered subjectivity. Parati writes that the "'I' inscribed into the space of theory is a gendered identity that becomes subject of a discussion on the definition of the role of women as critics once they translate their female or/and feminist 'I's' into a public theoretical text."[340] Put another way, the new female subject, the new operative concept of "woman" at work in Passerini's text is a subject *in* theory, a subject characterized by her continuous re-elaboration. Focusing on a dream Passerini relates about an androgynous being, ("un sesso forse più di uomo che di donna, ma confuso: una virago"[341]), Parati zeroes in on the idea of gender androgyny as a way out of the rigid binaries that constrain experience:

> the beings [in the dream], such as the virago, who are neither one nor the other are explained: they appear as monsters because they embody an unresolved struggle between oppositions and are saturated with anxiety because they personify an attempt to construct a hybrid entity. An act of mediation is carried out by returning to the term *neutral* not as the 'neutralization' of a woman's voice/identity, but as a potentially shared space.[342]

The hybrid entity Parati identifies by way of this dream of androgyny and anxiety is another instance of the text's effort to work against binary oppositions, on both a formal *and* a conceptual level. I disagree, however, with Parati's suggestion that *Autoritratto* points to androgyny as a path toward gender plurality; the dream – a scene characterized by anxiety and fear – is the only moment when the text engages in a reflection on the limits of gender as such. In the rest of the text, on the other hand, gender is discussed in terms of the social norms and expectations that inform individual and collective perceptions of identity; in other words, while *Autoritratto* recognizes that there are many ways of experiencing one's gendered identity, there are, nevertheless, only two acknowledged gender categories.

Derek Duncan also hones in on the figure of the androgynous body to theorize the potentiality of Passerini's text as hovering between prescriptive norms of gender and genre. He uses Rosi Braidotti's theory of the body as a threshold between the internal and the external to think of autobiography as a "place of transit." Autobiography, Duncan suggests, "can be seen as the place where the 'collegamento' between the self and the collective actually takes place, the site where histories, individual and collective, are made."[343] Implicit in this compelling description is the idea that autobiography is not about the individual but is, instead, a collective project (as Passerini's title suggests). This suggestion that autobiography acts as suture between the individual and the collective is not unlike my suggestion that *Autoritratto* inhabits De Lauretis's "space-off;" however, Duncan's insistence on reading *Autoritratto* as autobiography belies a certain anxiety about genre that I think Passerini's text works against. Of her own text, Passerini writes, "il linguaggio modella gli eventi biografici all'interno di una interpretazione del mondo e della storia. Il vissuto è trasportato di colpo in una sfera pubblica con valenza

[340] Parati, *Public*, 126.
[341] "a sex organ perhaps more male than female, but confused: a virago." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 25.
[342] Parati, *Public*, 137.
[343] Duncan, "Corporeal," 372.

letteraria."[344] The sense of movement conveyed in this passage, between experience and language, and across genres from the biographical to the historical is active throughout the text and is part of what makes *Autoritratto* such a radical, sweeping work of feminist revisionism. Passerini's work brings into focus the relationship between experience, history and text; in other words, she is making the radical claim that History is an account of memories of lived experiences. She explains that her interest is in the dynamic, constitutive relationship between memory and history: "la pretesa della memoria di fare la storia di se stessa, che è molto di meno e forse qualcosa di più di una storia sociale. […] Per farsi storia, questa soggettività deve affermarsi come antistorica."[345] Put another way, the attention Passerini pays to memory and experience, in the context of her historiographic work, constitutes a challenge not just to the methodologies of the discipline of History, but also to commonly held understandings of what counts as the shared national past. Her focus on Sessantotto sets the stage for a discussion of contested authority, which her formal experimentations elaborate.

Duncan's focus on the autobiographical highlights, as I mentioned before, the tradition of autobiographical writing in the women's movement. Using Sidonie Smith's analysis of women's autobiography as inherently transgressive (see my discussion in Chapter One), Duncan reads *Autoritratto* as a work of cultural critique.[346] He writes that in Passerini's text, "autobiography is a space in which stories emerge through a conversational process with none of the participants having the last word. It is this responsiveness to the intervention of other people, their stories, and their interpretation of their stories, that marks her autobiography out as an exemplary work of cultural criticism in the making."[347] Here Duncan is taking a Cavarerian approach to the text similar to my reading of the texts discussed in Chapter Two, where relationality among women, texts and readers, determines the focus and texture of the critique. I appreciate and, in many ways, agree with Duncan's proposal, but I also find it somewhat limiting – limiting of the possibilities of exchange between text and reader. If the text is limited to and classified as autobiography it remains, I contend, in the sphere of "women's literature," thus limiting the potential of its engagement with History as universally relevant and unchallenged category. It is my contention that *Autoritratto* acts differently from those texts described in the previous chapters in part because of the historical moment it was produced and the intellectual and political currents at work in the women's movement at that time.

Passerini's text is written in and shaped by the climate of the late 1980s, when the political Left began to crumble. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) had, for decades, been a formidable political player, but the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the symbolic culmination of decline that had begun in the mid-1980s.[348] In the context of the women's

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[344] "language shapes biographical events within the context of an interpretation of the world and history. Experience is suddenly transported into the public sphere and is given literary valence." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 47.

[345] "the pretense of memory to make history of itself, which is something less than and maybe something more than social history. […] To make history, this subjectivity must affirm itself as being ahistorical." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 39.

[346] See my discussion of Smith and autobiography in Chapter One.

[347] Duncan, "Corporeal," 383.

[348] For more on this transition see: Sivia Mantini, "Women's History in Italy: Cultural Itineraries and New Proposals in Current Historiographical Trends," trans. James Schwarten, *Journal of Women's History* 12:2. (2000): 170-198.

movement, this political upheaval meant the loss of a powerful ally and, for many women, the end of activism and, perhaps more drastically, the loss of hope for a transformed, feminist Italy. *Autoritratto di gruppo*, published in the shadow of this imminent change, carries undertones of this disillusion but takes as its focus a dramatically different historical moment. In discussing the affective relationship between women and the activist left of ’68, Passerini writes,

> La presa di distanza delle donne del ’68, parziale o totale, invia almeno due messaggi importanti. È una critica della sinistra, del suo modo di pensare e di far politica, è un modo di chiamarsi fuori da una tradizione per fondarne una nuova e diversa. Il secondo messaggio è che il movimento delle donne rivendica altre origini rispetto a quello degli studenti, che non considera suo antecedente diretto. Qui sono da distinguere le origini storiche, la genesi, e la rappresentazione, compresa l’autorappresentazione raggiunta; la memoria deve essere interpretata anche su questa presa di distanza.[349]

The two messages Passerini identifies, of critique and self-definition, are the product of a split between the women’s movement and the student and workers’ movement, a split that characterizes this period in women’s history and that helps inform the disillusionment and negative affect that inform the women’s movement of the early 1990s. Adalgisa Giorgio and Anna Cento Bull describe the affective consequences of this political split by explaining that

> the disappearance of the ‘father party’ [on the left] has led to a multitude of political voices and to fragmentation. […] As for women, they have not been able to make substantial inroads into political institutions leading to positions of power, or they have lacked the necessary motivation to do so. Arguably, this can also be seen as a legacy of the 1970s, when Italian feminism focused on alternative political practices which were fundamentally separatist. On the right, new surrogate paternal figures have emerged, notably Berlusconi, who, however, is a despot rather than a father.[350]

Giorgio and Bull describe a passive space, in which Italian women are abandoned by the Left and dominated by the new Right (Berlusconi); a formulation that leaves women lacking agency and reproduces a culture of negative affect that is often repeated in the current women’s movement. Passerini’s text, however, does not guide its readers to a determined affective conclusion, instead she engages with the complicated work of memory and history and reflects on how periodization is, itself, a political strategy with

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[349] “the distance taken by the women of ’68, partial of total, sends at least two important messages. It is a critique of the Left, of the way it does politics; it is a way of leaving one tradition in order to found a new one. The second message is that the women’s movement claims origins that are different from the students’ movement, and that it does not consider the latter to be a direct predecessor. We must identify, here, the historical roots, the genesis and the legacy representation and self-representation; memory is to be interpreted even from this distance.” Passerini, *Autoritratto,* 205.

[350] Adalgisa Giorgio and Anna Cento Bull, “The 1970s through the Looking Glass,” in *Speaking Out and Silencing: Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s,* ed. Adalgisa Giorgio et al. (London: Legenda, 2006), 6.

affective outcomes: "Un modo per difendersi, per la memoria, è periodizzare. Grazie a un tipico movimento per salvare l'identità, molti attribuiscono il 'bene' a un movimento iniziale e incorrotto, e la degenerazione a un periodo successivo."[351] The attention to origins and identity is central to the projects of politics, history and autobiography – it is by way of a claim to origins that so many political projects are motivated – and it is in the context of this coming together of goals and crossing of disciplinary paths that *Autoritratto* is situated.

The decade between 1968 and 1978 is, roughly, the object of Passerini's study (though, of course, her narrative arcs reach beyond this time in both directions); it is a time period characterized by social and political change, by radical visions of alternate Italies and by widespread hope and active public participation. During this time, the Left was strong and fostered a new culture in which challenge to authority and break with tradition united an array of oppressed peoples: "Nei momenti costitutivi del nuovo atteggiamento culturale doveva prevalere l'allontanamento da tutto il passato."[352] Passerini's text traces some of these sympathetic alliances (between students, workers and women), as they lead to ruptures, resentment, to the formation of a separatist women's movement, or a withdrawal of women from the political scene. She describes the transition from anger and resentment to resigned disillusionment that characterizes so many women's political autobiographies: "Nelle testimonianze attuali c'è assai poco quello che là dominava, recriminazione e rancore. C'è la consapevolezza dei costi pagati e della propria complicità nelle scelte fatte. Il tempo e l'allargamento dell'intellettualità femminile hanno consentito una storicizzazione iniziale."[353] This preoccupation with time that Passerini brings to her research is also crucial to our reading of her work; *Autoritratto* was written in, and shaped by, the climate of the late 1980s but the focus is on 1968-1978, and those values of collectivity and questioning of authority, so central to that earlier moment, continued to inform her writing one and two decades later.

A Dark Future

Less than a decade later, Chiara Valentini's *Le donne fanno paura*, begins with an investigation of the current distance Italian women take from political activism. Taking note of the cultural distance that divides her work from Passerini's, Valentini focuses on the shift away from the values and practices of collectivity, finding connections between this cultural transition, the lived experiences of women, and the narratives told about them. *Le donne* tackles the politics of narrative exclusion head on, through a journalistic-style exposé of the ways in which optimistic narratives of women's "progress" and "success" in Italy are based on demographic practices that do not reflect women's lived

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[351] One way memory defends itself it through periodization. Thanks to a typical strategy of identity self-preservation, many look to an initial phase as a period of 'good' and purity,' and a ascribe degeneration to a later phase." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 176.

[352] "In the constitutive moments of this cultural attitude, there had to be a total break with the past." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 47-48.

[353] "In the testimonies given today there is little of what was common at the time: recrimination and bitterness. There is an awareness of the price paid, and the complicity in the choices made. Time and the expansion of women's intellectual horizons have allowed for an initial historicization." Passerini, *Autoritratto*, 139.

experience. At the heart of this project is a two-pronged interrogation of what it means to be a woman in Italy and what it means to be Italian. The first question draws on an extensive tradition of textual production that I have been highlighting throughout this dissertation; the second part participates in a slightly different and, perhaps surprisingly, shorter legacy. Attempting to identify the essence of the Italian character is by no means a new task (one need only think of the phrase famously attributed to D'Azeglio – "fatta l'Italia ora bisogna fare gli italiani" ("Italy is made, now we must make Italians") – to see that this project has been inseparable from the activity of national formation). What is different about Valentini's approach to this question is the historical moment in which she finds herself and from which she launches her inquiry. Valentini is writing at a moment of significant national and international transformation: the Left has fallen, the European Union is coming into being, borders are unstable, people are migrating in new directions and in increasing numbers, and the new technologies of communication and commerce are exposing the "private" conditions of national existence to the scrutiny of the international community. Silvana Patriarca notes that these new global conditions were felt later in Italy than in the rest of Europe; they gave "rise to an interest in national identity in Europe in the 1980s" but "in that same period Italy, in contrast with the core countries [of Europe] had been little touched by the rise of interest in the question of national identity."[354] In Italy, it is not until the 1990s that this question comes to be regarded as an urgent and critical task of imagining the nation's future, rather than narrativizing the past. I make this temporal distinction as a way of signaling the difference between the type of interrogation of national identity that Valentini is engaged in, and the more well-known approach that grew out of the Risorgimento.[355] The latter is, by and large, a practice of affirmation and of identifying those traits and historic accomplishments that uplift and bring honor to a national ideal. Valentini, on the other hand, belongs to (or departs from) a more cynical camp that seeks to divorce the events and experiences of Italians from their myths and ideals; however, this project is not motivated entirely by cynicism, at the heart of this deconstructive effort is a desire to offer new narratives of national history so that they might serve as fodder for visions of new (and other) Italian futurities.

Valentini is a well-known investigative reporter, with a long history of publications; most relevant to this dissertation are her biography of Dario Fo, which I referenced in Chapter Two, as well as her collaboration on *Piccole italiane.* She has always been an outspoken intellectual voice within the Italian media, beginning her career with *Corriere della sera*, going on to help start *Panorama* and finally moving to *L'Espresso* where she currently publishes a weekly blog (Rosablog). *Le donne fanno paura* stands out from her other publications because of its pointed focus on the exploited and oppressed condition of women in Italy. Before *Le donne* Valentini had written about important figures in the Italian political and economic world (most notably three studies of Berlinguer, and one on the fall of the PCI, the Italian Communist Party). In 1993, she

[354] Silvana Patriarca, "National Identity or National Character? New Vocabularies and Old Paradigms," in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Civilization of National Identity Around the Risorgimento,* ed. Albert Ascoli et al., (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2001), 299.
[355] Recently some interesting work has been done to create a dialogue between the different moments of nation-making in Italian history. One important title to consider is *Making and Remaking Italy: The Civilization of National Identity Around the Risorgimento.* Edited by Albert Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2001).

wrote an award-winning exposé on the use of rape in the Balkan war (*L'arma dello stupro,* 1993). *Le donne* marks a shift in Valentini's work in that it brings the national and gender-specific together, focusing her harsh journalistic lens on a question which had, by and large, been ignored. This text is a study of the origins of public opinion on the economic and political trajectory of women in Italy. *Le donne fanno paura* traces a history of Italian women beginning in the late 1960s, and moving through the 1990s.

Truth and Contradiction

"In particolare nell'Italia di oggi non c'è niente di più contradditorio della vita femminile."[356] Like De Lauretis, Valentini uses contradiction as a way of describing the condition of women, but she relies on numbers and data rather than theory, on oral history (like Passerini), media reporting and legislative action rather than philosophy and the arts to make her case. This text is, at its core, a study of the origins of public opinion on the economic and political trajectory of women in Italy. Using demographic data to identify economic and educational trends, Valentini traces a history of Italian women beginning in the post-war era, and moving through the 1990s. She focuses on major social and political changes and events that directly and indirectly affect women, beginning with the feminism of the early 1970s, and connects those events to workplace and education statistics. In this way Valentini creates a new historical narrative that contextualizes women's disadvantaged position in the workplace in relation to their exclusion from politics, identifying both the ways in which these histories (political and socio-economic) are mutually constitutive, and the media's complicity in keeping these narratives separate; the effect is the perpetuation of an optimistic tale of women's "emancipation" that is grounded not in fact, but in narratives of historical progress: "è proprio lo scarto fra questa visione ottimistica e la realtà delle cose a provocare un malessere che oggi mi sembra particolarmente forte."[357] The dominant narrative (about women) is that we were oppressed for centuries, but then, in 1946, we won the right to vote, and continued to fight for more rights, culminating in the 1970s when we won the right to control our own reproductive, marital and economic destinies. After that, there was nothing left to fight for, so the feminist movement disbanded and women have, ever since, enjoyed the equal status and treatment of their male counterparts. Valentini claims / shows that the truth is much more complicated. While there is certainly more to the story of the rights won between 1945 and 1980, what is most in need of correcting is the idea that women today enjoy a status equal to men and do not suffer exploitation and oppression as a direct result of their gender. She seeks to revise this narrative by toning down the optimistic arc and pointing to the ways in which the "progress" has been arrested. If women have made such progress why, she asks, are things so hard? "Perché allora tante cose non funzionano? Perché sono quasi sempre e quasi dappertutto gli uomini a comandare e a decidere? Forse non abbiamo valutato a sufficienza quanto siano

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[356] "Especially in today's Italy there is nothing more contradictory than a woman's life." All translations are my own. Chiara Valentini, *Le donne fanno paura,* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1997), 11.

[357] "it is precisely this difference between this optimistic vision and the reality of things that causes this feeling unease that seems particularly strong today." Valentini, *Le donne*, 12.

state dirompenti le conseguenze del nostro ingresso in una società pensata da sempre al maschile?"[358] She wonders, also, why these questions are not at the heart of a public national dialogue: "Erano domande che, per lo meno nel mondo basato su logiche fortemente maschili come quello dei giornali, non sembravano sollevare grandi curiosità."[359]

As a way of getting to these answers, Valentini goes back to 1945, and briefly identifies some contradictions between narratives and experience as well as noting some significant developments for women in the each of the decades that followed. Her main focus, however, are the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and what she identifies as the increasingly dramatic difference between popular narrative and real conditions of existence. She points to a number of specific examples of this divergence, relying on demographic data, economic statistics, media reporting and government publications, legislations and public statements. In what I think is a really interesting move, she critiques these sources even as she relies on them. By way of this critique she seeks to uncover some of the motivations driving this discrepancy.

Twisted Tales

The 1970s are widely regarded as the heyday of the Italian women's movement in large part because of legislative milestones earning women the right to divorce, equal rights at work, and abortion. Valentini also offers data as evidence of the large number of women entering the workforce and pursuing education that mark this period: "al di là del valore delle immagini, quel che ancor oggi stupisce e su cui non si è riflettuto abbastanza è che in quegli anni [settanta] la condizione reale delle donne aveva davvero cominciato a modificarsi."[360] This is why the 1980s and 1990s are so interesting – because they are at odds with the predicted trajectory of women's history (based on accomplishments between 1945-1979). "Se un'osservatrice del tutto esterna e imparziale avesse potuto cogliere con uno sguardo unificante tutto quel che stava muovendo nell'universo femminile nella seconda metà degli anni settanta […] probabilmente avrebbe pensato che le italiane avevano buone possibilità di farcela."[361] Valentini claims, however, that the momentum of female emancipation comes to a halt with the kidnapping and death of Aldo Moro. It is her contention that Moro's death marks the end of the women's movement: "l'ipotesi di trasformazione prudente della società italiana pensata da Enrico Berlinguer e da Aldo Moro era andata in pezzi. Era finita l'epoca delle grandi riforme e

[358] "Why, then, do so few things work? Why is it almost always, and almost everywhere, men who are making decisions? Maybe we have not given enough weight to the disruptive consequences of our entrances into a society that has always been thought as masculine." Valentini, *Le donne*, 12.

[359] "There were questions that, at least according to the heavily masculine logic of newspapers, do not seem to raise many questions." Valentini, *Le donne*, 9.

[360] "in addition to the images, the thing that is really amazing and that has not received enough attention, is that in the those years [the Seventies] the real condition of women was starting to change." Valentini, *Le donne*, 14.

[361] "If an impartial observer had been able to capture in one unifying glance all the things that were changing in the world of women in the second half of the Seventies […] she probably would have thought that Italian women had a very good chance of making it." Valentini, *Le donne*, 65.

anche l'epoca d'oro delle leggi delle donne."[362] This significant historical event, however, is rarely placed in dialogue with account of women's history or the conditions of women's existence. Instead, women are de-gendered, in a sense, and woven into a discussion of economics and demographics that refuses to acknowledge gender bias.

Valentini highlights the different narratives that are used to recode women's struggles as success: "Passati gli anni settanta, già negli ottanta si era cominciato a parlare di 'economia parallela' e di sommerso e a considerare questa e altre forme non regolate di lavoro come una componente importante della nostra economia di quinta potenza economica mondiale."[363] In examining the language of parallel or unregulated markets, Valentini reveals the ways gendered discrimination is hidden, repackaged as a characteristic of the new global market and thus as something unrelated to the history of women's oppression. She points to two ways of understanding and of narrating this new, non-regulated, parallel workplace and its effect on women: "Se volessimo usare una parola oggi poco alla moda potremmo dire al servizio dello sfruttamento. Ma per altre […] l'angolo visuale è ben più ottimista. Della flessibilità e dell'uso non rigido del tempo vengono valutati gli aspetti positivi, che consentono di rompere la gabbia delle otto ore e del posto fisso per tutta la vita e che si incontrano con la mobilità e la maggior creatività delle vite femminili. Bisogna dire che in questo campo si è diffusa anche molta retorica."[364] These two views are, as Valentini makes clear, indebted in different ways to the power of rhetoric. The optimistic narrative is, in her view, a denial of the realities of exploitation. The danger of these rhetorical moves is that they shift the onus back onto the woman, denying the logic that would allow for a structural critique (of a system that perpetuates women's disenfranchisement) by reproducing a narrative in which women's emancipation has been achieved, and what we are confronted with now (at the end of the 1970s) are the gender-blind challenges of the modern labor.

This new global market place produces images of worker-citizens that are rhetorically constructed to meet certain political and economic ideals. Valentini describes the development of yet another concept of woman in the 1980s, one that rejects collective, relational identity, one that rejects feminism (understood *as* collective, radical politics), and is instead a deeply "American" embodiment of an individual, defined by her place in the consumer market:

> in quegli anni invece l'opinione corrente si stava orientando in tutt'altro modo. Nel decennio del riflusso e del consumismo, del ritiro nel privato e della fine dei movimenti collettivi, quel che emergeva era l'immagine della 'superwoman' che dopo aver dato un calcio al femminismo si

[362] "the project of prudent transformation of Italian society developed by Enrico Berlinguer and Aldo Moro had gone to pieces. The era of big reforms and the golden age of laws for women had come to an end." Valentini, *Le donne*, 28.

[363] "After the Seventies, and already in the Eighties we began to hear about a 'parallel economy' and a black market labor force. These, and other modes of non-regulated work began to be considered as important components to our position as fifth in the global economy." Valentini, *Le donne*, 148.

[364] "If we wanted to use a word that today is out of vogue we could say exploitation. But for others […] the visual approach is much more optimistic. The flexibility around hours is seen as a positive, it allows for freedom from the cage of a life-long eight hour work day, and allows for the creativity and fluidity of the female lifestyle. It must be said that this position has relied heavily on rhetoric." Valentini, *Le donne*, 143.

> accingeva, anche essendo una semplice segretaria, ad atteggiarsi, a vestirsi e a pensare secondo il nuovo modello della donna in carriera.[365]

The "superwoman" Valentini refers to gains her powers by rejecting the premise of gender-based discrimination which, for the previous eighty plus years, had been the fundamental unifying feature of all women's movements, bringing women together across differences of class, religion, political affiliation and so on. The superwoman of the 1980s is profoundly, definitionally alone – as are all superheroes, their singularness is what makes them super(extra, above) human. It is a mythological model that works simultaneously to empower and control, by inflating the possible glory of the individual and, in the same breath, working against the potential mobilization of the masses. New narratives begin to circulate that cast women's roles in the public sphere as separate from feminist and emancipatory projects: "Le nuove protagoniste sono ben inserite nelle gerarchie che contano. Quasi sempre affermano di non essere femministe, di non condividere le posizioni radicali di un movimento che peraltro è ormai scomparso dalle piazze. E sembrano, casomai, voler riverniciare di rampante modernità il vecchio filone dell'emancipazione."[366] This emphasis on the death of feminism shaped widely held views on women in the 1980s and, I believe, helps explain the brand of feminism revisionism I have been discussing in this chapter. These texts come as a reaction, as a counter-narrative, attempting to defeat the negative force of the superwoman on the women's movement precisely by documenting the history she grew out of and putting her in dialogue with the successes and the difficulties that make up Italian women's history. Of the three texts examined in the chapter, Valentini's is the one that most clearly articulates this mission, citing the dangers of the superwoman myth and telling the stories of real women; paradoxically, however, *Le donne* is more cynical in tone than the other two about the potential for change as a result of this narrative work.

