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From Turin to Boston (and back): A Transatlantic Feminist Network

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Abstract

In September 1970, a group of women from Turin (Italy) embarked on a project in which they translated documents produced by the American feminist movement. By reconstructing the history of this translation project, this essay traces the origins of a transatlantic network between Italy and the United States by drawing on an analysis of the texts, public interventions and practices that were circulated in Italy following this historic encounter.

Keywords: Feminism; New Left; Transatlantic Network; Turin; Boston.

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1 Introduction

In the early 1970s, the crisis of the New Left accompanied the consolidation of the so-called second-wave feminism. Historians are still studying this relationship, but we can say that 1970s feminism "was simultaneously a product and a response to 1968,"[1] according to Gerd-Reiner Horn. The feminists of the time "recast the radical imaginary,"[2] challenging the specific forms of oppression they were subjected to and developing an autonomous political consciousness. The latter spread rapidly, first when the movements were undermined from within and then in society as a whole, reproducing itself and adopting different perspectives in different contexts.[3] In Italy, for example, "the relation between the 1968 movement and the women's movement was a dialectic and multidirectional one, simultaneously looking back and forwards."[4] The United States was undoubtedly one of the directions in which Italian feminists looked since the encounter with the American women's liberation movement represented for some time the "founding myth"[5] of Italian feminism in the seventies. In recent years, this interpretation has been partially questioned, but at the same time