Valentini takes a critical stance as she confronts the myth of the modern superwoman, stressing the dangers inherent in promoting the idea that women's oppression is a thing of the past. At the same time, however, she seems to agree that feminism did indeed end, that – perhaps *because of* this narrative – the new successful women are not feminists, are not politically or socially minded, but are instead striving to fit into a patriarchal system where their woman-ness needs to be simultaneously suppressed and reified, perfected, exaggerated.

The myth of the superwoman is powerful, not just because it does away with the "problems" of feminism, offering instead the image of a successful woman. But also

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[365] Note that the use of English words to describe economic, social and political phenomena increases dramatically as Valentini's focus shifts to the 1980s and onwards; this linguistic shift is, perhaps unintentionally, indicative of the mounting influence of American consumer culture in Italy.
"in those years, on the other hand, public opinion was flowing in the opposite direction. In the decade of the rise of consumerism, the withdrawal into the private and the end of collective movements, what emerged was the image of the 'superwoman' who, having kicked feminism to the curb, dedicated herself, even as a simple secretary, to act and behave, dress and think according to the new model of the career woman." Valentini, *Le donne*, 33.

[366] "The new protagonists are well-integrated in the hierarchies that count. They almost always claim not to be feminists, not to share the radical positions of a movement that has disappeared from the streets. They seem, if anything, to want to repaint the old banners of emancipation with a radical modernity." Valentini, *Le donne*, 35.

because this image is fleshed out, is given the detail and specificities characteristic of the self-narrating woman of the 1970s, without, however, acknowledging the contradictions that define the lives of real women. Valentini uses as an example the trends of DIY and of home-cooking to show how these activities – transformed from gendered duties into fashionable hobbies for women – operate, just like the superwoman myth, according to a contradictory logic:

> Basti pensare, negli ultimi dieci anni, al boom delle riviste e delle dispense di cucina, che insegnano tutto quel che si deve sapere sui soufflé e sulle ricette della nonna, sui piatti esotici e sulle marmellate fatte in case. È una logica opposta rispetto a quella delle ricette rapide 'per la donna che lavora' in auge fino a un certo momento.[367]

The trend Valentini describes is one that presents these domestic chores as fashionable hobbies, in magazines published explicitly for women that use language like "quel che *si deve* sapere," which Valentini knowingly mimics. The effect is to create a narrative wherein 'la donna che lavora' is, nevertheless, firmly rooted in the home; she has the freedom to build a professional career, but this will not in any way impinge on her ability or desire to make a perfect home. In other words, the mythical image of the successful businesswoman is made to work in conjunction with a logic that keeps women tied to the domestic sphere and to ideas of gendered space under the guise of "return to tradition."[368]

Valentini's project of revision takes on all public narratives that claim to speak for women's experience, including those coming from within the women's movement. In particular, she takes issue with the philosophy of sexual difference, accusing proponents of this brand of Italian feminism of enabling a divided workforce and a segregated public discourse. The philosophy of sexual difference is, Valentini claims, unwittingly supportive of the mistreatment of women in practice and in policy because it refuses to support legislation that would demand *equal* treatment for men and women on the grounds that women need to construct a system of power and order based on difference (rather than equality or the false promise of equality). In effect, she structures an opposition, which I find quite compelling, between the philosophy of sexual difference and affirmative action-like laws (about quotas in candidacy and equal opportunity).[369]

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[367] "One need only think, in the last ten years, of the boom of magazines about cooking, that teach everything one needs to know about soufflés and grandma's recipes, about exotic dishes and homemade jams. It is a logic that stands in opposition to the quick recipes for the 'working woman' that were in vogue until recently." Valentini, *Le donne*, 63.

[368] Valentini also examines the role television has played in controlling the images available for/of women. Beginning in the mid-1980s Italian television has been a powerful tool in keeping women in a subordinate position, reducing them to sex objects and ornaments to the more serious world of male politics. Television is, of course a very important part of any discussion of Italy in the past thirty years, and an increasing number of studies are being done about how Italian television (mis)represents women. I am not dealing directly with this topic because I have tried to limit my focus to the textual; from more on this topic I recommend Lorella Zanardo's *Il corpo delle donne* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2010).

[369] Valentini takes as a case study Law 81. Law 81 was designed to help ensure women had equal representation on the ballot (175) Opposition to the law came from men on the right as well as women on the right and the left: "Da destra la missina Adriana Poli Bortone aveva sostenuto che il riequilibrio non serviva perché fra uomini e donne non ci sono differenze sostanziali. La democristiana Ombretta Fumagalli Carulli aveva scaldato gli animi gridando nel microfono 'Le donne non sono una specie in estinzione da proteggere. Non siamo panda.' Questo slogan facile tornerà spesso nelle discussioni successive e

Feminists supportive of the philosophy of sexual difference (embodied, for Valentini, in the figure of Luisa Muraro) are accused of allowing their theoretical convictions to impede the implementation of practical fixes to problems women face. She points repeatedly to the United States as an example of a place where the feminism of equality has succeeded where the philosophy of sexual difference has failed; sexual harassment in the workplace, for instance, is the topic of much feminist debate and legislation in the U.S., but is scarcely even mentioned in Italy.[370] This is not, however, a straightforward praise of the feminism of equality over that of difference. She is careful to point out that in Italy, in those professional and political areas where women have made significant and substantial (as opposed to symbolic) progress, the credit must be given to a system of female empowerment: "Quello di donne che lavorano per altre donne è forse il fenomeno

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contribuirà a creare un'opinione pubblica contraria alla politica del riequilibrio. Anche una parte della sinistra, [….] sosteneva la nocività di qualunque tipo di azione positiva, capace solo di testimoniare una 'miseria simbolica femminile' e di avallare una subalternità che le donne in carne e ossa non esprimevano più." ["From the Right Adriana Poli Bortone had maintained that regulated gender representation was no longer necessary because there are no substantial differences between men and women. The demochristian Ombretta Fumagalli Carulli had roused the crowd, yelling into the microphone, 'Women are not an endangered species in need of protection. We are not pandas.' This catchy slogan would often return in subsequent discussions and contributed to the fomenting of public opinion against regulated equal representation. Even from the Left […] they spoke of the danger of any type of positive action, able only to speak to the 'pathetic female symbolic' and to a subalternity that women of flesh and blood no longer felt."] (176). The repeal of the law of equal representation helped create the "parlamento maschio" of April 21st 1996. Many people were against these laws, including women on the Right, feminist groups on the Left, and the majority of the masculine world: "il mondo maschile aveva covato un rancore crescente, soprattutto per quell'obbligo di alternanza nella lista proporzionale della Camera, il luogo privilegiato." ["the masculine world had been stoking a growing resentment, especially against that mandatory equal representation in the Senate, the privileged space."] (189) The "world of men" (by which she means the institution of patriarchal politics, argued against the equal representation laws on the grounds that they contradicted democratic principles and excluded the more qualified candidate in the name of equal representation. This misleading narrative justifies the repeal of laws of equal representation through the redeployment of an outdated myth that says gender difference does not negatively impact experience and success: "Da un giorno all'altro […] i candidati tornavano a essere non più uomini e donne ma creature neutre, nonostante gli evidenti svantaggi che il nostro farraginoso maggioritario aveva arrecato al genere femminile", ["From one day to the other […] the candidates went from being, not men and women, but neuter beings, in spite of the obvious disadvantages that our macho majority had created for its female population."] (189). In a seemingly contradictory move, Valentini points to the philosophy of sexual difference for the success of this return to a gender-blind political attitude: "In realtà la radice di queste posizioni risiede nel femminismo della differenza che però nega l'utilità di partecipare a istituzioni maschili, pensate e strutturate al maschile", ["In reality, the root of these positions lies in the feminism of philosophy of sexual difference which denies the usefulness of participating in masculine institutions, which have been imagined and structured along masculine lines."] (176) She blames the philosophy of sexual difference (and its strong hold on Italian feminism) for the opposition to practical laws protecting women's participation and representation in politics.

[370] She spends quite a bit of time discussing the inadequacy of Italian legislation as regards to sexual harassment and she laments the lack of public discussion on the topic. She contrasts this with the U.S., praising Catherine MacKinnon in particular: "Curiosamente in Italia Catherine MacKinnon è poco conosciuta e poco tradotta. Da noi, d'altra parte, sulle molestie sessuali non è nemmeno stata mai fatta una ricerca su scala nazionale, al contrario del resto d'Europa" ["Curiously, in Italy Catherine MacKinnon is not well-known and rarely translated. Here very little has been done about sexual harassment and we have never conducted a national study, unlike the rest of Europe."] (167). Valentini is quick to note, however, that the American case has reached an unenviable extreme, where politically correct paranoia inhibits the kind of honest conversation MacKinnon sought to encourage.

più interessante fra le avvocate, che spesso mettono le loro competenze al servizio del loro sesso, per tutelarlo non solo nel campo del diritto di famiglia ma anche nel lavoro e nei sempre più numerosi procedimenti per maltrattamenti e per violenze sessuali."[371] What she is describing is an actualization of the theory of *affidamento;* that Valentini does not use the word is further evidence of her own ambiguous attitude toward the course Italian feminism has taken since the early 1980s.

If we read *Le donne fanno paura* as participating in the same tradition of feminist revisionism as *Autoritratto di gruppo*, I think we can understand her critique of the philosophy of sexual difference as a development of Passerini's attempt to distance herself from that same brand of Italian feminism. By assuming this critical distance, both texts highlight the philosophy of sexual difference as that which is specific to Italian feminism and, indeed, what allowed it to shine as a movement that involved women across the political, class and social spectrum. At the same time however, this specificity is called to account for the ultimate inability of the movement to continue to grow and develop. There is a moment in time when Italian feminism ceases to be public and active: the mid-1980s. Passerini sees that time as a symptom of the philosophy's stasis, a pause in need of regeneration, reinvigoration. Valentini is more critical, she sees it as the end, as a break, or stopping point symptomatic of the current political pessimism within the women's movement. Valentini's most pointed critique comes when she chides Muraro for failing to recognize the new right's manipulation of women in the elections of 1996. This blindness or naiveté on the part of Italian feminists is, I argue, a consequence of the fall of the Left.

Valentini identifies the fall of the Left, symbolically captured in the destruction of the Berlin Wall, as a moment of great consequence for Italian women: "il tormentone che si apre con la caduta del muro di Berlino e che porta alla famosa svolta e alla nascita del PDS mette in ombra la contraddizione di sesso, la riduce al silenzio. Allo stesso tempo si spezza il 'patto fra le donne' e si rinchiudono gli spazi che si erano aperti."[372] The new Right that comes up in the place of this political vacuum, uses women strategically, by engaging in what I am calling a transformation of the topoi of emancipation into ideological marketing. Women appointed by Berlusconi's Forza Italia to seats in the senate symbolize the conquests of the women's movement, but at the same time cover-up or serve as distraction from the unprecedentedly low number of women voting, running for office, or serving in elected positions: "Con una tecnica da marketing, all'improvviso, erano state imposte agli onori dei media varie figure femminile."[373] Women were deployed by the new Right to symbolically represent women's emancipation. The effect of this symbolic representation is two-fold; it serves to quell the feminist movement, while, simultaneously, reducing women's access to the public sphere. Those women who are in the spotlight, the faces of modern, liberated Italy, are devoid of all real access to decision making, and are instead made to speak for neoconservative policies and

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[371] "The most interesting case of women that work for other women is among lawyers, who often put their skills at the service of their gender, not just in the arena of family law but also working with the ever increasing number of cases of domestic violence and abuse." Valentini, *Le donne*, 60.

[372] "the rupture that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall and which brought about the Democratic Party of the Left, hides the contradictions of sex and reduces them to silence. At the same time, the 'pact among women' is broken and the spaces that had become public are newly closed." Valentini, *Le donne*, 51.

[373] "Through a marketing strategy, all of sudden, female figures were offered up to the media." Valentini, *Le donne*, 177.

ideologies. The contradictory ideological position these women represented was legible on their bodies in complicated ways: "per la prima volta occupava la scena politica un gruppetto di figure femminili che rifiutava ogni appartenenza di genere. Se nel modo presentarsi molte di loro sottolineavano la femminilità, dalle minigonne di Pia Luisa Bianco alle austere civetterie della Pivetti ai vestiti da vamp della Mussolini, nei contenuti sostenevano concordi che la specificità femminile non esiste. E anzi non perdevano occasione per scagliarsi contro il femminismo."[374] In Valentini's assessment of this denial of feminism we can hear a defense of the philosophy of sexual difference that comes through in spite of the author. She accuses these women of denying their gendered identity while still assuming the feminine pose; such an accusation relies, I contend, on a belief in the value of symbolic difference and a skepticism about the benefits of an equality based on neutrality. Nevertheless, Valentini persists in maintaining a discursive logic that reinforces the idea of a binary between narrative and reality: "Per i media italiani (e anche per parecchie donne) le neoconservatrici apparivano invece come il nuovo modello femminile del Duemila, sicure di sé, animate dalla voglia di emergere, capaci di competere alla pari con gli uomini. Tutto il contrario delle cenerentole della sinistra, invischiate in miserabili problemi di quote, un gruppo secondario e bravo solo a far risaltare lo svantaggio femminile. Si erano fatte contagiare da un entusiasmo anche alcune femministe storiche, ritenendo di trovarsi di fronte a un'affermazione di autorità femminile."[375] In particular she cites Luisa Muraro's response to the new presence of women in politics as an example of how the feminists of the theory of sexual difference were / are so caught up in the world of the symbolic that they neglect the "real" effects. She writes, "in realtà i partiti della destra erano stati abili a sfruttare il senso di novità delle candidature femminili. Molto meno erano disposti a riconoscere poi alle stesse donne un ruolo e una dignità quando si trattava di far politica per davvero."[376] She goes on to list the ways in which Pivetti, Mussolini, Parenti and Maiolo were all pushed out of power or made to fight losing battles.[377]

This narrative technique of establishing a scene and then "revealing" a contradictory reality is characteristic of Valentini's text. She uses phrases like "Se ancora una volta dagli studi socio economici passiamo alla realtà" to reinforce the disjuncture

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[374] "for the first time a new group of women came on the political scene, women who denied any affiliation of gender. Their appearance highlighted femininity, from Pia Luisa Bianco's miniskirts to the austere coquetries of Pivetti and the sexy styles of Mussolini, but in their speeches they maintained that there is no female specificity. And they never lost an opportunity to rail against feminism." Valentini, *Le donne,* 178.

[375] For the Italian media (and for many women) these neoconservatives seemed to be the new model of the women of 2000, sure of themselves, driven by the desire to be as capable and able to compete as their male counterparts. They were the opposite of the Cinderella's of the Left, stuck in miserable problems of quotas, a secondary group good only for bringing to light the disadvantaged postion of women. The media had allowed itself to be infected by the enthusiasm, even some famous feminists felt it, believing they now found themselves in front of images of female power." Valentini, *Le donne,* 179.

[376] "in reality, the parties of the Right had been able to take advantage of the feeling of novelty that surrounded these women candidates. These same parties were far less willing to give those women a real role or any respect when it came to actually doing politics." Valentini, *Le donne,* 179.

[377] Valentini, *Le donne,* 179.
Irene Pivetti of the ultra-conservative right Lega Nord party first appeared on the political stage when she was appointed President of the Camera from 1994-1996. Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of Benito, has been a prominent face in right-wing politics since 1992. Tiziana Parenti and Tiziana Maiolo have served in the Parliament as a representative of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party since 1994, though both come from careers with the political Left in the 1980s.

she sees between official narratives and lived experience.[378] In this way her text is unlike any of the others I have examined in this dissertation.[379] Through the repeated use of certain words and phrases she establishes an oppositional dynamic/tension between "truth and fiction," between what is said (in mainstream media) and what is experienced, what "actually" happens. One subsection is entitled, "La parola proibita," (in which "disoccupata" is the forbidden word). This section proceeds along a present-and-reveal pattern, with "eppure" ("and yet") being the operative word. Valentini begins by explaining that women value their work in a number of important ways (economic freedom, experience outside the home, intellectual and emotional satisfaction, self-esteem). But, she says, all of this is dismissed by society at large: "Eppure anche su un piano culturale la disoccupazione delle donne continua a essere considerata qualcosa di meno grave rispetto a quella degli uomini."[380] This different valuing of women's versus men's unemployment is key to her discussion of the ways in which media and other "official" narratives of political and economic history perpetuate a misogyny that is implicit, coded in the language and rhetoric of progress but is explicit, comes to the surface in the laws and statistics (demographics). Discursively this misogyny is coded either by way of exclusion (never mentioning "la disoccupata" and instead talking about "il disoccupato"), or by hyper-attention, by a focus on the achievements of some women that is so narrow it leaves no room for discussion of new or continued obstacles women face.[381]

This discursive exclusion is, she argues, strategic; it is designed to refocus attention on the image of the modern Italian woman. It is my view that this has to do with Italy's position and positioning of itself in relation to the increasingly open global community where "good politics" has come to mean opening oneself and one's nation to the scrutiny of others; the private doings of a state to its citizens are now the business of the international community. The effect, in Valentini's decidedly pessimistic reading, is to change or carefully craft the narratives, not to work to alter the lived experience. In the 1980s, for instance, "premeva sull'Italia l'esempio internazionale. Dagli anni settanta l'ONU e la Comunità europea avevano scoperto le donne e avevano dato via a numerose commissioni e network impegnati a denunciare tutte le possibili forme di discriminazione verso la parte femminile dell'umanità."[382] This concerted effort to improve women's lives produced successful, tangible outcomes in most Western nations but not, in

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[378] "If, once again, we move from the studies to the reality." Valentini, *Le donne,* 140-141.

[379] This is, no doubt, a reflection of her training as a journalist and the preoccupation in that field with objective truth and reporting. What makes this text particularly interesting, however, is Valentini's very engaged awareness with the power of narrative to construct and alter experience. She explains, as I have noted, the way the narrative of successful, accomplished emancipation negatively impacts women's ability to enact legislative change in the service of things like protection against sexual harassment in the workplace. Nevertheless, *Le donne fanno paura* is harnessed to a logic of "real v fiction," in which narrative is repeatedly made to coincide with fiction.

[380] "And yet, even on the cultural level, unemployment among women continues to be considered less of a problem than unemployment among men." Valentini, *Le donne*, 136.

[381] The past decade has seen the beginning of some important work around women and un/employment in Italy. In particular I recommend the work Laura Fantone has done with Prec@s network, around issues of temp labor and gender discrimination. A publication about the work this group has done is forthcoming.

[382] "Italy was pressured by the international example. Starting in the Seventies, the UN and the European community began to discover women, and many studies had been undertaken an networks formed to denounce all the possible forms of discrimination against women." Valentini, *Le donne*, 37.

Valentini's view, in Italy: "il caso italiano sia quello di un paese un po' anomalo, più modernizzato di altri paesi mediterranei ma piuttosto arretrato quanto all'emancipazione."[383]

She claims that this model of backwards emancipations is "un modello molto italiano," but she does not recognize the decidedly Italian style of pessimism with which she makes the claim.[384] This cultural denigration and, specifically, the claim that Italy is "backwards" or "behind" in relation to other Western nation-states, is one that has deep roots in the history of Italian public discourse and it brings to light the problematic tension between the project of feminism and the ideology of the modern nation-state. Put another way, the cynical analysis Valentini offers is that modernity stands in opposition to feminism, and that the modern nation cannot be successful if it still needs feminism, if it is still the target of feminist action.

In this equation, the modern nation-state is defined by economic and gender standards whose rules are not always clearly articulated (though many milestones have been laid out by the E.U., and other powerful global associations, as necessary for membership); more significantly, however, these rules of modern eligibility are rarely conceived of in relation to one another, so that the steps for the actualization of economic success are not necessarily supportive of gender parity. In other words, the continued discursive segregation of these topics helps support the myth of the superwoman, and reinforces the notion that the economic market is a public concern but gender is a private matter.

Conclusion

The question of progress is one that troubles each of the texts I have considered here but that is rarely acknowledged. Both *Piccole italiane* and *Le donne fanno paura* rely, as I have suggested, on a notion that progress means a movement towards a Western ideal of modernity and, in relying on this idea, they also reproduce the rhetoric of Italy as a backwards nation; implicit in this line of reasoning is the short-hand of measuring a nation's progress by its treatment of women. The problem with this method of measuring "progress" is that it assumes that every society begins in a place of subordinating women and evolves to move out of that place of inequality. In other words, if progress is measured by women's rights, we begin with the premise that "natural," "primitive" human society is structured around gender inequality. This logic is reinforced, albeit unintentionally by the linear (progressive) structure of *Le donne* and *Piccole italiane*. While neither text sets out to promote this idea of inherent gender inequality, they are unable to negotiate the contradictory position of doing feminist history in a patriarchal discipline. Of the three texts I have discussed, only *Autoritratto* performs a historiography that denies the narrative of history as being a path from oppression towards freedom. By working along multiple timelines simultaneously, Passerini

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[383] "the Italian case is an anomaly, more modern that other Mediterranean countries, but fairly backwards when it comes to emancipation." Valentini, *Le donne*, 97.

[384] "Da noi invece, come sappiamo, si è scelto *un modello molto italiano*, fare finta di niente, scaricare il problema sulle famiglie e allo stesso tempo comportarsi come se fuori casa la donna fosse un lavoratore qualsiasi, solo un po' bizzarro e inaffidabile per quella sua strana propensione a fare figli." ["We Italians, as we know, choose a *decidedly Italian approach*"] Emphasis added. Valentini, *Le donne*, 119.

encourages a thinking about the past that is also a reimagining of the future. In other words, the final product of the women's movement is not yet clearly defined and it is precisely in that obscurity and potential that freedom is located.

This idea of non-linear progress is one that has been taken up repeatedly by queer theorists and which, more recently, has served as inspiration for a new wave of Italian feminist thinking that seeks to reimagine citizenship under the changing social and political dynamics of the European Union.[385] Out of these changing dynamics has come a discussion of new forms of citizenship *in relation to* new modes of historical knowledge production, where attention is given to those who are left out of these feminist revision narratives: queer and im/migrant peoples most specifically. De Lauretis proposes approaching the question of citizenship and difference by

> developing a theory of the female-sexed or female-embodied social subject, whose constitution and whose modes of social and subjective existence include most obviously sex and gender, but also race, class, and any other significant socio-cultural divisions and representations; a developing theory of the female-embodied social subject that is based on its specific, emergent, and conflictual history.[386]

De Lauretis's proposal is very attractive in that it encourages a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject and, as such, preempts the dangerous reduction of individual to category that has hampered the women's movement for so long. On the other hand, her call for a "developing theory of the female-embodied social subject" is hard to reconcile with current models of civic and governmental organization that depend on the stability and immediate intelligibility of categories, foremost among which is citizenship. In the following chapter, I will develop this question of new models of citizenship as I discuss the shifting contours of the Italian women's movement as it is impacted by different racially, culturally and nationally charged voices.

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[385] For more on the work being done this arena see: Luisa Passerini, and Polymeris Voglis, *Gender in the Production of History*, (Badia Fiesolana: European University Institute, 1999); and Gabrielle Griffin, Gabriele, and Rosi Braidotti, editors, *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

[386] De Lauretis, "Upping," 370.

CHAPTER FOUR:
IL COLORE DELLE DONNE[387]

The formation of the European Union at the end of the last century marks, the beginning of a series of dramatic social and political changes in Italy. For some, there was a sense of national vindication at seeing Italy finally recognized as political and economic equal to the powerful nations of Europe.[388] The introduction of the euro in place of the lira caused dramatic financial transformations, boosting Italy to a new position in the global market and changing the ways people lived in Italy, but also having an impact on the ways Italy's place in the world was thought of abroad.[389] For much of the nation's short history, Italy has been perceived of as a destination for tourists and travelers in part because of its beauty, history and culture, but also because it had, for decades, been among the least expensive destinations in the Western world (along with Greece and Spain). Italians abroad had been, for the most part, laborers and immigrants, rarely were they part of the leisure class.[390] With the economic shift came a change in how Italy operated in, and was perceived by, the rest of the world. Suddenly there was a widely shared perception (within Italy and abroad) that Italians had joined the global middle class and were now traveling the world as tourists and consumers rather than as migrant

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[387] The color of women

[388] As Sabino Cassese writes, the moment of transition from the lira to the euro at the turn of the millennium was hailed as the realization of a national dream: "Quella italiana di 'entrare in Europa' è un'aspirazione antica (gli uomini del Risorgimento guardavano alla Francia, al Regno Unito, persino al piccolo Belgio, come esempi), rinverdita nel secondo dopoguerra – quando ci si rese conto di aver preso una strada sbagliata – e rafforzata negli anni ottanta, quando si comprese che chi non ha virtù può solo sperare di obbligarsi a marciare al passo dei paesi virtuosi" ["The Italian dream of 'joining Europe' is an old one (the men of the Risorgimento looked to France, to the United Kingdom, even to little Belgium, as models), renewed after the second world war – when we realized that we had taken the wrong road – and given new life in the Eighties when it became clear that those who have no virtue can only hope to march along at the pace of the more virtuous nations"] (Cassese *Lo stato*, 8). Cassese's tone is here is typical an Italian pessimism and national self-denigration that I discussed earlier, and that feeds into the neoliberal myth of progress and modernity. [Sabino Cassese, *Lo stato introvabile: modernità e arretratezza delle istituzioni italiane*, (Rome: Donzelli, 1998)]. For more on the idea of Italy as being behind, or needing to 'catch up' to Europe see: John Agnew, "Time into Space: The Myth of 'Backward' Italy in Modern Europe," *Time Society*, 5:1 (1996) 27-45.

[389] For a thoughtful overview of the changes in perceptions of Italian national identity, from Unification through Berlusconi's rise to power see: Bruce Haddock, "State, Nation and Risorgimento," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000) 11-49; and William Brierly, and Luca Giacometti, "Italian National Identity and the Failure of Regionalism," in *National Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos, (London: Routledge, 1996) 172-200.

[390] As Cornelius and Tsuda explain, "Italy was a classic country of *emigration* for most of its history, but this trend was revered in the early 1980s. While Italy (like Spain) was initially a waystation for immigrants attempting to get to other European countries through the 'back door,' it is now an important immigrant destination in its own right" (Cornelius and Tsuda *Controlling,* 33). The language used here to describe these demographic shifts is indicative of a persistent perception, both within Italy and abroad, of Italians as needing to catch up with other modern (Western) nations. Whereas in previous decades Italy had been a "waystation," and "backdoor," today the new permanent presence of immigrants works to grant Italy an elevated international status. [Wayne Cornelius and Takeyaki Tsuda, "Controlling Immigration: The Limits of Government Intervention," in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, second edition, edited by Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) 3-48].

laborers; the Italian peninsula, in turn, became a destination for migrant laborers and immigrants of all types in a way it had never been before.[391]

People began to arrive in Italy in unprecedented numbers from all over the world.[392] These demographic shifts called for a rethinking of seemingly self-evident terms like "community," "Italian," "belonging" and "nation."[393] Another factor that significantly impacts this period of transition is the increasing number of women immigrants.[394] Whereas previous decades had seen predominantly male immigrants moving to and through Italy, the number of women coming in search of work has grown dramatically. One important thing to consider when analyzing this shift is the type of work available and the gendered division of labor. The rise of a new Italian middle class resulted in a considerable upswing in domestic employment; these activities, referred to as "domestic" or "care" labor, are socially coded as feminine, as pertaining, in fact, to an entire feminine sphere (the domestic or private sphere).[395] This domestic labor, previous fulfilled by poor, often undereducated and southern, Italian women (or girls) was now delegated to hired foreign laborers.[396]

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[391] This trend did not include all Italians but did connote broad cultural changes and thus impacted even those Italians who were left out of the economic upswing. The influx of immigrants to Italy began with the economic upturn in the mid-1980s, but the formation of the EU is a useful marker because it symbolizes the culmination of a set of economic and political practices that transformed the Italian demographic landscape. For more on the shift in immigration trends to Italy and across Europe in the 1980s and 1990s see: Mark Mitchell, and Dave Russell, "Immigration, Citizenship and the Nation-State in the New Europe," in *National Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos (London: Routledge, 1996) 54-82; and Jacqueline Andall, Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan. "Introduction." *Modern Italy*, 8:1 (2003): 5-7

[392] *European Immigration: A Sourcebook*, edited by Triandafyllidou and Gropas, is comprehensive and very recently updated analysis of immigration trends in the different European Union member states. Very useful resource for history of immigration to Italy and Europe more generally, since the end of WWII. They explain that the collapse of Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 had dramatic consequences on immigration throughout Europe. [Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, editors. *European Immigration: A Sourcebook,* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014)].

[393] For a broader discussion of theories of nationalism, and an analysis of the construction of the Other in the Europe Union as a whole see: Anna Triandafyllidou, *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe*, (Routledge, 2001).

[394] A significant body of work has been done on care labor, gender and race. One important text dealing specifically with the Italian case is Jacqueline Andall's, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: The Politics of Black Women in Italy*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate. 2000).

[395] That immigrant women should be employed to fill these roles that had previously been occupied by (unpaid) Italian women is neither surprising nor specific to the Italian case; what is unique to the Italian case is the way in which legislation regarding immigration was quickly passed to facilitate the arrival of this new immigrant class while it remained virtually non-existent on all other fronts. "Italy: Economic Realities, Political Fictions and Policy Failures," by Kitty Calavita, offers a concise overview of the history and trends in immigration, labor and law. [Kitty Calavita, "Italy: Economic Realities, Political Fictions and Policy Failures," in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, second edition, edited by Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) 345-380].

[396] Another interesting aspect to consider in this context is the response of the Italian government to immigration and labor in this area; it is significant, for instance, that visas for domestic work are issued much more readily than any other immigrant visas. Italian immigration law has been conspicuously slow in responding to shifts in immigration and, as a result, has received a considerable amount of criticism from sources abroad, including European nations who view the Italian peninsula as an unguarded gate for the influx of new migrants; and from human rights organizations who worry that Italy is not doing its part to protect those who come seeking safe haven. I will return to this question later in the chapter. For more on the history of legislation and policy see: Giovanna Zincone, "The Making of Policies: Immigration and

This is not to say that all women immigrating to Italy work in the domestic sphere, but it does comprise a significant majority and sets the context for any discussion of immigration, gender and national identity in Italy today.[397] These new social dynamics require a rethinking of what it means to occupy the subject positions in question.[398] This chapter will examine some literary efforts by women to engage with these changes in the Italian context.

I will explore these topics through an analysis of two texts and one literary competition: Laila Waida's *Amiche per la pelle* (*Bosom Buddies*) (2007), Rossana Campo's *Lezioni di arabo* (*Arabic Lessons*) (2010), and the Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre (National Literary Competition: Mother Tongue) (2005-2014). These three literary objects are very different from one another, but they come together in this chapter to offer a picture of current destabilizations of categories of "woman," "Italian," "immigrant" and "foreign." I want to make clear that this chapter is not about im/migration as itself an object of study – though there is certainly a lot that can and has been said with that focus.[399] Immigration occupies a central role in this discussion because it has become an important component of Italian life, shaping what it means to be Italian in ways it never has before.

Immigrants in Italy," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32:3 (2009): 347-375; and Wayne Cornelius and Takeyaki Tsuda, "Controlling Immigration: The Limits of Government Intervention," in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, second edition, edited by Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) 3-48.

[397] I stress the contemporary setting of this conversation because a conversation about immigration, gender and national identity in the 1980s and early 1990s would, by contrast, be much more focused on men as evidenced by Pap Khouma's 1990 novel *Io venditore di elefanti* (*I Was an Elephant Salesman*) and the academic and social debate it fueled. For more on the role Khouma's text plays in this field see: Daniele Comberiati's, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro: la letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)*, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2010); Graziella Parati's, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy*, (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999). And Pasquale Verdicchio's, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

[398] One useful resource for thinking about these issues in the context of Europe as a whole is *Women and Immigration Law: New Variations on Classical Feminist Themes*, edited by Sarah van Walsum and Thomas Spijkierboer, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

[399] A few recent titles on immigration in literary and cultural studies in the Italian context include: Graziella Parati and Anthony Tamburri, editors, *The Cultures of Italian Migration: Diverse Trajectories and Discrete Perspectives*, (Madison, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011); Tiziana Caponio, et. al, editors, *World Wide Women: Globalizzazione, generi, linguaggi – vol. 3,* Torino: CIRSDe, 2011); Graziella Parati, editor, *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies. Volume 1: Definitions, Theory, and Accented Practices*, (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012). Some useful resources on immigration policy, legislation, social and demographic change are: Ralph Grillo and Jeff C. Pratt, *The Politics of Recognizing Difference: Multiculturalism Italian-Style*, (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2002); Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos, editors, *National Identity in Contemporary Europe*, (London: Routledge, 1996). A helpful analysis of immigration, integration and xenophobia is: Rinella Cere, "Globalization vs. Localization: Anti-immigrant and Hate Discourses in Italy," in *Beyond Monopoly: Globalization and Contemporary Italian Media*, edited by Michela Ardizzoni and Chiara Ferrari, (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2010) 225-244. For an overview on recent immigration research in Italy see: Tiziana Caponio, "(Im)Migration Research in Italy: A European Comparative Perspective," *The Sociological Quarterly*. 49:3 (2008) 445-464.

There is a tendency, when it comes to so-called "migrant" writing, to read stories as autobiographies.[400] In many cases this assumption is correct, a good deal of writing in this area, and in other genres defined by the minoritarian status of their authors, is autobiographical in nature; in other instances, the author's identity is imposed on the narrative in a way that denies the creative productive capabilities of oppressed people.[401] However, regardless of whether or not the author's biography matches the narrative, the effect of these stories is to shed light on certain ways of living that are excluded from dominant narratives. As Marie Orton writes:

> [t]o show how identity is constructed is to claim one's place in that construction. By writing literature — that is, by engaging in the traditional medium of Italian identity construction — each of these [migrant] writers helps guarantee that migrants are not merely the other against which traditional Italianness is defined and that they are not written out of master discourses of identity.[402]

The literature I am going to focus on in this chapter is not necessarily autobiographical, but it does serve this political purpose of exposing, of giving a voice to experiences that are too frequently deemed unimportant, or not worthy of narrative space and public attention.

Wadia's novel *Amiche per la pelle* takes place in a run-down apartment building in Trieste, and tells the story of the different immigrant families who live in poverty there, struggling to survive economically and socially. Wadia is an immigrant herself, arriving in Italy at the age of twenty to attend university in Venice; although her biography does not mirror that of the young Indian woman in her novel, her work does returns consistently to the theme of immigration and the condition of difference experienced by immigrants living in Italy. Wadia is a prolific author, with a number of published novels, articles and short stories, some of which have appeared in the Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre, the project with which I will close this chapter. Founded in 2005, the Concorso is a nation-wide literary contest and online-community for foreign women living in Italy. The Concorso invites entries by foreign women of all ages as well as by Italian women writing about the theme of immigration; each year an anthology is published with the fifty-plus winning entries. Founded by a white, Italian woman and funded by the Piedmont Regional Government, the Concorso is an interesting point of juncture between the Italian feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, state

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[400] I hesitate when using the term "migrant" writing because it does not accurately describe the identities or issues it represents; the term migratory implies movement, migration from one place to another. However, many of the authors who are saddled with this label do not think of themselves as transitory, or of their stories as being about movement. They are born in Italy, or have established themselves in Italy, and are writing about living in difference. Wadia, for example, rejects the label: "Mi definisco una scrittrice trasculturale" ["I label myself a 'transcultural' writer"] (Musetti "Laila Wadia, La femminilità"). I have chosen to use the category of migrant writing in this dissertation because it is widely used to connote a specific literary aesthetic and socio-political concern, but I hope it might soon be replaced with something like "minoritarian literature" or "writers in difference." [Gabriella Musetti, "Laila Wadia, La femminilità sboccia come un'erbaccia," *Letterate Magazine* n. 117 (http://www.societadelleletterate.it/2013/06/intervista/), accessed Nov. 26th 2014].

[401] For more on autobiography see my note in Chapter One.

[402] Marie Orton, "Writing the Nation: Migration Literature and National Identity," *Italian Culture* 30: 1 (2012), 33.

government, and current migrant identity politics. The other text I will discuss in this chapter is *Lezioni di arabo* by Rossana Campo, a well-known native-Italian author with deep artistic and ideological connections to the feminist movement. Situated in Paris, this novel tells the story of an Italian woman negotiating her own cultural and gender identity as she forms a relationship with a black man of Algerian descent. Questions of race and sexuality come to the fore as these characters explain and defend themselves against accusations of dangerous non-conformity. Campo's novel may here serve as a reminder that immigration and gender are experienced in multiple ways, not only by those who come to Italy and are forced to reconcile their cultural history with the dominant Italian one, but also by women who leave Italy and find themselves negotiating the realities of a new national context as well as the perceptions of and changes in Italy. Additionally, I am approaching *Lezioni di arabo* as a platform from which to think about how the Italian women's movement is implicated in current tensions around race and immigration.

In the past twenty years, a lot has happened to change the way women experience life in Italy and the way they are perceived. Berlusconi's rise to power has dramatically impacted the way women are represented in the media.[403] The formation of the E.U. resulted in new attitudes towards travel and border crossing, giving women more freedom to move about Europe and form alliances with women across national lines.[404] Michela Marzano, an Italian feminist philosopher who moved to Paris after the formation of the EU, reflects on these changes in her 2010 book *Sii bella e stai zitta. Perché l'Italia di oggi offende le donne* (*Look Pretty and Be Quiet. Why Italy Offends Women*). Marzano writes: "Ero lontana dall'immaginare nel 1998, quando lasciai l'Italia e venni a stabilirmi in Francia, che nel 2010 un libro di questo genere sarebbe stato così lontano dalle posizioni dominanti."[405] Marzano's text is a collection of essays that address some of the

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[403] The most important study on this is Lorella Zanardo's *Il corpo delle donne*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2010). Another useful resource on the representation of women in Berlusconi's media is Stefania Benini's, "Televised Bodies: Berlusconi and the Body of Italian Women," *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*. 1.1 (2013): 87-102.

[404] Some examples include: ATHENA, the Advanced Thematic Network in European Women's Studies, founded in 1997 and funded by the European Commission; AtGender, the European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation, founded in 2009 (www.atgender.eu).

[405] "When I left Italy to move to France in 1998 I was far from imagining that, in 2010, a book like this one would be so distant from mainstream ideas."] Michela Marzano *Sii bella e stai zitta: Perché l'Italia di oggi offende le donne,* Milano: Mondadori, 2010) 10. Marzano was one of the authors of the "Appello alla dignità" ("Appeal to Dignity") launched in October 2009 (along with Nadia Urbinati and Barbara Spinelli) in *La Repubblica* newspaper. The appeal was written in response to then-prime minister Berlusconi's misogynist comments to senator Rosy Bindi which they saw as a "last straw" in a series of "offese contro le donne" ("offenses against women") that had been building over the last decade. Marzano's efforts have been welcomed by a vocal majority of the Italian women's movement. Valeria Ottonelli, however, heads the camp of those (in the women's movement) who take issue with this appeal. Ottonelli accuses Marzano of preaching a "femminismo moralista" ("moralistic feminism") which, she warns, is dangerous because it puts the onus on the individual rather than calling for structural change. I find Ottonelli's critique very compelling, particularly in the context of immigrant women and women of color who are particularly vulnerable to oppression and who, by the same token, are often least able to effect structural change. However, I think Ottonelli's argument falls short in that it fails to acknowledge an urgent need for action; Marzano is insisting on a substantive paradigm shift, ("non solo a un'uguaglianza formale – dal punto di vista giuridico – ma anche e soprattutto all'uguaglianza sostanziale") ("not simply a formal equality – from the juridical point of view – but also, and above all, a substantial equality") because that is how her philosophical feminist tools allow her to effect change (Marzano *Sii bella,* 17). Ottonelli's point, though compelling, is not transformative. Finding a balance between these two camps is one of the key tasks that

major changes affecting women in contemporary Italy; she discusses the successes of the women's movement in previous decades and laments the current rise of misogynist culture. She identifies a regression in Italy from the social and political achievements of Italian feminism in the Sixties and Seventies to the denigration at every level today, writing, "Ho avuto la sensazione che la progressiva riduzione della donna a corpo-immagine fosse accompagnata da un'involuzione ancora più grave, da un contrattacco pesantissimo contro l'uguaglianza e la libertà per le quali le donne si erano tanto battute negli anni Sessanta e Settanta."[406] Marzano uses cultural objects, legal data, and current events (for example, the televised interaction between Rosy Bindi and Berlusconi), to contrast Italy (unfavorably) with other Western nations, and reflects on her own position as an Italian living in France. "Anche se vivo in Francia ormai da molti anni," she writes, "sono fiera di essere italiana e amo profondamente il mio paese. Non sono però del tutto certa che, se fossi rimasta in Italia, avrei potuto fare quello che ho fatto, in termini di lavoro, di carriera, di scrittura."[407] This interesting note about the different possibilities available for women in Italy as opposed to France is a point I will return to in my analysis of Campo's novel. In many ways, Marzano's text echoes the tone and contents of Chiara Valentini's *Le donne fanno paura*, (discussed in the previous chapter), though both focus very explicitly on the specificities of their historical moment. Like Valentini, however, Marzano does not engage with questions of race or immigration, keeping her discussion limited to a culturally homogenous definition of Italian women. I contend that the misogynist discourse Marzano identifies so astutely should be viewed in relation to current racist postures that (implicitly and explicitly) permeate the Italian social and political landscape.[408] The texts I have assembled in this chapter all, in various ways, address the convergence of these two discriminatory attitudes and, at the same time, refuse to submit to that oppression.

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face the current Italian women's movement. The relevant Ottonelli text is *La libertà delle donne: contro il femminismo moralista*, (*Women's Freedom: Against a Moralistic Feminism*) (Genova: Il Melangono, 2011).

[406] "I had the feeling that the progressive reduction of woman to body-image was accompanied by an even more sever regression, a strong counterattack to the equality and freedom women had fought for in the Sixties and Seventies." Marzano *Sii bella,* 8.

[407] "I am proud to be Italian and I love my country dearly. I am not, however, entirely convinced that I would have been able to accomplish all that I have in terms of work, career and writing, if I had remained in Italy." Marzano *Sii bella,* 12.

[408] A useful study on racism and xenophobia in the Italian media is Giovanna Campani's, "Immigrants and the Media: The Italian Case," in *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference,* edited by Russell King and Nancy Wood, (New York: Routledge, 2001) 38-53. For an analysis of national identity and Italian media more generally see: David Forgacs, "The Mass Media and the Question of National Community in Italy," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 142-162.

"Almeno non hai un nome da negra"[409]:
Race, Gender and National Belonging in Laila Wadia's *Amiche per la pelle*

Four women, from four corners of the world, sit at the kitchen table in a cramped, run-down apartment in downtown Trieste, awaiting the arrival of a fifth woman, their Italian language teacher. This little group of students is the focus of Laila Wadia's novel *Amiche per la pelle*. As the title suggests, these women are close friends, but, as the layers of meaning in that title hint, their friendship is shaped in large part by race. Indian, Chinese, Albanian and Bosnian, these women are all marked by their cultural, racial and linguistic otherness in the Italian setting. They are neighbors, living with their husbands and children in the same squalid apartment building at via Ungaretti 25. Together they share the experience of being identified by difference and of coming together, across that difference, to learn a new language.

There is one tenant, however, who feels no such comradery: signor Rosso, the lone Italian in the building. An elderly bachelor, signor Rosso is distinguished from his neighbors by his lack of family, his vehement racism, and his affiliation with the racial and linguistic majority in Italy. Paradoxically, he is isolated because of his identification with Italian culture and language. His only source of companionship will come through his interactions with Kamla, the five-year-old daughter of one of the women. Rosso befriends Kamla and teaches her to love the great Italian poets, beginning with Ungaretti and setting her on the path toward proper, nationalist education.

That it should be Ungaretti to serve as the privileged figure in this city of poets is worth noting, as he too, like the characters in this text, was an import to Trieste. Born in Alessandria d'Egitto, Ungaretti has no ancestral connections to Trieste, but in 1915 he enlisted in the Italian military and served on the Carso Triestino; his writing during this time touches on themes of national identity, difference and unity: "*Sono un frutto / d'innumerevoli contrasti d'innesti / maturato in una serra / Ma il tuo popolo è portato / dalla stessa terra / che mi porta / Italia*."[410] This message of unity despite difference will be central to the characters in Wadia's text. Ungaretti functions, for the inhabitants of #25, as a figure of unification (embodied by his name on the street that brings everyone together). Like the Italian language itself, Ungaretti's is a controversial unification. Signor Rosso uses the poet as a tool to educate his young friend in the ways of *italianità*, teaching her to recite his poems and to recognize the name as more than just a street, using literary and cultural education as a way of marking Kamla as different from the other, decidedly non-Italian neighbors.

The themes of teaching, language, and community-building figure prominently in this novel, though the goals are not always the same for teacher and student. For the women at the kitchen table, language lessons serve as a space to bond across cultural and linguistic differences, as women, wives and mothers, as immigrant outsiders in a new land. The topos of immigration and language, and the adult foreign language lesson in particular, has a rich history and a specific function in the perpetuation of certain national myths, particularly in the United States where immigration and multiculturalism have

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[409] "At least you don't have a negro name"

[410] "I am the fruit / of countless contradictory grafts / ripened in a greenhouse / But your people are carried / by the same earth / that brings me / Italy." Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Italia," in *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie,* (Milan: Mondadori, 1969). Translation is my own.

long been part of public discourse.[411] Italy, on the other hand, has become a significant immigration destination only in last past quarter century, and the nation remains very divided about how to negotiate this new reality. “Multiculturalism,” however, as Cornelius and Tsuda explain, “has not been pursued as a social integration policy because of the widespread belief that the cultures of Third World immigrants threaten Italy’s social cohesion and national identity.”[412] As a result of this attitude towards (non)integration, the scene of the Italian-as-second-language classroom a relatively new one.[413]

The theme of linguistic unity, however, is by no means new in the Italian context. As Loredana Polezzi notes in her discussion of the current politics of Italian language, “[i]n the case of Italy, language and nation are linked, if possible, by particularly intricate connections, as eminently demonstrated by the centuries-old debate on the *questione della lingua*.”[414] Wadia’s text offers what I see as a critique of this historical conflation of language and culture, suggesting that we interrogate the weight given to the idea of linguistic unity.

In the context of the language lessons in this novel, the goal of learning a shared vernacular is not conformity but community:

> Due persone che vogliono abbattere il muro linguistico tra di loro sono due esseri ansiosi di costruire un mondo migliore. E noi, armate di mattoni – libri di grammatica e di esercizi, vocabolari e audiocassette – e con tanto di cemento di buona volontà, stiamo tirando su con non poco sacrificio l’impalcatura del nostro futuro.[415]

I propose a reading of this text that picks up on this notion of language learning as world-building and follows it beyond the confines of the lessons, thinking about language acquisition as a mode of *bridging* difference, rather than a path toward assimilation. This message of inclusive difference is not presented as a moral lesson, but rather an alternative, an option that is desirable even as it is contested and challenged.

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[411] It is useful to keep the North American context in the back of our minds when we think about this text, and about migration in Italy more generally because the public conversation about immigration that has been taking place in the U.S. for the past 150 years has made itself felt in policy and attitudes around the globe. In “(Im)Migration Research in Italy: A European Comparative Perspective,” Tiziana Caponio offers a compelling analysis of changing trends in Italian immigration studies and the related influence of North American theory, legislation and cultural representation.

[412] Wayne Cornelius and Takeyuki Tsuda, “Controlling Immigration: The Limits of Government Intervention,” in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, 2nd edition, edited by Wayne Cornelius and Takeyuki Tsuda, (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2004), 34.

[413] For a more detailed account of the changes in immigration to (and through) Italy see: Kitty Calavita, “Italy: Economic Realities, Political Fictions and Policy Failures,” in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, 2nd edition, edited by Cornelius, Tsuda, Martin and Hollifield, (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2004) 345-380.

[414] Loredana Polezzi, “Polylingual Writing and the Politics of Language in Today’s Italy,” in *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies Definition, Theory, and Accented Practices,* edited by Graziella Parati, (New Jersey, USA : Fairleigh Dickinson University, 2013), 87.

[415] “Two people that want to tear down the linguistic barrier between them are two beings eager to build a better world. And our group, armed with bricks – grammar books and exercises, vocabulary lists and audiocassettes – and the cement of good will, is laying the foundation of our future, despite all the sacrifices.” Laila Wadia, *Amiche per la pelle*, (Roma: E/o, 2007) 53.   All translations are my own.

The specificity of Trieste as a setting for this story is significant. The truth that the text highlights by way of its setting in Trieste, is that Italy is not newly multicultural – there have always been people from different lands, languages and cultures – particularly in Trieste.[416] In the last 150 years, Trieste and the surrounding region have been part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Italian Republic; it was contested as a symbolic and actual battleground during the Risorgimento as well as in both World Wars; it has been and continues to be home to Slavic, Balkan, Austrian, German and Italian-identified people, customs, and languages. Because of this complicated history, Glenda Sluga suggests that Venezia Giulia, and Trieste in particular, are "a vantage point for the study of conceptions of Italian national identity and nationalizing practices."[417] In other words, Trieste's position as a border city and its diverse demographic makeup has made it a sort of testing ground for the (often extreme) education of national identity, from Liberal era and Fascist programs to enforce assimilation, to more recent efforts at defining *italianità* by ethno-nationalist groups like the League.[418] One of the most apparent and contested examples of the complexity of imposing national uniformity is language; this has been clearer in Trieste, which, because of its history and geographical position, has an unusually high number of widely spoken languages and dialects. This polylingual setting, while only indirectly addressed in the novel in the figure of peripheral characters, brings into relief the complexity and urgency of linguistic identification.

It is in the context of this historically and culturally unique Italian city that we meet the narrator and protagonist, Shanti Kumar. Shanti comes to Italy by way of an arranged marriage, leaving her parents' home in India as a young woman, just out of college, to marry Ashok, an Indian man living in Italy and working as a waiter in an Indian restaurant. Like Ashok, all the men in the apartment building employed, when they can find work, as unskilled laborers in jobs secured almost exclusively by way of racial affinity. The women approach paid labor in different ways; some, like Bocciolo di rosa, the Chinese woman, and Lule, the Albanian, are employed from the moment they arrive in Italy, working out of necessity as waitresses and housekeepers.[419] Others, like

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[416] For a comprehensive history of Trieste see: Elio Apih, *Trieste. Storia della città italiana,* (Rome, Laterza, 1988).

[417] Glenda Sluga, "Italian National Identity and Fascism: Aliens, Allogenes and assimilation on Italy's North-Eastern Border," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 163.

[418] For a detailed reading on the Fascist government's efforts at the forced assimilation of the Slav population of Venezia Giulia (by way of urban planning, language bans and searches of homes and businesses for evidence of foreign affiliation) see: Sluga, "Italian National Identity and Fascism." For a study of the different narratives and "contested memories" of the northeastern border area, see: Bojan Baskar, "'That Most Beautiful Part of Italy': Memories of Fascist Empire-Building in the Adriatic," in *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World*. Edited by Dimitar Bechev and Kalupso Nicolaidis, (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), 109-128. For a more contemporary analysis of the role of entho-nationalist groups like the Northern League in the Trieste area see: Anna Cento Bull, "Challenging the Nation-State: the Northern League Between Localism and Globalism," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 259-276.

[419] The type of work the women in this novel are able to secure is representative of the limited employment options available to the majority of immigrant women. Women have been immigrating to Italy in record numbers in the past two decades, working predominantly in the domestic sphere, as care givers, house cleaners, and as sex workers. For a useful study of the demographic changes in immigration to Italy over the last century, and the new gendered distributions of labor see: Calavita, "Italy: Economic Realities."

Shanti and her Bosnian neighbor Marinka, must persuade their husbands to allow them to work, pushing against cultural prescriptions concerning women's behavior. Wadia's novel constantly returns to this question of the significance of gender difference for the experience and expectations of immigrant life, highlighting the ways in which integration, gender and space (public and private) are simultaneously interdependent and held to different, often conflicting, standards. Before entering the workforce as a babysitter, the language lessons and her interactions in the building are Shanti's only occasion to socialize.

Shanti's first experience of Italians in Trieste is through her neighbor, signor Rosso. He steps out of his apartment as she is moving into hers: "'Cazzo, altri neri' ha borbottato. Mi trovavo in Italia da pochi giorni e non capivo bene la lingua. Per di più ero giovane e ingenua. 'Io mi chia-mo Shan-ti Ku-mar' gli ho risposto, scandendo le parole e allungando la mano. 'Mio marito è Ash-ok Kumar. Abi-teremo terzo piano. Piacere di co-no-scer-la, signor Cazzo Altrineri.'"[420] This interaction brings together the themes of language and race, revealing tensions and hostilities *as well* as possibility. The humor in Shanti's naïve misunderstanding suggests that the immigrant, the new arrival, need not – necessarily – understand herself as Other, as foreign object (of curiosity or, in this case, hate). Shanti's failure to "correctly" understand signor Rosso's racism is also a translation, a resignification of that racism; reversing the direction of the hateful speech, so that the speaker, not the object, is named.

Shanti's only other interaction with an "authentic" Italian is with her language teacher, Laura. Laura teaches language *and* encourages a particular kind of cultural assimilation: she is the mouthpiece for a brand of Western worldview that measures progress in terms of female emancipation. She encourages a model of gendered experience that is based on Western notions of equality, individuality and self-worth. While not entirely rejecting this ideal of Western feminism, Wadia's text highlights the ways in which this model is culturally specific and, paradoxically, blind to that specificity. For instance, Shanti feels enormous pride and a new sense of independence when she finally convinces her husband to let her work and earn her own money. Even as Shanti comes to assume some of the traits of independence that Laura encourages, she refuses to feel ashamed of her arranged marriage, taking pride in the beauty and tradition despite Laura's indignation: "Com'è possibile che succeda una cosa così a una donna istruita nel ventunesimo secolo?" exclaims Laura.[421] The logic behind Laura's remark is one of choice and freedom but, to echo Jasbir Puar, this position also masks a criticism of non-normative integration;[422] in other words, Laura represents a narrative in which the

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[420] "'Shit, more negroes' he muttered. I had only been in Italy for a few days and I did not understand the language well. Besides, I was young and naïve. 'My na-me is Shan-ti Ku-mar' I answered, carefully articulating my words and extending my hand. 'My husband is Ash-ok Kumar. Li-ving third floor. Nice to meet you, Mister Shit Morenegreos.'" Wadia, *Amiche*, 20.

[421] "How could something like this possibly happen to an educated woman in the twenty-first century?" Wadia, *Amiche*, 56.

[422] Jasbir Puar has written extensively about the hypocritical stance Western feminists and human rights groups frequently take with regards to the imposition of a specific type of freedom on "brown" bodies (non-Western, non-white). Puar explains that even as these groups recognize forms of oppression governing brown women, they fail to acknowledge that there may be different forms of freedom, and that in this model of liberation, what occurs is the replacing one set of values with another without ever obtaining the consent or granting agency to the brown woman. A particularly useful reading is: Jasbir K.

immigrant woman is expected to reorient her desires and values to coincide with a Western heteronormative ideal of the modern woman. In Shanti's words: "Assieme ai verbi irregolari e alla 's' impura, cerca d'inculcarci l'importanza di questa libertà, e spesso ci parla di quello che l'emancipazione femminile ha significato per la sua città natale. A volte però, sembra dimenticarsi che non sempre viene offerta la stessa possibilità a chi è nato altrove."[423] Shanti's comment brings to the fore the tension between different modes of integration: linguistic, cultural, economic and ideological. Laura's attitude is in an example of what Polezzi calls

> [the] curious reversal of positions [that] seems to be taking place, in which the Italian left (or what is left of the left), once characterized by internationalist tendencies but also by a national aspiration which managed to incorporate a clear stand against nationalist ideologies, now finds itself defending the myth of national unity together with the equally elusive entity that is a standard Italian language.[424]

In this case, the message of female emancipation as a measure of "proper" integration, coming through the mouthpiece of Laura as teacher and "authentic" Italian, causes the women of via Ungaretti not to feel ashamed of their difference, but to keep it hidden, sharing it only with each other. On one occasion Laura organizes a field trip to the theater. Despite the anxiety and trouble this will cause each woman as she invents an excuse to fool her husband, what they are most concerned about is Laura's anger:

> a quel punto del nostro cammino culturale non avevamo più tanta paura della reazione dei nostri mariti.[…] No, il nostro timore era un altro: non avremmo saputo reggere l'ira di Laura. Se le fosse venuto il minimo sospetto che dovevamo organizzare la serata alla chetichella… niente più teatro, e basta anche con le lezioni, magari! Laura odia i sotterfugi. Ancora più delle donne sottomesse, detesta quelle subdole.[425]

The two levels of deception the women must engage in – hiding the outing from their husbands and hiding the hiding from Laura – displays an awareness, on the part of these women, of the type of integration expected of them *as* immigrants.[426] Lidia Curti writes

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Puar and Amit S. Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: the War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 20.3 (2002).

[423] "Alongside the irregular verbs and the 's'-consonant, she tries to instill in us the important of this freedom, and she often talks about what women's emancipation has meant for her hometown. At times, however, she seems to forget that these options aren't always available to those born elsewhere." Wadia, *Amiche*, 54.

[424] Polezzi, "Polylingual," 88.

[425] "at that point in our cultural journey we were no longer very afraid in our relations with our husbands […] No, our fear was different: we would not have known how to deal with Laura's anger. If she had even the slightest suspicion that we had to organize the evening on the down low…no more theater, and probably no more lessons! Laura hates deceit. She hates devious women even more than she hates submissive women." Wadia, *Amiche*, 63.

[426] Laura's reaction to the women's refusal to stand up to their husbands is an example what Valeria Ottonelli has called "femminismo moralista." Contemporary Italian feminism, Ottonelli cautions, is characterized by a sort of common-sense moralism ("un moralismo di piazza"), that has dangerous consequences for society and for women in particular. "Il moralismo," Ottonelli explains, "anche […] apparentemente nobile, è un pericolo. E lo è in particolare quando ad essere 'difesi' dall'atteggiamento

that this self-awareness is part of the immigrant condition; "[l]a migrante," she explains, "ha costante coscienza di sé, di ciò che è e di ciò che diviene. La nuova appartenenza richiede un passaggio interiore tra quello che è e ciò cui aspira – o deve aspirare – ad essere."[427] Wadia's women are negotiating the delicate interplay between assimilation, understood as the washing over of difference, and integration, understood as the living together in difference.

Assimilation and integration represent two different beliefs about what constitutes a livable society; in the first case there is the idea that difference must be subordinate to a shared set of cultural, political and linguistic practices (dictated by the governing majority). Integration, on the other hand, implies a possibility of living successfully together in a plurality of customs and practices.[428] In the last century of Triestine history both of these approaches have been implemented. During the Liberal and Fascist eras, assimilation was forcibly demanded not only of immigrants, but also of all peoples not conforming to the (then new) norms of Italian identity. In the post-war period the preservation of linguistic variety was held up as an example of a new democratic Italy, where difference was not only tolerated but also encouraged. Following the collapse of the government in 1992 and the subsequent development and rise in popularity of ethno-nationalist groups like the Northern League, difference was rebranded, once again, as a potential threat to the purity and survival of Italian culture.[429] These multiple histories can be heard in the conflicting attitudes immigrant people are confronted with today as they

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moralista sono soggetti che già vivono una condizione di marginalità e debolezza culturale" (Ottonelli *La libertà*, 12). She goes on to argue that this condescending moralism hides an attitude of intolerance towards values and customs that are at odds with the moral codes that structure this new feminism: "Dietro all'atteggiamento del moralista che ambisca a una trasformazione intima […] non c'è solo l'istinto totalitario di chi aspira alla virtù come fondamento dell'ordine sociale; c'è anche un altro atteggiamento[…] si tratta in ultima analisi di una forma di razzismo e di intolleranza, che rende inconcepibile la convivenza con chi conduce vite che non si capiscono, ma che si ritiene di capire fin troppo bene" (Ottonelli *La libertà*, 18). While I think Ottonelli's position is a bit too dismissive of the nuances and possibilities generated by the current position of the women's movement, I think the character of Laura embodies the hypocrisy of this style of feminism, acting as both ally and resource for this otherwise marginalized women, while also demanding a particular form of philosophical and moral allegiance. [Valeria Ottonelli, *La libertà delle donne: contro il femminismo moralista*, (Genova: Il Melangolo, 2011).]

[427] "the migrant woman," she explains, "has an awareness of herself, of what she is and what she will become. Her new appearance requires an interior journey from what is toward what is wants – what she should want – to be." Lidia Curti, "La condizione migrante: nuove soggettività tra poetica e politica," in *World Wide Women: Globalizzazione, generi, linguaggi – vol. 3,* edited by Caponio, et al, (Turin: CIRSDe, 2011), 162. All tranlations are my own.

[428] Cristina Lombardi-Diop discusses assimilation and immigration in contemporary Italy in her article "'Staying Longer in Water Does Not Turn a Stick into a Crocodile': The Transformative Powers of Senegalese Culture in Italy," in *The Cultures of Italian Migration: Diverse Trajectories and Discrete Perspectives*, edited by Graziella Parati and Anthony Tamburri, (Madison, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011) 141-152. Lombardi-Diop puts into question the model of assimilation immigration and studies the ways both the "host" nation and the homeland are transformed through the immigration experience. She argues that stricter EU immigration policies result in reinforcing cultural and affective (my term) ties with the home-country. Mark Mitchell and Dave Russell discuss the consequences of integration versus assimilation policy in broader context of contemporary Europe in "Immigration, Citizenship and the Nation-State in the New Europe," in *National Identity in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Brian Jenkins and Spyros Sofos, (London: Routledge, 1996), 101-124.

[429] For further readings on immigration, assimilation and integration policy in Trieste during these different historical moments see my footnote #6.

are encouraged to share their cultural specificity while also reassuring Italians of the innocuousness of that difference. Implicit in this equation is the idea that Italian culture is inherently superior and that, as a result, immigrants should gladly give up their native culture in favor in this more enlightened and advanced set of beliefs and practices.[430] Conversely, holding on to one's linguistic and cultural difference can be understood as a failure to recognize the superiority of Italian culture or, even worse, as an act of cultural aggression, threatening the survival of italianità.[431] Wadia's women, by contrast, learn Italian primarily to communicate with each other – not having any other language in common – in other words, they learn Italian not to erase difference but to communicate despite, or across, specificity. However, they *perform* the experience of assimilation demanded of them by narratives of "successful" or "proper" immigration.[432]

The theater outing highlights a theme that resurfaces again and again in this text: the conflicting expectations of immigration. Is it an escape from something? A journey toward something? Must we necessarily consider origin and destination when thinking about immigration? Wadia's novel refocuses the narrative of immigration on the immediacy of the experience of difference and the shared affective dimension of that experience. It does this by foregrounding the very real and very problematic relationship between language and race.

At the heart of this discussion are, of course, the question of national unity and the dangerous myth of mono-culturalism. The tension between these terms circulates throughout the text, but nowhere more obviously than around the fascist signor Rosso. Shanti is not sure what "fascist" means: "Bocciolo di Rosa mi aveva detto che il signor Rosso era un gran fascista e che la odiava perché lei era comunista. Quella sera ho chiesto ad Ashok cosa voleva dire 'fascista', e lui mi ha spiegato che significa uno che

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[430] In their volume *Women and Immigration Law*, Van Walsum and Spijkierboer discuss this dynamic as it impacts women throughout Europe, creating a hierarchy between "emancipated" Western women and "repressed," "non-Western women: ""The purportedly emancipated position of European women is being contrasted with that of their immigrant (especially Muslim) sisters, who supposedly differ in that they are still suffering under a patriarchal system and are in urgent need of consciousness raising" (Van Walsum "Introduction," 7).

[431] Mitchell and Russell explain that this anxiety about non-assimilation is specific to certain immigrant populations: "it is migrants and asylum seekers from so-called Second and Third World countries who are identified as problematic by the potential 'host' countries of Western Europe. Not only do these groups lack the necessary cultural capital to enable them to participate in the accepted ways of living in the countries concerned and to share and enjoy its values and traditions; they frequently lack any interest in acquiring these cultural values and thus represent, in the eyes of many, a potential challenge to the integrity of the nation and to the maintenance of a strong sense of national identity" (Mitchell and Russell " Immigration," 56).

[432] Cristiana Giordano discusses this question of performance and immigration in an interesting study about the legal options available to immigrant women sex workers in Italy. Giordano explains that certain narratives (in which the women are unwilling victims of sex trafficking) are offered to migrant women by Italian state and cultural institution. These prefabricated identities are imposed on the migrant women who, in exchange for survival tools like legal residency, agree to give their voices to these narratives. She talks about the real risks and consequences of refusing or failing to fit into one of the prescribed identity narratives, consequences that can include social condemnation or deportation. Cristiana Giordano, "Practices of Translation and the Making of Migrant Subjectivities in Contemporary Italy," *American Ethnologist*. 35.4 (2008): 588-606.

odia gli stranieri."[433] With the repeated use and redefinition of the word "fascista," Wadia reminds us that racism disguised as nationalist pride is by no means a new thing in Italy – it cannot, in other words, be "blamed" on the new wave of immigrants.[434]

This Italian brand of racism is not a reaction, but an institution, a point emphasized by the repeated references to the Risiera di San Sabba, the former Nazi concentration camp in Trieste. That Shanti and her husband confuse this Sabba with the homophonous author reinforces the notion that language is at play in everything; questions of national belonging, racial exclusion and cultural production are all equally tied up with issues of language.

Just as language acquisition often steers towards assimilation, Ungaretti, as the representative of national literature and culture, evokes a tradition of the erasure of difference for the inhabitants of #25. One tenant remarks that,

> Lor signori non fanno altro che scriver poesie, tanto troveranno sempre dei morti di fame come noi per fare i lavori sporchi! Poi questi mangiarane si prendono tutta la gloria. Hai mai visto una via dedicata a uno straniero che si è fatto il mazzo così mentre loro stanno lì a fare le rime?[435]

Language becomes inseparable from institution, it is the visual representation of government, emblazoned on the street signs; that these signs are reserved for the names of Italians belonging to a certain racial, cultural and economic class serves to

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[433] "Bocciolo di Rosa (Rosebud) had always told me Mr. Rosso was a fascist and that he hated her because she was communist. That evening I asked Ashok what 'fascist' meant, and he explained it refers to a person who hates foreigners." Wadia, *Amiche*, 33.

[434] Racism is a controversial topic in Italy today, both within the academy and without; the claim that there is a connection between contemporary attitudes about immigration and fascist and colonial beliefs about race and nation is even more radical. There is, however, a small but growing body of scholarship broaching the issue. Among these are Sandra Ponzanesi's 2011 article, "Passaggi migranti: genere, generazioni e genealogie nella letteratura postcoloniale italiane," in which she outlines a genealogy of Italian postcolonial literature by women writers who bring to the fore untold stories of colonial and contemporary oppression. Anna Triandafyllidou's 1999 article "Nation and Immigration: A Study of the Italian Press Discourse," is also a useful resource for thinking about the persistence of certain myths about race and migration in Italy. She talks about myths of invasion and of the immigrant presence being presented as a threat to Italian culture and tradition. Triandafyllidou explains that these myths are stoked by the rise of ethno-nationalist groups (like the Lega Nord) and rely on a logic that, paradoxically, denies racism in Italy, relying instead on terms like economic and cultural "protectionism." Triandafyllidou uses the following, very descriptive quote, to discuss the denial of racism that characterizes a great deal of Italian discourse about difference: "Racists? Us? Are we joking? We are not like Americans in Alabama," (Triandafyllidou "Nation," 80). Carlo Ruzza argues that this denial of racism dates back to the postwar era as a retroactive rejection of fascism: "In 1945, having rejected racial discrimination, which permeated institutions under fascism, most Italians were not ready to readopt compromised biological racial stereotypes." When immigrants started becoming a visible presence in Italy in the 1980s, Ruzza continues, "[e]ven the political right eschewed their use. The Italian lore was to maintain 'we are not racist.' Or even 'we are not racist because we have been discriminated against ourselves'" (Ruzza, "The Italian Antiracist Movement between Advocacy, Service Delivery, and Political Protest," in *International Journal of Sociology*, 38:2 (2008) 56.

[435] "Those (elite) people don't do anything other than write poems, because they will always find some starving people like us to do their dirty work. And then these fat cats take all the glory for themselves. Have you ever seen a street named for a foreigner who broke his back while they sat there making rhymes?" Wadia, *Amiche*, 41.

institutionalize a practice of nationalist separatism.[436] The anger directed at the street sign acts, in this way, as an expository tool, rejecting as false the notion that language is natural and impartial, and revealing it to be, instead, a manifestation of the ideology of nationalism.

Confusion around names is a recurring theme in the text. Shanti's Chinese neighbor is called "Bocciolo di rosa" (rose bud) – calling attention to stereotypes and persistent orientalism.[437] This is just one of many instances in which Wadia uses racial stereotypes in the service of a comedic yet pointed social critique. No one in the building calls signor Rosso by his real name; Bocciolo di rosa calls him signor Lo So (a play on the stereotype of Chinese people pronouncing "R"s as "L"s – and a way to poke fun at the man's inflated sense of superiority), and Shanti, of course, first knew him as "signor Cazzoaltrineri" (Mister ShitMorenegroes). Only Kamla, Shanti's daughter, knows his name is Alberto. He, in turn, calls Kamla "Camilla." "Come ti chiami?" ("What's your name?") he asks the girl when they first meet. "Kamla" she answers. "Camilla. Bene. Almeno non hai un nome da negra." ("Good. At least you don't have a negro name.") He hears her *as white*. "Conosci Ungaretti?" ("Do you know Ungaretti?") he asks her, testing her participation in his racial and cultural identity group. She responds that she does know Ungaretti, but signor Rosso is unconvinced: "Veramente? Be', cosa conosci di Ungaretti? Sentiamo." ("Really? What do you know? Let's hear.") The girl answers, "Via Ungaretti 25."[438] As Kamla becomes the Italian Camilla, signor Lo So becomes, for Kamla's mother, signor Rosso, "una persona italiana. Una persona estremamente colta." ("an Italian person. A very educated person.")[439] He is transformed from a person defined by his arrogance and racism ("Lo So," and "Cazzoaltrineri"), into a man revered for his erudition and culture ("colta," and "italiana"); this transformation hinges on his association with the poet.

Poetry has always held an important place in Italian history and society and, as a result, continues to play a major role in the myth of Italian national identity. As Maria Serena Sapegno explains,

> è la scrittura in poesia, piuttosto che quella in prosa, ad occupare il piano più alto di una gerarchia dei generi letterati che è stata insegnata lungo il corso dei secoli nelle scuole della penisola e praticata nelle sue Accademie cittadine e nazionali. È la poesia a fornire un pressoché illimitato patrimonio d'immagini e di emozioni che toccano la sensibilità e tendono

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[436] Glenda Sluga discusses the toponomy laws of 1923 that "reinvented the identities of these provinces, from their street names and monuments" in an effort to impose cultural uniformity by replacing any traces of non-Italian identity, (Sluga 2000: 169). I contend that the passage above from Wadia's text shows the persistence of this strategy of national identity formation, despite the current lack of explicit laws or policy.
[437] Bojan Baskar notes that Italian scholars refer to the northeastern border as "il confine orientale," ("the oriental border"), an attitude which may influence the perception and representation of the Other in that region. Although it may be coincidence, it is worth noting that the inhabitants of via Ungaretti #25 are exclusively from the "east," from the Balkan region, India and China, perhaps inviting reflection on orientalist attitudes which persist in the use of terms like "il confine orientale" (Baskar "Most Beautiful," 113).
[438] Wadia, *Amiche*, 28.
[439] Wadia, *Amiche*, 29.

> ad imprimersi in profondità nell'inconscio collettivo a cominciare dal periodo formativo.[440]

Poetry, Sapegno continues, has been used to incite Italians to action, to defend their country and expand their borders, "la poesia intrisa di miti e di sangue aveva il compito di contribuire ad infiammare i giovani italiani alla riscossa contro lo straniero e alla conquista dei territori lontanissimi e sconosciuti costituiti inizialmente dalle terre dello stesso mezzogiorno italiano e poi da quelle dell'Africa e, di altri lidi ignoti."[441] This is an interesting point to consider when we think about the role Italian poetry has in this text, passed down from a man to a girl, from a former Fascist soldier to a child learning to be Italian. In this light, it would seem that poetry does, in fact, continue to serve the function of educating new patriots, bringing with it Italian histories and traditions of war and exclusion. However, the choice of Ungaretti complicates this, revealing perhaps some of signor Rosso's own ambivalence about the nation he served.

Ungaretti's writing conveys a sort of melancholy patriotism, "quel senso di disagio e di mancanza di identificazione semplice […] Essere italiani è divenuto molto problematico."[442] Ungaretti's poetry touches on themes of nationalism, of his own military service to his country, but also of sadness and loss, of travel and difference. In a similar vein, signor Rosso's story speaks to these problematics of being Italian. Born and raised in Trieste, he enlists in the Fascist military as a young man, serving a nation that Trieste has only recently joined. He participates in the colonial mission in Africa where he meets and falls in love with a local woman, a woman different from him in culture and skin color. The two marry and produce a child and in doing so commit a crime, breaking the laws of miscegenation. Signor Rosso's resolve to stay with this woman falters when his mother calls him back to Trieste. The loyalties to mother and nation are thus conflated. He returns to Trieste and publicly performs the role of devout patriot, speaking out angrily against all who are not Italian. Privately, however, signor Rosso feels torn, and he continues to write and send child support to his family in Africa. In fact, it is his persistent letter writing that causes his grandson to travel from Africa to Trieste and knock on the door of via Ungaretti #25 at the end of the novel. The arrival of this unexpected prodigal son symbolizes, in no subtle manner, the optimistic belief in a future multicultural Italy that drives this novel. Signor Rosso's death marks the symbolic end of an era of anger and racism in via Ungaretti #25, but his death has practical consequences as well when Kamla discovers the old man's will and the residents learn that they will be able to defend themselves against the threat of eviction thanks to the generous gift left to them all in signor Rosso's will. Signor Rosso's behavior is, in many ways, inconsistent and contradictory; he is an angry racist, an ethnic purist, but also a father of a beloved

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[440] "poetry, rather than prose, has for centuries occupied the highest place in the hierarchy of literary genres taught in schools in the peninsula and practiced in the national and civic academies." Maria Serena Sapegno, *L'Italia dei poeti: immagini e figure di una costruzione retorica*, (Roma: Aracne Editrice, 2012) 11. All translations are my own.

[441] "poetry, steeped in myth and blood, had the task of inspiring young Italians to join the fight against the foreigner and to conquer far off lands and strange territories of southern Italy, at first, and later of Africa and other unknown places." Sapegno, *L'Italia dei poeti,* 24. "quel senso di disagio e di mancanza di identificazione semplice […] Essere italiani è divenuto molto problematico

[442] "that feeling of unease and lack of identification […] Being Italian had become very problematic." Sapegno, *L'Italia dei poeti,* 24.

black daughter, and benefactor to his culturally and racially diverse neighbors. While he seems ambivalent about the present and future of his country and his town (always lamenting the damage wrought by immigrants), he does not seem ambivalent about his identity as an Italian and this is nowhere clearer than in his decision to teach Ungaretti's poetry to Kamla; what is at stake is the tradition of teaching and nurturing Italian identity.

Kamla represents not only a new generation, but also a new type of citizen. Born in Italy, she is the only character to fully participate in a multicultural world. As Elisa D'Andrea writes, "Immigrati di seconda generazione o italiani di prima generazione. È questa la grande difficoltà che si incontra nel momento in cui si cerca di collocare stabilmente i figli degli immigrati, nati e cresciuti in Italia, all'interno della società italiana."[443] D'Andrea proposes the term "interculturalità" ("interculturalism") as a way of thinking through this new subject position. Physically Kamla "looks Indian," sharing the same dark skin tone her parents have. But she has never been to India. She was born and raised in Italy, but she speaks more Hindi than Italian. Kamla represents a subject position that, while familiar to a U.S. audience, is new in the Italian context – one whose identity is complicated by multiple cultural and linguistic allegiances.

The confusion about language and identity that surrounds immigration reverberates in the academy as well. There is much discussion over whether to label a text or an author as immigrant, or migrant, postcolonial or "other."[444] Rather than participating in this debate over whether to use the term migrante, immigrante, extracomunitario, postcoloniale, nuovo italiano, Wadia uses all of these terms (and more) playing with notions of specific, "precise" identification and arbitrary labeling. This refusal to use one term helps show the artifice, the contextually specific nature of all identity labels and the ways in which all labels can be reread, rewritten, differently heard as prejudice.

These themes are brought together particularly, though not exclusively, in the figure of the daughter, Kamla. The Italian language group also functions in a similar way – learning the language means, according to teacher Laura, also learning "Italian" values of feminism and so forth. The response of the women students is complicated, they learn Italian primarily to communicate with each other, but they recognize their learning as a symbolic and practical gesture of integration. The title – *Amiche per la pelle* – reminds us that even in this narrative about language learning, these women will continue to be marked by racial difference.[445] The effect is a commentary on how language is used as

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[443] "Second generation immigrants or first generation Italians. This is the difficulty one faces when trying to situate the children of immigrants – born and raised in Italy – within the landscape of Italian society." Elisa D'Andrea, "Lingua letteraria e interculturalità: le scrittrici italiane di prima generazione" Tesi di Laurea, Università degli studi di Tuscia, 2008): 4. All translations are my own.

[444] Nadia Setti, in a discussion of another of Wadia's text ("Pollo al curry," a short story in the collection *Pecore nere*) considers the implications (primarily theoretical) of interpellating the migrant writer as such. Setti draws on the theoretical work of Adriana Cavarero and Judith Butler to make the claim that because the migrant is understood as "Other," she is expected to offer an account of herself. Building on Setti's analysis I argue that the imposition of the label "migrant" has the effect of producing a particular type of story, one that fits with assumptions about the immigrant experience. [Nadia Setti, "Raccontarsi insieme: il libero racconto di sé in altri/e," in *World Wide Women: Globalizzazione, generi, linguaggi – vol. 3*, edited by Caponio, et. al, (Turin, Italy: CIRSDe, 2011) 197-206.].

[445] The title draws on a common Italian idiom, meaning "best friends," but literally translated as "friends through our skin" or "friends because of our skin." Wadia's text draws on these different layers of meaning,

the measure of integration, covering over a deep-seated racism that, by and large, goes unacknowledged or is rebranded as the unavoidable consequence of a new multicultural Italy.

Disciplining Narratives and Damaged Identities in Rossana Campo's *Lezioni di arabo*[446]

In the fall of 2001, Oriana Fallaci published an article in *Corriere della sera* in response to the violence of September 11th. A week later, the same paper featured a response from Dacia Maraini. This encounter is noteworthy because it represents an unusual moment in the history of Italian women writers. These two women, Fallaci and Maraini, however loved or hated, are among the most internationally famous female writers in Italy, both of them well known for their literary works as well as for their dedication to the women's movement. In her article, "La rabbia e l'orgoglio" ("The Rage and the Pride"), Fallaci responds to the violence in New York with a linguistic and racist violence of her own, promoting segregation between two worlds she describes as finite and distinct. "Se crolla l'America," she warns, "crolla l'Europa, crolla l'Occidente" ("If America falls, Europe will fall, the West will fall"), thus setting the stage for the rise of the menacing Other of the West: "l'Islam."[447] Maraini responds, shocked by Fallaci's xenophobia. "Ogni essere umano," Maraini explains:

> fa parte di un sistema di conoscenze e di opinioni più o meno sfortunato, più o meno vincente, ma sempre degno di vivere dignitosamente nel rispetto altrui. C'è stato un periodo in cui la civiltà africana contava più di Roma e di Atene. Per non parlare dell'Islam.[448]

Thus condemning the hate and antagonism that pervade Fallaci's piece, Maraini proposes tolerance and compassion according to a logic of "separate but equal" cultures, in the process maintaining the "us and them" / "West and Islam" dichotomy that structures Fallaci's fears. By situating Rossana Campo's *Lezioni di arabo* (*Arabic Lessons*, 2010) in the context of this debate I am also calling attention to the ways in which American events, in particular the violence of 9/11, gave rise to a new global strain of Islamophobia. I point to the exchange between Maraini and Fallaci so that it may serve as a backdrop for a discussion of safe versus suspect identities in the writing of another prominent Italian woman author.

The attention to gender and politics that has marked the language and content of Fallaci's and Maraini's work for decades finds clear echoes in Campo's writing. All three have been praised and condemned for their bold descriptions of women's sexuality and

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keeping the affective dimension of the idiom, while also literalizing it by calling attention to race, visibility and the forced bonding that comes from ghettoizing racial others.

[446] An earlier version of this section, by the same titled appeared in the journal *California Italian Studies* 4:2 (2013).

[447] Oriana Fallaci, "La rabbia e l'orgoglio," *Corriere della sera,* September 29th, 2001. All translations are my own.

[448] "Every human being is part of a system of knowledge and opinions, more or less fortunate, more or less powerful, but always deserving of a dignified life and the respect of others. There was a time when African culture counted more than Rome or Athens. Not to mention Islam." Dacia Maraini, "Ma il dolore non ha una bandiera," *Corriere della sera,* October 5th, 2001.

corporeality. A few well-known examples from an extensive list are: Fallaci's *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* (*Letter to an Unborn Child*, 1976), in which a woman describes her physical, emotional and psychological experience of pregnancy and abortion; Maraini's *Donna in guerra* (*Woman at War*, 1975), one of the first Italian texts to narrate a woman's experience of menstruation and masturbation; and Campo's *In principio erano le mutande* (*In the Beginning, There Was Underwear*, 1992), which garnered attention for its depiction of women discussing and critiquing the sexual abilities of their male partners. All of these texts enter the political stage by breaking silences that traditionally surround female sexuality, underscoring the ways that silence constitutes an implicit condemnation of women's sexual desire and thus works to secure their status as subordinates to men. *Lezioni di arabo* renews this legacy of politically engaged literature by Italian women, at the same time interrogating the limits and expectations of gendered political deliberation.

If we approach *Lezioni di arabo* from the backdrop of the 2001 debate, a line of inquiry about racially charged and culturally suspect identities comes to the fore that may otherwise be overshadowed by the narrative of erotic critique for which Campo is best known.[449] This is not to say that the debate has remained unchanged. The global political climate shifted significantly between the time of the publication of Fallaci and Maraini's pieces and the arrival of Campo's text, just eight years later. Fallaci and Maraini wrote editorial pieces for the newspaper at a time when paranoia and imposed nationalism dominated all public speech—even Maraini praised Bush's good leadership in her piece. Writing a novel in 2008, Campo met with a very different set of expectations. It is thanks to these differences—of genre and historical climate—that Campo is able to engage with and reflect on the complexities of a multicultural Europe without being obligated—as perhaps her predecessors were—to put forth an unwavering agenda of one kind or another (Fallaci's vote for violent segregation, or Maraini's demand for tolerance). Campo's text offers neither praise nor condemnation of multicultural living; instead it

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[449] A quick look at the popular responses to Campo's novel gives an idea of how, for many readers, the erotic narrative overshadowed everything else at the time of its publication. On the website QLibri Network, user "Pelizzari" writes: "L'autrice ha uno stile diretto, forte, violento, deliberatamente e gratuitamente volgare. Senza nessun valore aggiunto a una storia che non sta proprio in piedi. Scrive che entrare nell'intimità delle persone è un terreno minato. Forse vuole dare l'idea di riuscire a entrarci, lei, in questo mondo privato, per svelarne gli angoli più bui e nascosti, rimanendo indenne e forse volendo anche molto stupire. Invece stende pagine che sono cascate di violenta volgarità" ["The author's style is direct, strong, violent, and deliberately and gratuitously vulgar. None of this adds any value to a story that just does not hold up. She writes that entering into the intimacy between people is entering into a minefield. Maybe she wants to give the impression that she was able to enter this private world, able to shed light on the darkest and most hidden corners, without getting hurt but also wanting to shock. But instead she offers pages that are nothing other than violent vulgarity"]. (http://www.qlibri.it/narrativa-italiana/romanzi/lezioni-di-arabo; February 7, 2012). On the blog "Sulla mia scrivania," Paola Borracino writes, "Soggetto buono per un porno, ottimo per un film erotico vietato ai minori. Veramente." ["Good topic for a porn, excellent for an erotic film forbidden to minors. Truly."] (http://sullamiascrivania.blogspot.com/2010/09/lezioni-di-arabo.html; September 5, 2010). And in even briefer terms, "Anna" writes on the IBS comment page, "il libro peggiore che io abbia mai letto, solo una descrizione di rapporti sessuali e nulla di più" ["the worst book I have ever read, just a description on sexual relations and nothing more"]. (http://www.ibs.it/code/9788807702228/campo-rossana/lezioni-arabo.html; October 6, 2010). These selectively chosen responses represent a or persistent, though by no means exclusive, tendency to reduce Campo's text to an erotic narrative deprived of all meaning and artistry.

describes a world in which multiculturalism is a condition—not a question—that must be thought in conjunction with gender and sexuality.

The story is set in a Paris presented almost entirely by way of racial and ethnic descriptors: "[S]ulla destra ci sono gli arabi, le loro moschee, le loro drogherie e gli hammam, a sinistra ci sono gli ebrei con le sinagoghe, le pasticcerie i caffè".[450] One street is Arab, another Chinese; the parks are full of African women tending white children; the restaurants are Algerian. It is in one of these Algerian restaurants that the story begins. Betti, an Italian living alone in Paris without friends or family, works in an Algerian restaurant where she meets Suleiman. Suleiman is Algerian, raised in France but made to feel foreign because of his stereotypically Arab-Muslim appearance. Although I am emphasizing national and cultural differences here, what is especially interesting and provocative about Campo's text is, as I will explain, her refusal to divorce these identity markers from those of gender and sexuality. A productive way to engage with this approach to identity is through intersectionality theory. Developed by North American feminists of color, intersectionality theory arose in response to racism within American feminism that dismissed difference with silence. In particular, intersectionality theory was developed to call attention to the convergences of race, class and gender as mutually constitutive systems of oppression that come to bear on and cannot be divorced from a subject's concept of herself.[451] Campo's text plays on the challenges of conveying this complexity, emphasizing the ways in which dominant regimes of control and social order continue to reduce subjects to single categories.

In this text the effects of race and gender on experience and, more specifically, the process of making sense of experience, are described in terms of communication—each character's ability or inability to communicate is directly linked to how well or how poorly he or she adheres to the expectations of his race and her gender, or, said another way, to how appropriately one is able to narrate oneself. In making this claim, I am invoking Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, in which she theorizes the demand that we give an account of ourselves to others in order to justify not just our actions, but our way of being, and how the failure to satisfy this demand, to give a coherent and final account, can result in painful political and social consequences.[452] Butler's focus is on the limits, possibilities and ethics of self-knowledge for a subject that is theorized in relation to the social, a subject that is opaque to itself and needs an Other in order to recognize itself. At the core of this theory is the question of what ethical obligations we have towards one other, and how those ethical contracts are predicated on narrative transparency. Also relevant for my discussion is Adriana Cavarero's *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* (*Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*), which is, as the title suggests, a theorization of the relational dimension of self-narrativization.[453] As I noted in previous chapters, Cavarero stresses the ways in which we come to know

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[450] "[O]n the right are the Arabs, their mosques, the pharmacies and the hammam, on the left are the Jews and the synagogues, the pastry shops, the cafes." Rossana Campo, *Lezioni di arabo* (Milan: Canguri, 2010), 19. All translations are my own.

[451] For a detailed explanation and history of the theory of intersectionality see Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1995).

[452] Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

[453] Cavarero, Adriana. *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti: filosofia della narrazione*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997. Published in English as *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (London: Routledge, 2000).

ourselves through others and, focusing specifically on women and their historical subordination to men, she posits self-narration as a political act. The practice of beginning with oneself is explicitly intentional, an intervention in the political process of advocating for women by articulating *as* women. In other words, Butler, drawing on Michel Foucault, highlights the potential dangers that inhere in forcing subjects to place themselves into ideologically informed discursive regimes; Cavarero, exploring that same process from a different angle, identifies the radical potential for creating new discursive regimes. I do not invoke the work of Cavarero and Butler to engage in a discussion of recognition, of whether or not Betti or Suleiman *know themselves* or recognize themselves, but rather as a platform from which to consider how communication, as a mode of accountability—understood as both narrating and taking responsibility for oneself—is a disciplining exercise.

In a strikingly multicultural Paris, Betti and Suleiman are both loners—a status that is politically suspect for him because of racial stereotypes, and that is sexually suspect for her because of gender stereotypes. Suleiman is continually called upon to justify his existence—to explain why he, in the name of all Arabs, wears a beard, does not eat pork, oppresses women and hates America. Though he is offended and angered by the disrespect and the implicit violence of these questions, he is able, again and again, to answer, engage and discuss. His struggle is with a pervasive racism that allows his body to be read as needing better, more eloquent justification than others in order for it to be passable, acceptable, or legible as safe (and not deviant). Suleiman, ultimately, does not oppose that normativizing force that impels him to explain himself and to map his subject position onto a predetermined plain; his self-narrativizing comes from an impulse of self-preservation. He is read as "threat" until and unless he offers a counter-narrative. Betti, on the other hand, stands in tentative opposition to this normativizing, self-protective impulse.

Betti repeatedly fails in her attempts at communication, at narrating herself and making herself easily legible to others. As a child she is an outcast: she draws by herself instead of playing with others and her peers shun her because of her solitary behavior, thus starting a cycle of externally and internally imposed exile. The only daughter of divorced parents, young Betti spends her afternoons alone. She rarely speaks with her parents who, though they continually encourage her to find friends, nevertheless neglect her themselves, neglecting even to teach Betti about her body, so that she nearly dies of fright when she begins menstruating. It is her older "boyfriend" who relieves her anxieties and explains that her body is changing. This so-called boyfriend, Ennio, is another symbol of Betti's social exile. Ennio, a thirty-year-old married man, seduces the eleven-year-old Betti because, as he tells her repeatedly, she is not like other girls. Because of this difference she must also keep quiet and never tell anyone about their relationship. This conflation of silence with difference comes at a critical juncture in Betti's life. As a grown woman she frequently thinks back on her time with Ennio with renewed sexual longing and with a contingent feeling of difference, of living in social as well as national exile.

This relationship marks Betti as negatively different in three significant ways: first, as young girl, it sets her apart from her peers who are not yet thinking about sex; as an adult, the erotic pleasure Betti derives from the memories of this illicit relationship signals her deviance from norms of female sexuality, in particular her failure to feel

ashamed of this experience. I will return to this point shortly, but first I want to stress that what persists, from childhood to adulthood, and what in paradoxical ways reinforces Betti's status as a social exile, is silence. Betti's relationship with Ennio is one of sexual submission and silence. When she meets Suleiman, Betti is reminded of Ennio because of the sexual submission and silence that characterize their first encounters. Initially the two have almost nothing to say to one another, and on their first date Suleiman forces Betti to submit to anal sex without first asking her consent. Because the text offers no descriptions of Suleiman other than his race and his outsider status before giving us this scene of sexual aggression, he cannot but serve to conjure stereotypical, even mythical images of a racialized bogeyman; that he almost immediately breaks with this image helps illustrate just how ideologically imbued the stereotype is, and the power it has to map its narrative onto subjects and scenes, effectively erasing the specificity of context. Speaking about such stereotypes, Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai trace a genealogy of the abnormal and the monstrous through Foucault, explaining that the sexual deviant and the monster-terrorist have become aligned in the post- 9/11 period through "the deployment of gendered bodies, the regulation of proper desire, the manipulation of domestic spaces, and the taxonomy of sexual acts such as sodomy."[454] As the story progresses and Suleiman reveals more about himself, he becomes increasingly distanced from the figure of the Arab bogeyman; but he must continue to defend that distance, to atone, as it were, for his initial, apparent proximity to that stereotype of danger and deviance. By marking the start of Betti and Suleiman's relationship with this scene of anal rape, the text signals the intersection of these discourses of racial and sexual otherness.

As they become more involved, Betti begins to break her own silence by giving voice to her sexual desires. While this development may at first seem liberating and progressive, I want to suggest that it is also a sign of Betti's "domestication." The logic of appropriate integration that informs the text demands a narrative outcome in which Betti must relinquish the silence and solitude that have always been hers, in exchange for communication, family and sociability (*legibility*), which are powerful tools of control and surveillance in an increasingly complex, multicultural, multiethnic society. This corrective, disciplining force is at work throughout the text but is unremarked upon, evident only in the silence and unease that characterize Betti and Suleiman's first encounters:

> Mi dice che si chiama Suleiman e mi fa un piccolo sorriso. Trovarmelo così vicino di colpo mi rende confusa, sono a disagio . . . Lui fa un altro sorriso timido e a questo punto non abbiamo più niente da dirci, non sboccia alcuna curiosità da parte di nessuno dei due.[455]

By beginning and ending their first meeting with accounts of what is or is not being said, Campo produces a subtle conflation of silence and unease, *as though* the two were related. In my view, however, Betti's sense of discomfort is a product of Suleiman's

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[454] Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War On Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 72, no. 3 (2002): 116.

[455] "He says his name is Suleiman and gives me a little smile. Finding him suddenly so close confuses me and makes me uncomfortable . . . He gives me another timid smile and at this point we have nothing left to say to one another, neither one of us expresses any curiosity." Campo, *Lezioni,* 14.

closeness ("Trovarmelo così vicino . . . sono a disagio"), and not of their lack of dialogue.

Their second and third encounters are equally awkward. Instead of intimate dialogue between two lovers, the narrative is cluttered with Betti's hyper-attention to the racial and ethnic identities of the people and places around them:

> Ci incontriamo all'uscita del metrò Couronnes, lo vedo arrivare in mezzo a una folla di arabi con la djellaba, africani coi loro boubou, qualche cinese e un paio di ebrei col cappello nero e la camicia bianca.[456]

These details are offered without further remark, as though this were the only way of making sense of and reading the world; in the context of a novel whose very title foregrounds issues of racial and linguistic difference, Betti's observations underscore the pervasiveness of uncritical, seemingly automatic appearance-based assumptions about race and identity. The essentialist discourses that come through in these descriptions set the stage for the more explicit racism Suleiman is confronted with while also revealing a thread of unconscious racism in Betti's thinking. In fact, Betti's first descriptions of Suleiman take a similar tone, focusing on his "occhi scurissimi da arabo."[457] These racializing descriptions are couched in metaphors of animal aggression, comparing him to a starving beast—"come un animale affamato"[458] —thus suggesting a connection between the solitary Arab man and the lone wolf: the "lupo randagio."

Paris has, for centuries, been the international metropolis par excellence; a destination for political and artistic exiles, it has figured, in the Western imaginary, as the place where difference is erased. Making Paris the backdrop for this scene of racial hyper-vigilance, Campo seems to speak to Gabriele Marranci's point that Islamophobia, in Europe, is about a fear of multiculturalism, where the Muslim man stands in for all the negative consequences of difference; even utopian Paris is subject to these prejudices.[459] It is important to bear in mind, when discussing the power of racist and similar phobias of the Other, that the circulating currency is the image of a single, invented figure; it is a solitary actor that is captured in the snapshot that comprises a stereotype. Historical Muslim men are, therefore, not the subjects of this new, post-9/11 brand of Islamo-focused racism, though they are its objects. Maraini reminds Fallaci that not all Muslims are bad: "Non sono gli islamici in generale a fare l'eccidio, come non sono gli italiani in generale a buttare la bomba alla Banca dell'Agricoltura".[460] Maraini's point is that the violent acts of some must not be used to make generalizations about an entire population. While this seems to come from a place of understanding and compassion, the underlying

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[456] "We meet at the exit of the Couronnes metro, I see him arrive in the middle of a crowd of Arabs wearing djellabas, African with boubous, some Chinese and a few Jews with black hats and white shirts." Ibid., 18. See also 23, 29 and 31.

[457] "very dark Arab eyes." Ibid., 12.

[458] "like a hungry animal". Ibid.

[459] Marranci explains that "Europe fears that, in a real multicultural environment, Islam might transform what Europe is today (or maybe what it wants to be in the future)." Gabriele Marranci, "Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilizations Theory: Rethinking Islamophobia," *Culture and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2004): 106. Giuseppe Sciortino offers a compelling analysis of the rise of Islamophobia in the Italian context through a reading of Fallaci's article and Giovanni Sartori's response to it in "Islamofobia all'italiana," *Polis* 1 (2002): 103-26.

[460] "Not all Muslims commit mass murder, just as not all Italians bomb the Agricultural Bank." Maraini, Dacia. "Ma il dolore non ha una bandiera." *Corriere della sera.* October 5th, 2001.

logic is that the loner is suspect by virtue of his difference from the rest; in Maraini's logic, the "Muslims [who] commit mass murder" are set apart from the majority of Muslims, they are the unusual ones, the bad seeds, the different and other of Muslim society, even though these "Others" may work together as terrorists, they are read as similar only in their difference from the norm. As Puar and Rai explain, in the discourses of Islamophobia and radical Western nationalism that were reenergized after 9/11, implications of difference transformed the Arab man into a (potential) terrorist and a psychologically "damaged" individual.[461] This is the logic that allows Maraini to claim that not all Muslims are bad, just the lone man who is, for some reason, unable to behave and think like his fellow Muslims. To return to Puar and Rai, what is at stake, according to this psychologizing logic, is "the failure of the normal(ized) psyche. Indeed, an implicit but foundational supposition structures this entire discourse: the very notion of the normal psyche, which is in fact part of the West's own heterosexual family romance—a narrative space that relies on the normalized, even if perverse, domestic space of desire supposedly common in the West."[462] By putting the myth of heterodomestic normalcy in dialogue with the looming image of the Muslim bogeyman, Puar and Rai get at a tension that is at the heart of this text. Suleiman, othered by these denigrating discourses of difference, is not always able to resist their pernicious logic. The pervasiveness of these racist ideologies is such that Suleiman has, in some way, internalized some of the thinking that sees difference as negative. Although clearly rooted in the U.S. context, Puar and Rai's thinking helps get at the ways in which, in Campo's novel, the racism Suleiman faces is shaped by the attacks on America and, as a consequence, is significantly different from the racisms and the Islamophobia that have historically colored Franco-Algerian tensions. This is not to suggest that those tensions and those types of bigoted thinking no longer exist; instead, I am arguing that this text highlights a new, Americanized brand of Islamophobia that acts in addition to pre-existing narratives of inclusion and exclusion in Europe.

In a moment of confession, Suleiman admits to Betti that he has worried about not fitting in, about never being able to adapt:

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[461] Islamophobia is by no means "new" to Europe. Islam has, in many ways, been the object of discrimination and phobia since the end of World War II, whereas the U.S. was focused on the "threat" of Communism. September 11th (and the violent rhetoric of Western nationalism exemplified by Fallaci's article) brought Europe and the U.S. together—led by the U.S.—in Islamophobia, though of course there were differences. The Italian context is no exception; to borrow Rinella Cere's words, "[i]mmigrants from Muslim countries, or mixed-faith countries […] make up the largest immigrant group in Italy. These communities are often in the news due to anti-Islamic feelings constantly being whipped up by the Lega Nord and other center-right forces alongside sections of the Catholic Church. The phenomenon of the 'War on Terror' led by the United States has undoubtedly compounded the problem" (Cere "Globalization," 232). Campo's novel, even though it takes place in France, was written in Italian and released to an Italian audience. In this way it participates in the cultural representation of Muslims. For a thoughtful analysis of the history and transformation of Islamophobia in Europe, see Matti Bunzl, "Between Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some Thoughts on the New Europe," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 499-508; Andre Gingrich, "Anthropological Analyses of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in Europe," *American Ethnologist* 32 (2005): 513-15; and Marranci, "Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilizations Theory."

[462] Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 72, no. 3 (2002): 123.

> Io un giorno ci ho pensato davvero a morire, sai, mi sentivo completamente fuori posto qui, mi mancava il paese, la mia famiglia, mi mancava tutto, anche l'aria che respiravo laggiù, non c'era niente da fare, non volevo tornare a vivere in Algeria. Così avevo la sensazione che non c'era un posto per me in questo mondo, che avevo sbagliato tutto, ero un fallimento vivente, con le ragazze, lo studio, il lavoro. Avevo già bruciato la mia vita e non sapevo nemmeno io in che modo. Ero intrappolato in questi pensieri, ero come fermo bloccato. Non c'era posto per me nel mondo.[463]

His monologue is not substantially different from the existentialist rant that so many young male protagonists have voiced throughout literature; Suleiman questions his purpose in life and curses his own ineptitude in love, work and intellectual success. By deploying the topos of the young man's existential rant in the context of a narrative that highlights racial difference, the text reveals the ways racialized normativizing forces work to dissuade the (white) man who is the subject of those norms from his feeling of difference while simultaneously reinforcing the sense of unalterable failure the other (not-white) man feels about his difference. What makes Suleiman's existential monologue significant to this discussion is precisely that it comes from an Arab man; his existential crisis is bolstered by the pervasive discourse of Islamophobia rather than being countered by the narratives of belonging and self-worth. In a world imbued with racism and xenophobia, the implications are that the Arab man is always alone, always out of place; he does not even know how to treat women and cannot adapt anywhere—in the West or at home, "non c'è posto nel mondo." Unlike the lament of the immigrant who longs for his homeland, Suleiman's speech is without longing, there is no idealized place of return, only a sense of failed integration: "avevo sbagliato tutto, ero un fallimento vivente."

The crisis of the young, white, Judeo-Christian man is coded as a rite of passage (think, for instance, of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov or Salinger's Holden Caulfield), a moment of self-reflection that concludes with the rejection of youthful dreams and the reassuring realization that he has a purpose and place. For the Arab man in many Western narratives, there can be no such realization. The pervasive narrative (in the Western world) tells us that it is because of Arab man's unadaptability that he is angry and threatening: "They hate our freedoms [...] They stand against us" and want to destroy our way of life, was George W. Bush's explanation of 9/11 that echoed around the globe.[464] As Marranci writes, "after September 11th, the myth of a Europe founded on Judeo-Christian values has been reinforced by marking the differences between Islam and the West rather than trying to undermine them."[465] But even as Suleiman's monologue calls up these myths, it serves to illustrate how independent they are of cultural specificity: this

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[463] "Once I did really think about dying, you know, I felt completely out of place here, I missed my country, my family, I missed everything, even the air I breathed there, there was nothing for me to do, I didn't want to go back to Algeria. So I had the feeling that there was nowhere in the world for me, that I had messed up everything, I was a living failure, with girls, with my studies, with work. I had already wasted my life and I didn't even know how. I was caught in these thoughts, as though blocked at a standstill. There was not a place for me in the world." Campo, *Lezioni.* 20-1.

[464] George W. Bush, "President Bush Addresses the Nation," *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2001.

[465] Marranci, "Rethinking Islamophobia," 106.

Arab-Muslim man is no more or less an outcast than any other young man living his moment of existential crisis; the difference is that his anxiety can be mapped onto political tensions and transnational aggressions. Put another way, Suleiman's sense of otherness finds a certain validation in the pervasive narratives of Islamophobia that name the Arab man as different and monstrous. He works against these representations by continuously offering up his self-narrative; whether as an explanation of his difference, or, as in the case of the monologue above, as an unintentional echo of other anxious souls, Suleiman's insistent self-narrativization places him in dialogue with and in relation to other subjects who can access those same discursive registers. Betti, on other hand, is continually marked by a lack of dialogue.

The silence that surrounds Betti is coded as negative because it brings to light a suspicion of solitude that is profoundly ingrained in Italian culture. The threat of being made to live as an exile or outcast is as pervasive as it is unspoken. By framing Betti and Suleiman's relationship with memories of her relationship with Ennio, the text emphasizes how profoundly connected Betti is to her Italian roots. She understands herself and her subject position entirely in terms of her cultural heritage, positioning herself within the confines of an Italian narrative of cultural identity. In this sense, then, I argue she understands herself as an *extracomunitaria*, whose outsider status in France hinges on her inability to communicate and is compounded by her national exile and her relationship with a racially othered man. The term "extracomunitario"—once offered as a politically correct, socially acceptable way of talking about non-nationals living in Italy—in fact describes a worldview in which you are either within or without "la comunità": the same "noi e loro" dynamic I have identified at the core of the Fallaci-Maraini debate. As Kossi A. Komla-Ebri explains in an analysis of the power of the word "extracomunitario" in the Italian cultural imaginary, "[l]a cosa più irritante in questa 'parolaccia' è che ci definisce in 'forma negativa.' Piuttosto che chiamarci per quello che siamo cioè 'cittadini,' essa ci circoscrive per quello che 'non siamo.'"[466] Presumably used to describe people who are nationally different, in actual practice "extracomunitario" refers to those who do not act or look properly Italian; a judgment most often based on physical and linguistic traits.[467] As a child and then a young woman in Italy, Betti looks and speaks "properly" Italian, but she self-identifies as being outside the community—outside the norm—because of her divorced parents, her relationship with Ennio and, above all, her inability to recognize herself in available narratives of identification. Betti's failure to participate in the community of talkative, sexually appropriate (restrained) Italian women is exaggerated by her move to Paris—the literary locus par excellence of sexual outcasts from around the world.[468] Though she lives in Paris as an

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[466] "The most irritating thing about that 'bad word' is that it defines us in 'negative' terms. Instead of calling us what we are, which is 'citizens,' this word defines what we 'are not.'" Kossi A. Komla-Ebri, "Il colore delle parole," in *Il mondo in classe,* ed. Lorenzo Luatti (Arezzo: UCODEP, 2006), 55.

[467] By and large this term is directed at people who can be read (racially and linguistically) as non-Western, but the logic of exclusion that prompts such categorization does not stop to discern whether a black woman in Florence is on holiday from the U.S. or emigrated from Ethiopia years before. The effect of the label is to identify difference and mark it as negative.

[468] Over the last two centuries Paris has figured both literally and literarily as a sight of refuge for writers and artists seeking a dimension of sexual freedom not permitted elsewhere or, at least, enhanced by a fantasy of a sexually permissive Paris. For depictions of Paris as site of refuge for exiles and locus of sexual freedom see, for instance, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, (New York: Dial Press, 1956); Pier

adult, she continues to understand her subject position in relation to the Italian context so that Paris marks her exile rather than signaling her participation in a new community with different terms of normalcy and propriety. In other words, through Betti, the themes of communication and narration are closely related to conditions of isolation and exile.

Betti repeatedly claims she is incapable of communicating or expressing herself in an easy and open manner, a skill she believes she *should* have. This flaw weighs on her even as a young girl: "A quattordici anni," she recalls,

> di parole non ne conosco, non è che non ne so, a volte certe parole me le rigiro dentro la testa, le sento, le ascolto e mi restano impresse per tanto tempo. Ma al momento che devono uscire fuori, attraversare la bocca e dirigersi verso il mondo, è come se si perdono per strada.[469]

Her father, on the other hand, is held up as the perfect example of the Italian man *because* of his loquacity: "[L]ui ha sempre avuto la cazzata pronta da sparare, è sempre stato forte a parlare a raffica e tenersi le conversazioni […] con gli amici, coi parenti, con mia madre."[470] Talkative and social, her father is the model of the non-threatening, trustworthy Italian —at least until his divorce, at which point he is left alone, in the silence of his shabby apartment, unable to talk or even joke with his sullen and disappointed teenage daughter. His silence and isolation are his punishment for breaking the family and threatening social order. Through the example of the father we can see how, for Betti, communication is not just a way of expressing oneself to others, but also a way of fitting in, a way of being one of many, rather than a loner, a suspect, a threat.[471]

In this sense, Suleiman is more successful than Betti at integrating and adapting his behavior. When a nosey Italian neighbor comes by Betti's apartment, ostensibly to borrow coffee but obviously to interrogate her new Arab boyfriend about all things Muslim, Suleiman responds patiently and courteously. In fact, he handles the situation so tactfully that Betti is forced to consider her own response: "Penso per un secondo," she says, "come risponderei io a domande simili, come tendenza credo che manderei subito a fare in culo diretto chi mi facesse queste domande. Invece il vecchio Suleiman tiene duro,

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Vittorio Tondelli's *Camere separate*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1989); Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Blue Ribbon books, 1928); or Suzanne Rodriguez's biography of Natalie Clifford Barney (*Wild Heart: A Life : Natalie Clifford Barney's Journey from Victorian America to Belle Époque Paris*. New York: Ecco, 2002).

[469] At fourteen I know some words, it isn't that I don't. Sometimes I turn them over in my mind, I hear them, I listen to them and they stick with me for a long time. But at the moment they are supposed to come out, cross my mouth and direct themselves towards the world, it's as though they get lost along the way." Campo, *Lezioni*, 59.

[470] "He always had a joke ready, he was always good at rattling on and holding conversations […] with friends, relatives, my mother." Ibid., 60.

[471] As a young girl Betti is a threat to Ennio and his wife; she is accused of ruining their marriage and, later, she is indirectly held responsible for his death because he is shot while running away with her rather than staying home with his wife. This image of the sexual single woman as a threat to the safety of men and calm and order of society is a well-worn one that finds roots in the dangerous seductive and dangerous of ancient mythology (the Sirens, Salome and Jezebel, for instance, are iconic examples of the effect of this ancient narrative that translates women's sexuality into threat and makes it appear as though it were isolated to these rare and unique figures, rather than being true of all women).

non si scompone."[472] Part of the reason Suleiman is able to stay so calm is that he can distinguish between the condemnation of the stereotype and his judgment of himself. "[D]opo l'11 settembre," Suleiman reflects, "è successo qualcosa, è saltato il tappo, per quello che riguarda gli arabi. Adesso chiunque si sente autorizzato a fare domande, a fare il poliziotto […] Ma non lo capisci," he explains to Betti, "qui noi siamo francesi sui documenti e basta, per il resto, siamo arabi. Per i francesi io e i miei fratelli resteremo sempre degli arabi."[473] Although offended and hurt by the bigotry that positions him as an exile in his own community, Suleiman is able to recognize it as a stereotype, as the manifestation of certain paranoias and the articulation of certain norms of appearance and behavior. Suleiman fights against the Islamophobia that makes every Arab man into that damaged monster-terrorist; he fights against this by trying to make himself legible, by re-narrating himself.[474] Betti's response, on the other hand, reveals the vast differences in how these two make sense of their social isolation, their loner status.[475]

In response to the neighbor's interrogation of Suleiman and his subsequent discussion of race, Betti launches into a narration of her first sexual experiences: "[M]i ricordi il mio primo amante" ("[Y]ou remind me of my first lover"), she tells Suleiman, and begins to recount her time with Ennio.[476] It is my contention that Betti's sudden confession (deeply uncharacteristic for this private woman) is only possible because of a profound misunderstanding. In other words, I am suggesting that Betti interprets Suleiman's dignity in the face of persecution as a sign of his disregard for social norms, as a sign of acceptance free of judgment. She realizes she is mistaken when he responds: "Sei troppo sincera, tu, non è bene che una donna dica tutte le sue cose intime."[477] Her openness, he points out, cannot be compared with his own because her gender demands discretion.

Suleiman's reprimand gives voice to an anxiety about female sexuality that finds echoes in all cultures. Betti thinks she recognizes in Suleiman the pain of being socially ostracized, but he rejects her. Suleiman's struggles are the result of his appearance and he is able to read them not as symptoms of his own transgressions but as markers of difference beyond his control. Betti's transgressions, on the other hand, are coded as individual, moral failures: as a young girl she allowed herself to be seduced by an older,

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[472] "I think for a second about how I would respond to similar questions. Out of habit I think I would immediately tell whoever asked me these questions to fuck off. Instead ol' Suleiman holds his ground, he doesn't lose his cool." Ibid*.,* 79.
[473] "After September 11th something happened, the cork popped, as far as the Arabs are concerned. Now everyone feels authorized to ask questions, to play the cop […] But you don't understand, here we are only French on paper, everything else about us is Arab. For the French my brothers and I will always be Arabs." Ibid*.,* 80-81.
[474] In this way Suleiman is performing a strategy of self-preservation similar to the one that Puar and Rai discuss in their reading of the Sikh community in the U.S., who produce "Talking Points" as a way of educating the public about the differences between the "good" Sikh turbans and the "bad" terrorist turbans. Puar and Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag."
[475] I am insisting on the term "loner" because, as I noted earlier in my discussion of Maraini's essay, the logic that sees the non-conformist subject as "Other" also insists on the uniqueness of that difference. In other words, despite the fact that Betti and Suleiman have each other, their difference from the behaviors, appearances and norms that govern the majority make it so that they are cast in the role of "loner," where alone means, at its base value, different and thus negative.
[476] Campo, *Lezioni*, 81.
[477] "You're too honest, it isn't right for a woman to tell all of her intimate stories". Ibid., 82.

married man, and now—as an adult—rather than being ashamed of her past, she is aroused by memories of that time. Though directly dependent on the particularity of her gendered, sexed body, Betti's non-normative sexual history marks her as negatively different from other women. Her articulation of her history—of her pleasure and desire—further condemns her as a woman unable to properly control her body, and deny or repent for her expression of desire.

In a conflation of national and gender identity, Suleiman rejects Betti's newfound openness in politically and racially charged terms: "[L]o sapevo che era una fregatura andare con un'italiana . . . dovevo rimettermi con un'araba."[478] And then again: "[I]o non ti seguo, parli come una francese."[479] Throughout the novel this type of conflation of language and identity serves to signal moments of tension, as when Betti says to Suleiman after he forces her to have anal sex: "Io no, gli dico, io non voglio questo, sei un gran figlio di puttana. Glielo dico in italiano, nella mia lingua."[480] This ownership of Italian identity—extremely unusual for Betti—is reserved for moments of battle and antagonism. Her cultural heritage informs her outlook and her sense of self, but rarely do we see her acknowledge that influence much less take pride in it. As suggested by the title, *Lezioni di arabo*, language is a central concern throughout the text, but the function of language is not always the same. Unlike the language lessons in *Amiche per la pelle*, that serve to unite a community of diverse people, the "lezioni" in Campo's text bring to light the way different languages can be used to reinforce personal and cultural distance. Sometimes, as in Betti's angry defense of her body, the choice of one language over another is meant to indicate difference from Suleiman and establish distance from his body. At other times attention to language is meant to offend, as a conflation of race, character and linguistic expression, such as Suleiman's condemnation of Betti for sounding French—a euphemism here for sexually explicit.

Although it is set in Paris, there is little attention to French in the narrative.[481] There is, instead, attention to those moments when Betti chooses to speak Italian to Suleiman (when she defends herself and her body) and, of course, to her decision to take Arabic lessons. She explains that these lessons are meant to bring the two of them closer together: "Ho detto a Suleiman che ho iniziato a prendere lezioni di arabo all'Institut du

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[478] "I knew is was a mistake to go with an Italian . . . I should've gotten back with an Arab girl." Ibid*.,* 88.

[479] "I don't understand you, you talk like a French girl." Ibid*.,* 89.

[480] "I don't, I tell him, I don't want this, you're a real son of a bitch. I say it to him in Italian, in my language." Ibid*.,* 26.

[481] By setting this story of migration and difference in France, Campo invites a comparison between the expectations of tolerance invoked by each national context. The Italian has historically been the other of Europe, emigrating to France and Germany, along with people from North Africa and Eastern Europe, for work and political asylum. Italy has only recently become a destination for immigrants. Perhaps because of these differences Italy has not been "expected" to know how to negotiate difference as well as France. In this way the dysfunctional multiculturalism of Campo's Paris setting helps to work against hierarchies of progress-as-tolerance that place France above Italy and which mark Italy as "not yet" multiculturally tolerant but sure to follow in the footsteps of its neighbors. In other words, the persistence of discrimination in Paris, where it is not narratively expected or legally tolerated, has the effect of simultaneously "forgiving" Italian racism (or making it seem "less bad") and also painting a bleak picture of the possibilities for tolerance and the harmonious coexistence of difference. For a more focused discussion of histories of migration and discrimination in and between European countries, see Christopher Bail, "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries against Immigrants in Europe," *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008): 37-59.

monde arabe, voglio imparare la sua lingua, almeno un po'".[482] Suleiman, however, does not take such a sentimental view of things. He responds, instead, by launching into a discussion of race relations between Arab people and Western people. "Lo sai perché voi occidentali finite sempre per ridurre l'altro a uno stereotipo?" he asks, and then goes on to answer his own question, becoming increasingly agitated as he speaks:

> Così potete continuare a non pensare, potete evitare di andare fino in fondo nelle questioni vere […] [V]oi credete di avere democrazia? Quanti sono gli italiani o i francesi che erano contrari alla guerra in Iraq? E ai massacri dei palestinesi? La maggioranza, forse. Però? […] Nessuno ha chiesto il vostro parere, vi hanno ignorato e ce l'hanno messo in culo a noi, come sempre […] Vi siete lasciati imbrogliare, anche voi, gli arabi non sono tutti terroristi, Osama bin Laden non parla a nome mio o a nome di tutti gli arabi.[483]

The anger and frustration of Suleiman's outburst are the flip side of the calm and poise that allow him to treat Betti's bigoted neighbor with such generosity. Like Maraini, however, Suleiman does not imagine a world undivided. Staying steadfastly within a logic of "noi e voi," he describes the patience and intentionality Arab people must constantly exhibit in thinking about and dealing with Western people. Betti, on the other hand, occupies a space between: not between a Western world and an Arab world, but between a world divided and a world undefined. Her relationship to Italy and Italian culture is strained at best; she is estranged from her family and her nation of birth and speaks Italian only in moments of anger and self-defense. She lives in a multicultural city, works in an Algerian restaurant and dates an Arab man. She is, to borrow Martin Manalansan's theory of queer immigrant identity, a "messy subject," spilling out of the conceptual containers used to make sense of social organization by inhabiting multiple, unspecific subject positions so that her very "messiness" marks her queerness.[484]

As the novel draws to a close Betti's boss is dismayed to find that she fails to embody her national stereotype religiously as well: "E non credi nemmeno nel tuo Dio, il Dio dei Cattolici? Gli italiani sono cattolici!" he exclaims.[485] She responds thoughtfully and at length:

> Ti dico in cosa credo, Hassan, io credo nello sforzo di chi cerca di diventare un essere umano. Di chi prova a superare l'egoismo e il razzismo istintivi, quella tendenza di merda che abbiamo tutti a ridurre

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[482] "I told Suleiman that I started taking Arabic lessons at the Institute for the Arab World; I want to learn his language, at least a little bit". Campo, *Lezioni,* 53.

[483] "You know why you Westerners always end up reducing the other to a stereotype? So that you can continue not to think, you can avoid getting to the bottom of the real questions […] [Y]ou think you have democracy? How many Italians or French people were against the war in Iraq? And the massacres of the Palestinians? The majority perhaps. And yet? […] No one asked your opinion, they ignored you and they screwed us, like always […] You let yourselves be tricked, you too, Arabs are not all terrorists, Osama bin Laden doesn't speak in my name or in the name of all Arabs." Ibid., 55-6.

[484] I borrow the notion of queer "messiness" from Martin Manalansan's talk, "Queer Dwellings: Migrancy, Precarity, and Fabulosity" (presented at the Feminist Theory Workshop at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, March 22-23, 2013). Manalansan used "messiness" to describe queer interactions with identity restrictors, like the census form, which presume shared understandings and experiences of subject-defining terms like "household," or "kinship."

[485] "Don't you even believe in your God, in the Catholic God? Italians are Catholic!" Campo, *Lezioni,* 104.

> l'altro a uno stereotipo, a incollare un'etichetta su qualcuno in base alle nostre paure: il terrorista islamico, il sionista, il negro, l'arabo, il matto, il povero, lo zingaro […] Credo che questa è l'origine di tutti i guai, delle guerre dello sfruttamento, di tutte le stronzate che ci sono nel mondo, nasce tutto da qui, negare a una persona la sua umanità, e ridurla a uno stereotipo.[486]

What is remarkable about Betti's response is not so much *what* she says, but that she says anything at all. As I discussed earlier, Betti's life up to this point has been characterized by her silence; she has always been a solitary and taciturn woman. Now, as the novel concludes, Betti has a steady boyfriend and has learned to engage in conversation and share her thoughts with others; she is responding to what Puar and Rai refer to as the call to enact her own normalization.[487] When her boss remarks on how talkative she now is, saying, "Oulalà sei una filosofa, tu" ("Oh, so you're a philosopher, you are"), she responds by mentioning Suleiman: "[M]i ha chiesto di andare a trovare la sua famiglia" ("[H]e asked me to go meet his family").[488] By associating her sudden ease of expression with her newly forming and impending domesticity, Betti is signaling the convergence of disciplining forces with which she must contend.

Ostracized and made to feel different because of her non-normative experience of sexuality and desire, Betti is also punished precisely for her condition as exile. Her solitariness—stemming from an inability to tell anyone about her experience and her pleasure with Ennio—makes her suspect; thus she is doubly condemned as different, alone and therefore suspect. Her relationship with Suleiman acts as a disciplining experience in which she learns the terms of acceptance: talk about this, not about that, don't be alone, be with a man, be part of a family. In the end, however, Betti is hesitant. She refuses to take Suleiman to meet her family in Italy and is unsure if she wants to meet his. This minimal dissent is indicative, I am suggesting, of a desire to resist being coopted, an effort to keep a narrative of the self from being translated and formatted to fit norms of narrative and social acceptability.

"Non ero anche io italiana come lei?"[489]: Narrative and alliance in The Concorso Letterario Nazionale Lingua Madre

The last literary object I am going to discuss before concluding this dissertation is not a single text, but a feminist literary project. The Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre: Racconti di donne straniere ("National Literary Competition Mother Tongue:

[486] "I'll tell you what I believe in, Hassan, I believe in the effort of whoever tries to live as a human being. Of whoever tries to overcome instinctive egotism and racism, those shitty tendencies we all have to reduce the other to a stereotype, to glue a label on someone based on our own fears: the Muslim terrorist, the Zionist, the negro, the Arab, the crazy person, the poor man, the gypsy . . . I believe that this is the root of all our problems, of the wars of exploitation, of all the crap in the world, it all comes from this, denying a person her humanity, and reducing her to a stereotype." Ibid*.,* 104.
[487] Puar and Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," 136.
[488] Campo, *Lezioni,* 104.

[489] "Wasn't I also Italian, like her?"

Stories of Foreign Women") is a community of Italian and foreign-born women coming together through text. Intended as a way to "dar voce a chi abitualmente non ce l'ha, cioè gli stranieri, in particolare le donne che nel dramma dell'emigrazione/immigrazione sono discriminate due volte,"[490] the Concorso is a multifaceted literary competition that welcomes participation from women writing on the theme of immigration or "foreignness." Once each year, since its foundation in 2005, the Concorso publishes an anthology with the winning short stories. Throughout the year it facilitates events and programs to encourage women's writing in a variety of venues including schools, prisons, community centers across the country.

The Concorso draws on the philosophical ideas, and political practices, developed by Italian feminists in the '60s and '70s, bringing together a number of the affective and aesthetic threads I have identified in previous chapters. Specifically, the idea of fostering affect and kinship through text reappears here as a central tenant of this project, as explained by the Concorso's founder, Daniela Finocchi: "La condivisione di un momento letterario, dell'atto dello scrivere insieme, porta alla piena scoperta e consapevolezza del proprio sé femminile."[491] This notion of writing as relationality is one that I have returned to repeatedly, in my discussion of Aleramo's text, the manifesto of the Libreria delle Donne, and the collective autobiographies of *Baby Boomers.* Citing Carla Lonzi, Finocchi explains how integral this practice of relationality among women is to the Concorso:

> Il confronto, il dialogo e il sostegno sono gli aspetti più profondi del Concorso. Il bando autorizza, anzi incoraggia l'aiuto di donne italiane, nel caso la lingua scritta presentasse difficoltà. E non è un aiuto che si ferma alla semplice revisione del testo, alla correzione grammaticale. È un aiuto più profondo, non univoco, ma reciproco, come solo quello al femminile sa essere. Scriveva Cara Lonzi: 'La donna cerca la risonanza di sé nell'autenticità di un'altra donna perché capisce che il suo unico modo di ritrovare se stessa è nella specie.'[492]

Through this literal and philosophical citation, Finocchi is placing herself and the Concorso solidly in this tradition of Italian feminism, drawing on the philosophy of sexual difference and the theoretical work of important Italian feminist thinkers like Lonzi, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero.

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[490] "Give a voice to those who have none, in other words, foreigners, particularly women who, in the drama of emigration/immigration are discriminated against twice." From the Concorso's mission statement: http://concorsolinguamadre.it/il-concorso/ (Accessed Nov. 20th, 2014). All translations are my own.

[491] "Sharing a literary moment, writing together, brings us toward a full discovery and understanding of our female self." Sole Anatrone, "Intervista: Daniela Finocchi: ideatrice del Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre," written, October 20th, 2014.

[492] "Exposure, dialogue and support are the most fundamental aspects of the Competition. The competition allows, in fact it encourages help from Italian women in those moments when the written language poses difficulties. And this help isn't limited to a revision of the text, a grammatical editing. It is a more profound help, not one-way, but reciprocal, of the type only women can provide. Carla Lonzi wrote: 'Woman looks for self-recognition in the authenticity of another woman because she understands that the only way she will be able to find herself is in her own kind.'" Daniela Finocchi, "Il blog del Concorso Lingua Madre: contaminazioni linguaggi e sperimentazioni nel segno della differenza," *World Wide Women: globalizzazione, generi, linguaggi* – vol. 3, edited by Caponio, et al., (Turin: CIRSDe, 2011) 234. The Lonzi citation is from *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti. Rivolta Femminile,* (Milan: et. Al, 1974), 147.

Finocchi, a journalist by profession, has lived and worked all her life in Turin, and has dedicated herself to questions of oppression, power and justice. When she decided, in 2005, to organize the Concorso, she found ready support from the local and regional government in Turin.[493] In an interview with me she explained the significance of Turin to the success of the Concorso: "non è un caso che il Concorso sia nato e cresciuto a Torino, dove la politica dell'integrazione ha superato da sempre la logica delle espulsioni e della gestione della questione come problema di ordine pubblico."[494] An industrial city since the turn of the last century, Turin was the site of the first major workers' and student protests in the Sixties, those same uprising that were the focus of Passerini's *Autobiografia* that I discussed in Chapter Three. The tradition of industrialism means that Turin has been a destination for economic migrants for decades; however, whereas in previous years that demographic had been predominantly southern Italian, since the 1990s it has become a destination for migrants from all over the world. This history of consistent immigration and social activism can be traced in the continued support for and success of the Concorso. Many of the participants have benefited from this success, going on to become successful authors, to found their own publishing houses, civic organizations, online communities and become known figures in the Italian literary world (particularly in the sphere of so-called migrant or postcolonial writing). Laila Wadia, who I discussed earlier, is among the better-known authors to pass through the Concorso, along with Cristina Farah Ubah, Gabriella Kuruvilla, Gabriella Ghermandi, Rosana Crispim da Costa, and Clementina Sandra Ammendola, among others. The Concorso has, in effect, become an institution; a platform from which women writers whose cultural and linguistic identities and styles do not conform to the national standard (a standard reinforced by the homogeneity in the catalogues of the major publishing houses) may enter the Italian cultural arena.[495]

The question of cultural conformity and difference is, as I have previously suggested, inseparable from any conversation about immigration and national identity. In the context of the Concorso, the title (Concorso letterario *nazionale* Lingua Madre:

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[493] The Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre is funded by Piedmont Regional Government and the Salone Internazionale del Libro di Torino, and is supported by the Torino Rotary Club, the Slow Food Terra Madre Project, and a number of other local and inter-European organizations. For more information visit their website at http://concorsolinguamadre.it/.

[494] "It is not by chance that the Competition was born in Turin, where a politics of dissent has always trumped the idea of expulsions and the handling of the issue as a matter of public order." Anatrone "Intervista."

[495] Graziella Parati discusses the limited representation of migrant authors by major Italian publishing houses. The vast majority of texts by im/migrant writers are published by small editorial houses, often established by those same writers. Parati explains that the few texts that have been published by the big publishing companies are presented as "token texts," acknowledging diversity without legitimizing it as a valuable source of cultural or economic capital (Parati *Migration Italy*, 99). The effect of this editorial tactic is to promote an image of homogenous literary cultural that corresponds to an idea of national identity. As Marie Orton explains, in her discussion of Asor Rosa's theory of the Italian literary canon, "this belief in the symbiotic relationship between literature and national identity depends on a vision that perceives national identity and its literary counterpart more as entities than as ever-developing processes" (Orton "Writing the Nation," 32). In other words, the systematic exclusion of minoritarian writers from the literary publishing market promotes a myth of Italian mono-culturalism and, perhaps more dangerously, of cultural stasis, of national identity as unchangeable. For more on the significance of literature in establishing and perpetuating a unified Italian national identity see: Alberto Asor Rosa's, *Storia europea della letteratura italiana*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

Racconti di *donne straniere* in Italia), invites an interrogation of these categories within a discussion of gender. Responding to my question about the political nature of the Concorso, Finocchi writes, "[e]sistono, certo, lingue nazionali e patrie ma esiste oggi, più di sempre, una lingua e una terra madre."[496] Engaging, in this way, with the question of language and nation, Finocchi makes a careful distinction between padre/patria (father/fatherland) and "terra madre" (mother earth), stressing the idea of a shared experience of womanhood and earth. This is presented in opposition to the political and philosophical idea of the fatherland; or rather, it is meant to shed light on the sexism inherent in these linguistic and philosophical constructs. Nation and language are, for Finocchi, symptoms of a patriarchal system that forces women (and men) to adhere to certain rules, borders and modes of expression that support a tradition of oppression.[497] Finocchi elaborates on this point in her discussion of the language requirement: "Nel Concorso Lingua Madre le donne sono chiamate a scrivere in italiano perché l'Italia è il paese di residenza e il luogo dove il concorso è bandito, quello dove ora vivono, lavorano."[498] Italian, she explains, is the required language because the Concorso takes place in Italy, but the fact of its "foreignness" is almost irrelevant because, Finocchi claims, on a philosophical and political level, all official languages are foreign to women:

> le donne sono abituate ad esprimersi in una lingua straniera perché da qualsiasi paese provengano, a qualsiasi cultura appartengano la "lingua" che utilizzano non è la loro ma è quella dei padri, quella della " cultura patriarcale". Le donne allora, potremmo dire, sono abituate ad esprimersi in una lingua straniera, nel senso che gli è " estranea", che non gli appartiene, in quanto storicamente emarginate dalla cultura con la " c" maiuscola.[499]

This outlook is consistent with the ideas of the philosophy of sexual difference and, consequently, offers the same successes and challenges I have previously identified (in Ch. 2). Taking the position that all language is foreign to all women is dangerous because

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[496] "there are, of course, national languages, and homelands, but today, more than ever, there is a mother land and a mother tongue." Anatrone "Intervista."

[497] In making this claim she is drawing on a specific tradition of feminist thought, influenced, as I've said before, by the philosophy of sexual difference, but also by the (often contradictory) thinking of Hélène Cixous and Adrienne Rich, both of whom she references in her explanation of why the Concorso is successful. She writes, for example, that to avoid "che ogni donna si ritrovi a confrontarsi con un modello dominante dell'identità femminile, è necessario allora fare riferimento alla politica del 'posizionamento,' cosi come suggerita da Adrienne Rich" (Finocchi "Il blog," 235). This call for an awareness of differences among women, when read in the context of Rich's work, may seem at odds with Cixious's philosophy of an *écriture feminine*, which Finocchi cites as mirroring the "presupposti fondamentali e caratterizzanti" of her project. In the Concorso, however, these two positions come together; they do so, in my view, at the expense of Rich's point about the limitations of Western feminism, but in service of a goal of cross-cultural interaction. I will return to this tension in my discussion of Nur's short story.

[498] "In the Mother Tongue Competition women are called upon to write in Italian because Italy is the place of residence and it is the country where the competition is held, the place where they now live and work." Anatrone "Intervista."

[499] "women are accustomed to expressing themselves in a foreign language because, regardless of where they are from, of which culture they belong to, the 'language' they use is not their own, but the language of their fathers, of the 'patriarchal culture.' We could say, therefore, that women are used to speaking in a foreign tongue, in the sense that it is 'foreign' to them, it does not belong to them because historically they have been excluded from culture with a capital 'c'." Anatrone "Intervista."

it risks undermining women's agency as speakers and writers of any language. In Campo's novel, for instance, Betti turns to Italian (her first language) as a powerful way to reassert her identity, thus marking herself linguistically against a figure of foreign male aggression. On the other hand, there is potential for transformation if we understand the notion of "linguistic foreignness" as unexplored but not unwelcome difference, as in the case of Wadia's women who learn to communicate with each other, forming new communities through their new language. By acknowledging a political, patriarchal investment in national languages, Lingua Madre works to push against hierarchies and uneven power dynamics that often inhere in citizen-immigrant dynamics (discursive and lived). At the same time, the Concorso is, in my view, limited because the philosophy of sexual difference relies on a binary gender system where women and men are understood as having fundamentally different modes of interacting with the world. **"**Il pensare delle donne," Finocchi explains, "e il loro *sentire differentemente* abbraccia il mondo e si sta tramutando in un *patrimonio umano universale*."[500] By insisting on a notion of gendered division of experiences the Concorso remains within a rigid, oppositional system (men/women), excluding other possible modes of existence. In addition, the question of national (and foreign) identity is reinforced in a surprisingly traditional manner, by noting the author's name and country of origin at the start of each story.[501] The effect is to reinforce the idea that immigrants are always bonded first and foremost with their so-called home country, despite the philosophical message about women transcending borders and finding home where their find community.

The philosophical bent of the founder and the mission of the project are not necessarily echoed in all the writing included in the published anthologies. Each volume includes approximately fifty short stories and each of those tells its own tale, varying stylistically and thematically in every case. One note that does, however, seem to persist in a majority of the work and which echoes the philosophical and political tone I discussed, has to do with valuing difference and finding strength in literary expression among women.

One of those is "Volevo essere Miss Italia," ("I Wanted to be Miss Italy"), a short story by Rahma Nur published in the 2012 edition of *Lingua Madre*, and winner of that year's Premio Speciale Rotary Club.[502] The titles echoes Nassera Chohra's 1993 novella *Volevo diventare bianca*, (*I Wanted to Become White*), and, like that precursor, this tale engages with questions of race, migration, integration and national identity.[503] What is

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[500] "Women's thinking and feeling differently, in a way that embraces the world, is a universal human heritage." Anatrone "Intervista."

[501] To be more specific, each story is introduced with the Author's name in the top left corner, the title just below, and, in brackets in the top right corner, the country from which, presumably, the author is from. The short bios in the back the anthologies include information about where each author was born, when she emigrated or became interested in the topic and a line or two, presumably penned the author indicating some personal detail (ex: other literary works or artistic interests). There is no indication as to whether or not the women prefer to be identified by the natal country on the title page; given the consistency of formatting one may infer that this is an editorial decision, and one that reinforces the keywords in the project's title.

[502] Rahma Nur, "Volevo essere Miss Italia," in *Lingua Madre Duemiladodici: Racconti di donne straniere in Italia,* (Turin: Edizioni SEB 27, 2012), 173-177.

[503] Nassera Chohra text is a precursor not only to Nur's story but also to the whole Lingua Madre project, thematically, politically and generically. It tells the story of an immigrant, woman of color experiencing all of these identities as conditions of her oppression; the act of writing about this experience is presented as a

interesting about Nur's story is the way it interacts with historical events, acknowledging the contradictory emotions and positions we assume in the face of significant, often controversial public events.

The first two sentences of this short story take us back to 1996, and describe Denny Mendez smiling and crying on television as she is the first black woman to be crowned Miss Italia. By the end of the paragraph, the focus has shifted away from the beauty queen and onto the viewer, watching and reacting to the events as they unfold on her home television: "Lei, una Miss nera! Mica siamo in America qui, ma cosa sta succedendo mai?"[504] These few words set the tone not only for the short story that follows, but for the Lingua Madre project more generally. They speak to the inevitable transformation of Italian society as the population becomes increasingly diverse, captured here in the crowning of a "Miss nera!" and to the surprise so many people feel in the face of this change. It is worth pausing for a moment over the off-handed comment, "mica

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step toward reclaiming the power of her voice and thus her agency. The question of agency is, however, complicated when we consider that *Volevo diventare bianca* was written in what many have seen as an unequal collaboration between Chohra and Alessandra Atti di Sarro. The disparity has to do with language and national identity and, once again, with the idea of white women saving brown women; in this case, Atti di Sarro is helping Chohra to express her story "properly," using the linguistic and stylistic conventions with which she, as a "native" Italian, is familiar. This dynamic of "speaking as" or "speaking for" oppressed women has been the subject of much debate in postcolonial studies [A particularly interesting discussion on this topic and the history of this debate is the 2010 collection of essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak ?Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind Morris and Gayatri Spivak.] The Lingua Madre project, developed more than a decade after Chohra's text was published, is positioned differently in this debate. Collaborative writing between immigrants and women who are native Italian speakers is encouraged, as is writing that produces new textures of Italian, mixing it with other languages and styles. Daniela Finocchi explains that the Concorso encourages collaboration "fra le donne straniere e italiane, nel caso l'uso della lingua italiana scritta presenti delle difficoltà," with the goal of fostering community, "nello spirito della valorizzazione dell'intreccio culturale che è prima di tutto intreccio relazionale: assistenza non è affatto perdita sul piano identitario, al contrario è proprio nella relazione che l'identità si afferma in modo positivo e non preclusivo" ["between foreign and Italian women, when the written Italian language poses a problem, in the spirit of valorizing the weaving together of cultures; it is a weaving together that is, above all, relational: assistance is not a loss of identity, on the contrary, it is precisely in relating to others that identity is affirmed in a positive and non-prescriptive way."] (Anatrone, "Intervista"). Finocchi notes that linguistic hybridity born of immigrant communities has deep roots in many parts of the world, but is relatively new in Italy: "un esercizio cui altre lingue sono soggette da tempo, pensiamo all'inglese che si è frammentato in tanti dialetti dallo Spanglish degli USA al Franglais del Canada, al Black American English e che con l'italiano inizia solo ora […] le cose evolvono, si scoprono termini che servono non solo per comunicare, ma anche per creare. Infine, l'italiano diventa la lingua scelta, si fa pensiero e si può arrivare persino a giocare con le parole, cambiandole, condensandole, inventandone delle nuove" ["it is a process other languages have been subjected to for a long time, think of English that is fragmented into many dialects by Spanish in the USA, or French in Canada, of Black American English, and then of Italian that is just now starting [to change…] things evolve, new terms are discovered that serve not just for communicating, but also for creating. In the end, Italian becomes a chosen language, a language of thoughts; you can begin to play with words, changing them, compounding them, inventing new ones"]. (Anatrone, "Intervista"). While this invitation to innovate does not address the question of power and inequality, it does allow us to think about new paths towards linguistic expression and civic participation. For a thoughtful study on the significance of language in the formation of Italian national identity see: Howard Moss, "Language and Italian National Identity," in *The Politics of Italian National Identity: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000) 98-123.

[504] "Her, a Black Miss! We're not in America here, what in the world is going on?" Nur "Volevo," 173. All translations are my own.

siamo in America."[505] This is a saying used frequently in Italy to signal things that sit on the border between strange and potentially appealing, but decidedly not Italian; "mica siamo in America" is a saying that drips with ideological implications, reinforcing an idea that the symbols of American modernity and progress are at odds with some fundamental element of Italian culture. In this case the unthinkable American reality is a black woman representing the nation. I stress this point about America because it sheds light on a tension between the standards Italians have for their society, and those that they assume the rest of the (western) world has for them. Racial equality, for example, is represented, in many arenas of public discourse, as something the nation ought to strive for, but, at the same time, it is spoken of as being at odds with Italian culture. This dynamic is repeated in many contexts, not least of which are the responses by the media and other public leaders to the actual crowning of Denny Mendez as Miss Italia.

Denny Mendez was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Italy at the age of 11, seven years before the Miss Italia competition. Since winning that title she has become a television celebrity, successful model and actress. In 1996, Italy was less than a decade into its new identity as immigration destination, with an increasing number of immigrants coming each year in search of work and an unstable political and social plan for negotiating this new reality, with the ethno-nationalist Lega Nord party gaining political ground and center-left leader Romano Prodi winning the prime minister's seat in the April elections. Appearing all over national media during this period of political tension, Mendez was perceived as embodying the increasing presence of immigrants in Italy. Some hailed this new multicultural Italy as a symbol of progress, others as a sign of cultural degeneration. When two of the judges were suspended for arguing that Mendez's race disqualified her form participation, the pageant was transformed into a public debate about race and national identity.[506] On both sides of the debate, Mendez's body, the color

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[505] Keep in mind that "America" refers, in this case, specifically to the United States.

[506] The winner was determined by a panel of judges and by a viewer call-in process. There was a lot of controversy as the competition dew to a close, and two judges were suspended for claiming that a black woman could not represent Italian beauty. One of the judges, Alba Parietti, was reinstated before the end of the competition but only after partially retracting her previous statement. "E' stato un malinteso, non sono razzista," ("It was a misunderstanding, I am not racist") Parietti explained to the *Corriere delle sera* the final day of the competition (Alfonso, "La 'Perla nera'). "Ho sbagliato perché non conoscevo le regole," ("I made a mistake because I didn't know the rules") she continues, offering the kind of apology that is so frequently heard when the offense is the perpetuation of racism. It is an apology that asks forgiveness for violating the rules of conduct established by a dominant society (embodied here by the elderly, white, male producer of the competition). The rules Parietti says she did not understand, are both implicit and explicit; in the interview she is referring to rules that say anyone with Italian citizenship, regardless of birthplace, may participate in the competition, but the implicit rules Parietti responds to demand that judges demonstrate the behaviors and attitudes expected of "developed" societies. Parietti performs what is asked of her, but feels no need to rethink her ideas on race or beauty, in fact she concludes her interview by confidently restating her views on national identity and physical appearance: "Non voglio che si pensi a me come a una razzista […] Resto comunque del mio parere. Miss Giappone, per me, deve avere gli occhi a mandorla" ("I don't want anyone to think I'm a racist […] I stand by my opinion, however. Miss Japan, in my opinion, must have almond shaped eyes"). Parietti then leaves the press conference to resume her role as judge on the nationally televised Miss Italia competition. This same clumsy rhetorical gesture, demonstrating an awareness of racism and, in the same breathe, perpetuating the language and logic of that racism, can be seen in much of the media coverage from that moment. The *Corriere della sera* article cited above refers to Mendez as "La 'Perla nera,'" *Il Tempo* calls her "la 'colored'" and writes that she is responsible for causing all the controversy ("Denny Mendez, la tanto discussa 'colored' che ha reso questo concorso diverso da tutti gli altri")("Denny Mendez, the much talked about 'colored' that made this

of her skin, the curve of her bottom, the kink in her hair, are made to stand for the current and potential future of the nation. In Nur's story Mendez is again reduced to a symbol, though here she serves as a catalyst for the narrator's reflection on her own ability to represent the present and future of Italy.

Before offering details about her biography, Nur's narrator admits to feeling jealous of the beauty queen, but not because of her good looks: "Ero solo invidiosa di questa ragazza dominicana, arrivata in Italia solo pochi anni prima che ancora non parlava un italiano fluente e probabilmente non sapeva nulla né di Manzoni né di Lucio Battisti! Ma che diritto aveva?"[507] What comes to light here is the narrator's sense of what it means to be Italian; to be Italian is to know Manzoni and Battisti, to recognize certain cultural symbols (just as in Wadia's story when signor Rosso tests Kamla by asking her about Ungaretti). Along with this vaguely defined but powerfully felt notion of what it takes to be Italian comes a sense of how immigration "should" work, of the proper path from immigrant to citizen. She explains that Mendez's victory feels like an injustice: "Mi sentivo defraudata, di cosa ancora non lo sapevo." ("I felt robbed, but of what I didn't know.") She goes on to say that she had hoped for something different, "[s]peravo che a rappresentare la parte più colorata di tanti Italiani come me fosse proprio una ragazza italiana, nata e cresciuta qui come me e tanti altri immigrati di seconda generazione. Invece, guarda un po' chi era riuscita ad arrivare fino a lì![508] By now it is clear that the narrator, like Mendez, is a young woman, ("una ragazza"), born to immigrant parents, raised in Italy, and, like Mendez, marked by the color of her skin ("la parte più colorata degli italiani").[509] Her sense of injustice, of being robbed

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competition different from all the others"), as though Mendez were the acting agent, rather than those who see her skin color as an obstacle (Soli, "La più bella"). Covering the pageant for the *New York Times*, Celestine Bohlen writes that one judge spoke somewhat candidly about the importance of *acting* (rather than thinking) like a tolerant nation: "'The contest ended under a sort of blackmail,' said Enrico Mentana, a judge who is a producer of one of Italy's main television news programs and who voted for another contestant. 'Not to elect Denny would mean looking like a Class-B country'" (Bohlen, "Italians Contemplate"). As Stephen Gundle writes, some "commentators confirmed the view that it was a cost-free way of affirming that Italy was modern and open, a fully-paid up member of the global village" (Gundle "Miss Italia," 264). Through a careful study of language used to in the media to describe Mendez, Gundle makes the compelling argument that "her victory was an aesthetic tribute not so much to Italy's tolerance and inclusiveness as to its historical preeminence as a country able to select and evaluate global beauty" (Gundle "Miss Italia," 264).

[507] "I was just jealous of this Dominican girl, arrived in Italy just a few years before, she didn't even speak fluent Italian yet and probably knew nothing about Manzoni or Lucio Battisti! What right did she have?" Nur "Volevo," 173.

[508] "I had hoped that the person to represent the most colorful Italians would be someone like me, a girl born and raised here, a second generation immigrant. Instead look who made it to the top!" Nur "Volevo," 174.

[509] She develops the description of her physical appearance by imagining the kind of reaction she might get on a pageant stage: "Ok, al livello fisico non potevo proprio competere […] non è che io fossi brutta, anzi, a detta di molti ero una bella giovane donna somala, con i classici lineamenti somali […] non credo che due superbe stampelle azzurre e un'elegante camminata claudicante fossero nella lista dei requisiti per diventare una Miss. Forse avrei potuto aspirare a Miss Disabile…!" ["Ok, on the physical level I couldn't compete […] it isn't that I was ugly, on the contrary, many would say I was a beautiful young Somali woman, with classical Somali features […] I don't think having two splendid blue crutches and an elegant limping gait is on the list of requirements to being Miss. Maybe I could have hoped for Miss Disability…!"] (Nur "Volevo," 174) In this passage we see a conflation of physical appearance ("bella"), age ("giovane"), gender ("donna"), and national or ethnic identity ("somala") that is presented not only without question, but

("defraudata") speaks to a narrative that comes up frequently in conversations about proper (vs. improper) immigration, where those immigrants who "have done it right" are described (often self-described) as being robbed by those who "are doing it wrong." This rhetoric is typically heard in debates about illegal border crossing, amnesty visas and other instances where certain people are accused of not playing by the rules; to hear it here, in the context of beauty pageants, calls attention to the arbitrariness of the rules that determine belonging, and the deeply emotive and often contradictory reactions they incur.[510] Nur's narrator explains that she has contradictory feelings about Mendez's win because her support for Mendez is clouded by this idea that Mendez has not played by the same rules:

> Io mi trovavo tra due fuochi; se qualcuno si diceva contrario, io mi arrabbiavo e confutavo che ormai in Italia c'erano italiani diversi e che era ora di aprire gli occhi alla realtà dell'immigrazione e che Denny era un'apripista per tutti noi (anche se sotto sotto, la vedevo come un'usurpatrice: io ero più italiana di lei!).[511]

On the one hand she feels connected to Mendez because of their shared identity as Italians of color; an affinity that prompts her to defend Mendez on the grounds that she represents a new Italy and should be regarded as a pioneer and role model for all immigrants ("un'apripista per tutti noi").[512] On the other hand, she feels she is far more Italian than Mendez and resents her because of that difference. However, in a moment of painful disillusionment, she learns that her feelings about being more or less Italian than Mendez do not correspond to generally held beliefs about what constitutes Italian. In a conversation with a close *white* friend, the narrator learns that what connects her to Mendez – their skin color – is also what disqualifies, her even in the eyes of those she considers friends:

> Disse che non era giusto che avesse vinto [Mendez] perché lei non rappresentava la classica bellezza italiana […] Mi sentii sprofondare […] non mi aspettavo una critica così dura da una mia amica. Allora le chiesi se avessi partecipato io, con la mia lunga storia di immigrata, arrivata in Italia da piccolissima, cresciuta a spaghetti, Battisti e letteratura italiana,

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is reinforced ("i classici lineamenti somali"). The presumed self-evident truth in this statement about Somali appearance is strikingly at odds with the debate about Italian appearance that motivates Nur's story. The dismissive, perhaps sarcastic, statement about never winning a pageant because of her disability, ("Forse avrei potuto aspirare a Miss Disabile…!") echoes the tone of the opening lines reminding readers that Italy is not America ("mica siamo in America!"); a Miss Disability pageant is an idea so far fetched she cannot even put it into words, as the ellipses imply.

[510] Some very interesting theoretical work has been done on the affective responses incurred by "official" rules and documents. I find David Eng's discussion of the affective effect Barak Obama's election had for queer of color communities to be particularly compelling. David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*, (Durham: Duke University Press2010).

[511] "I found myself between two flames; if someone said they were against it, I would become angry and would argue that there are many different Italians in Italy and that is was time to open our eye to the realty of immigration and that Denny was a trailblazer for us all (even if, deep down, I saw her as a usurper: I was more Italian than she was!)" Nur "Volevo," 174.

[512] For an interesting discussion of the ways Mendez's coronation may have impacted immigrant women in Italy see Laura Ruberto. *Gramsci, Migration, and the Representation of Women's Work in Italy and the U.S.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

> sarebbe stato meglio? Lei rispose che era la stessa cosa: non rappresentavo la classica bellezza italiana; anche io come Denny ero nera.[513]

The narrator feels betrayed here because she and her friend have always been close, sharing views on music, movies, politics, but it all comes apart at over a beauty pageant. The badges of italianità that the narrator has been proudly displaying ("spaghetti, Battisti e letteratura italiana") are suddenly worthless, invalidated by race. The betrayal is, fundamentally, about race ("anche io come Denny ero nera"), but the narrator refuses to engage directly with this term. With this rhetorical strategy, Nur exposes the racial prejudices that inform so much of Italian society and, at the same time, her text refuses the compartmentalizing effect that follows so many discussions about race, pushing its way instead into a dialogue about national identity. The narrator responds to her friend's statement that neither she nor Mendez can represent Italy because both are black, by arguing that she, like her friend, is *Italian*: "Com'era possibile che ora, per un banale concorso di bellezza, ci fosse una differenza così abissale tra di noi? Non ero anche io italiana come lei?"[514] She begins, in this way, to articulate her vision of Italian identity, and the rest of the story is devoted to this elaboration of this definition. Written almost as a manifesto, with the repeating first line, "L'Italia ero anche io," Nur's protagonist produces a list of experiences that define her italianità: "L'Italia ero anche io, mia cara! Molto più di tante altre persone di mia conoscenza. L'Italia ero anche io perché per amore per questa terra me lo ero conquistato giorno dopo giorno con le difficoltà che ho dovuto affrontare fin dall'età di cinque anni e mezzo."[515] The list continues for nearly two pages (making up almost half of this short story), and includes learning the classics in school, defending herself against racist remarks on a crowded bus in Rome, and desperately looking for stewed tomatoes to make ragù in a supermarket in Canada.
It is a response to the accusation from her friend that she can never represent Italy; it is also a defense of her model of immigration which includes a feeling of having earned citizenship, through love, pain and patience: "L'Italia ero anche io e forse anche di più quando arrivò il momento del giuramento e l'ufficiale comunale mi fece alzare la mano destra, sentii il cuore accelerare il battito e la gola seccarsi."[516] This declaration of love for the nation is, I argue, offered as justification for her claim that she has more right than Mendez to the crown of Miss Italia, as though citizenship were a badge reserved only for the good and devout, for those who have suffered and proven their loyalty. It is, paradoxically, the same logic used by many right-wing, conservative and ethno-nationalist groups who seek to justify the withholding of legal and civic rights from

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[513] "She said it wasn't right that [Mendez] won because she didn't represent classic Italian beauty […] I felt myself sink […] I was not expecting a critique like this from a friend. So I asked her, if I had participated, with my background of immigration, having arrived in Italy when I was very small, born and raised with spaghetti, Battisti and Italian literature, would that have been better? She said it was the same thing: I didn't represent the classic Italian beauty; like Denny, I was black." Nur "Volevo," 175.
[514] "How was it possible that now, because of a silly beauty pageant, there was this giant rift between us? Wasn't I Italian like her?" Nur "Volevo," 175.
[515] "I was Italy too, my dear! Far more than many other people I know. I was Italy too, because for love of this land I had conquered it day after day, with all the difficulties I had to face from that age of five and a half." Nur "Volevo," 175-176.
[516] "I was Italy too, and maybe more so when the moment arrived for me to take the oath and the city official had me raise my hand, and I felt my heartbeat speed up and my throat dry out." Nur "Volevo," 176.

minority groups on the grounds that those groups are undeserving and have no emotional investment in the nation.[517]

In Nur's text, the narrator's declaration in defense of national belonging ends with a hopeful message about a future multicultural Italy where everyone is different and accepting of that difference:

> Io sono l'Italia, quella di oggi, moderna, multiculturale e multietnica, ricca di sfumature e diversità […] L'Italia sono anche io e non importa il colore della mia pelle o le mie origini; non importa se non rappresento il classico canone di bellezza italiana perché ci sono altri canoni che rappresento: quelli culturali, quelli di pensiero, quelli di educazione e di vita trascorsa: ho tutti i diritti di essere Miss Italia, perché è l'Italia di oggi che rappresento![518]

This ode to a multicultural Italy, where skin color does not matter, is typical of a great deal of im/migrant literature; for instance, Wadia's novel *Amiche per la pelle* ends on a similar note, with the characters overcoming prejudice to form a stronger community. We might read the repetition of this message as example of the new canons Nur's text refers to ("ci sono altri canoni che rappresento: quelli culturali, quelli di pensiero"): a canon of women writing and citing one another, and thus perhaps calling into being, about a new kind of italianità.

It is worth noting that, while Nur's story takes place in 1996, it was published in 2012. In the intervening decade and a half there have been at least two occurrences of black women being crowned in Italian regional pageants, each of which has drawn considerable opposition, causing many to note the parallels and comment on the way things have not changed in the years since Mendez's coronation.[519] Despite these events and other instances of racism and ethno-nationalist activism that abound in Italy today, the message of optimism, of a beautiful multicultural Italy persists in the vast majority of

[517] Flavia Stanley explains that "the use of 'national' as a category is utilized to denote difference in what it means to 'be' Italian, whereas the category of citizen refers to those who *deserve* the privileges allotted to them for 'being Italian'" (*emphasis* added; Stanley "On Belonging," 43). This (re)definition of citizenship as reward or compensation relies on a non-specific notion of what constitutes deserving behavior, thus allowing for essentialist constructions of racial and cultural privilege by legislators, media and other dominant public voices.

[518] "I am Italy, the Italy of today, modern, multicultural, and multiethnic, rich in subtleties and diversity […] I am Italy too and the color of my skin and my origins don't matter; it doesn't matter if I don't represent the classic Italian beauty because there are other canons that I represent: cultural ones, and canons of thought, of education and life experience: I have the right to be Miss Italy, because I represent today's Italy!" Nur "Volevo," 177.

[519] *PourFemme* journalist Laura de Rosa writes about Cioma Ukwu who, in the summer of 2014, won the Miss Livorno pageant: "Nonostante il corpo mozzafiato che le è valso la meritata corona, la sua elezione ha scatenato un mare di assurde polemiche. Ancora una volta, a distanza di anni dalla prima Miss Italia nera, Denny Mendez, è il colore della pelle a far discutere" ["Despite the breathtaking body that earned her the crown, her election has sparked a sea of absurd controversy. Once again, years after the first black Miss Italy, Denny Mendez, skin color is getting people talking."] (De Rosa "Le Miss"). And in June of the same year, Luisa de Montis, writing for *Il Giornale*, reports on public reaction to Chrisolythe Songo, who makes it to the final rounds of the Miss Mondo Italia competition: "Come nel 1996, quando Denny Mendez conquistava il titolo di Miss Italia, una nuova aspirante reginetta è accusata di non rappresentare la tipica bellezza italiana." ["Like in 1996, when Denny Mendez won the Miss Italy title, a new aspiring queen is accused of not representing traditional Italian beauty."] (De Montis "Miss Mondo").

the stories collected in the Lingua Madre anthologies. When I asked about this trend of optimistic endings, Daniela Finocchi replied that optimism is "una necessità per le donne e una tradizione femminista" ("a necessity for women and feminist tradition").[520] For Finocchi, the belief in change is an integral part of the female experience: "Alla differenza femminile, che imprime diversi valori e diverse regole di vita, è anche affidata la speranza di un cambiamento futuro."[521] Put another way, this optimism and hope can be understood as both a sincere expression, and as a sort of self-preservation device.[522]

The question of how optimism works for (or against) oppressed people in their struggle for change, has been taken up extensively by queer theory scholars in ways that are useful to this discussion. In the field of queer theory there are those who, with Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, argue that optimism encourages a misguided focus on the future.[523] This attitude, they contend, is at odds with minoritarian identities because it is, ultimately, a repetition of the normative belief in linear progress and, as such, will only reproduce the same conditions of oppression. In the other camp there are those who, like José Muñoz, push for a distemporal optimism.[524] Muñoz makes the case for rejecting a hetero-centric temporality in favor of a queer concept of time that must work in the past and the future simultaneously, to secure affective space for the recognition of queer lifestyles. "Queer politics," he says, "needs a real does of utopianism. Utopia lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity."[525] The case for utopianism is a case for a future that is not yet imagined, one that exceeds the limits of the present; in this way it is also much more difficult to articulate as a political slogan or organizational tool.

For the Concorso, however, optimism is a strategically progressive notion, and progress is an effect of relationality: "È in nome di questa vicinanza, di questo sentire comune, che il Concorso Lingua Madre incentiva la relazione fra donne italiane e donne straniere, nella condivisione della lingua italiana ma anche di temi e problematiche, di idee, immagini e sogni."[526] The philosophical message that guides the Concorso

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[520] Sole Anatrone, "Salone del Gusto Interview with Daniela Finocchi," oral interview, October 27th, 2014.
[521] "Feminine difference, that pushes different values and different rules for life, is also responsible for the nurturing a hope for the future." Anatrone, "Intervista: Daniela Finocchi: ideatrice del Concorso letterario nazionale Lingua Madre," written interview, October 20th, 2014.
[522] The same kind of optimistic impulse and drive for self-preservation informs Suleiman's impulse to keep explaining himself in the face of insistent Islamophobia in Campo's novel.
[523] The key texts in this debate are: Lee Edelman, *No future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Leo Bersani, *Homos*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[524] The key text in this debate is: José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Although this debate is situated in the North American academic context, in the field of queer theory and not in the field of Italian race or immigration studies, I argue for the usefulness of thinking about these two discussions in relation to one another. In both cases, what is at stake is an urgent need to upset the current conditions of existence. In my view, queer theory has harnessed for itself a certain freedom from political and intellectual precursors so that it may explore new philosophical approaches to its critical task. Italian migrants and Italians of color have not yet been able to organize or distance themselves in this way from other more dominant groups and voices and, as a result, have not been able to explore philosophically in the same way. The possibilities that have come out of this queer debate are, I think, potentially useful in this way.
[525] Muñoz *Cruising*, 35.
[526] "It is in the name of this closeness, this feeling together, that the Competition encourages relationships between Italian women and foreign women, through the sharing of the Italian language, but also of themes and issues, of ideas and dreams." Anatrone "Intervista."

encourages us to see this hope, which in turn is the motivation for change, as the product of collaboration among women:

> La narrazione, strettamente connessa al processo di "ricostruzione" del sé femminile, diviene così, per tutte le donne di qualsiasi parte del mondo, uno strumento indispensabile per pensarsi e rappresentarsi al di fuori degli stereotipi. Ma anche uno strumento per riconoscere e ricostruire una propria genealogia.[527]

In what I see as an echo of (or perhaps a return to) Aleramo's *Una donna*, the Concorso promotes a narrative of relational awakening, in which each woman is known to herself through the act of telling her story and, in that sharing, a bond of knowledge and affect is formed that will inevitably lead to the creation of a better future; a future where women will support each other because the intimacy of that bond will make oppression impossible. This teleology is, in my view, somewhat dangerous because it runs the risk of creating too narrow a conversation, of eliminating the space needed for thinking through some of the more uncomfortable and contradictory aspects of community building.

There are very real, practical reasons for Finocchi, as the public face of the Concorso, and Nur, as a black woman living in Italy, to assume this optimistic attitude. In addition to fueling activism and engagement among women, this tone can be useful for securing funding from governmental organizations who aim to promote an image of a harmonious society rather than one characterized by tension and conflict.[528] From my privileged position in the North American academic environment, however, what comes to light is a pattern of avoidance that colors a great deal of discussions (academic and otherwise) about difference in Italy; this is particularly clear when we consider that these conversations are framed in terms of im/migration or postcolonial issues/literature/studies (rather than "of color," for example). The history of racism in the United States and Italy are, as I noted in Chapter Two, significantly different from one another, as are the respective histories and cultures of immigration. In Italy race is a category that has, historically, been felt most powerfully in the tensions between North and South, in which Southern Italians were seen as racially other; and the racial laws of the colonial and fascist eras that impacted African and Jewish people**.**[529] Perhaps because of these seemingly isolated moments and separate targets of racial discrimination, there has been a move to recode this type of social division as cultural difference resulting from im/migration.[530] I argue that by insisting on these terms we ignore the ways in which skin

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[527] "Narration, closely linked to the process of 'rebuilding' the female self, becomes, in this way, for all women from all corners of the world, an indispensible tool for thinking and representing oneself beyond the stereotypes. But it is also a tool for recognizing and rebuilding an individual genealogy." Anatrone "Intervista."

[528] A compelling study of the disconnect between postures of tolerance, legislation and racial discrimination in Italy is *The Outsider: Prejudice and Politics in Italy*, by Paul Sniderman, P. Peri, R. de Figueiredo and T. Piazza (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[529] For more on the (misleading) correlations between place, culture and identity in the Italian colonial context see: Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan's, *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Post-Colonial Cultures*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010). For more on racial laws during colonial and fascist Italy see my note in Chapter Two.

[530] For more on the rhetorical and ideological relationship between "nation" and "migrant," and the constructions of difference see: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's *Culture, Power, Place*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

color is deployed as a marker of difference that overrides any cultural affinity or legal status. Nur's short story makes this point very clearly, while, at the same time, singing the praises of a multicultural Italian society. In other words, what Nur's story is implying (perhaps in spite of itself) is that the problem is not with cultural tolerance (because Italy is and always has been already multicultural), but with the persistent targeting of dark-skinned people.[531] In this way the American and Italian narratives converge, though the contexts, colors and trajectories continue to differ significantly.

Conclusion

I am closing this dissertation with a focus on racism, and on the deployment of physical bodies (and their colors) in discussions of nationalism. The physicality of discrimination is something I have tried to bring to the fore in my reading of each of the texts included in this chapter in part because I worry that our thinking about power and agency has taken us away from the body; when we talk about immigrants, for instance, we tend to ignore the fact that those who are most vulnerable are people with brown bodies. Intrinsic to this argument, however, is a belief in the power of language. Throughout this dissertation I have returned to the question of language as a powerful tool that has often been out of reach of those who need it; Giuliana Ferri's narrator suffered physically and psychically because she did not have access to the language needed to describe the experience of her abortion or the pain of her depression. In all of the texts considered in this last chapter the language at stake is, specifically, the Italian language. Wadia's novel and the Concorso Lingua Madre, reminds us that access to language enables the construction of communities; in both instances Italian is presented as a tool for communication across difference. Campo's text, on the other hand, foregrounds some of the ways language continues to be a burden; read in conjunction with these other projects, I would argue that Campo's text works against the idea of narrative relationality, suggesting an alternative, more physical mode of living in difference. For those who live in Italy with "different" (brown, yellow, queer, disabled) bodies, the question of how to safely articulate themselves is critical; the conversation about this difference is one that is starting to enter the world of the Italian women's movement but needs, I think, to go beyond a discussion of multiculturalism and consider the bodies (and their scars) that are made to represent those cultures.

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[531] In recent years there have been a number of highly publicized verbal and physical racial attacks in Italy; among the most widely discussed was the verbal assault by senator Roberto Calderoli against senator Cecil Kyenge in the summer of 2013, and the racist insults directed at soccer player Mario Balotelli. A lot, though not enough, has been written about these incidents. One compelling analysis is "Italy is Not Just Racist, It's Anti-Black," by S.A. Smythe in *Okay Africa* (Aug. 1st, 2013. Accessed Nov. 30th, 2014. http://www.okayafrica.com/news/italy-racism-anti-black-cecile-kyenge/). There is also a vocal antiracist movement in Italy, comprised of individuals (primarily privileged ethnically Italian people) who work against racism. Although this group is growing, it remains dramatically overshadowed by racist groups that have worked their way into positions of power in the Italian and EU governments. For more on this see: Carlo Ruzza, "The Italian Antiracist Movement between Advocacy, Service Delivery, and Political Protest," in *International Journal of Sociology*, 38:2 (2008) 54-62.

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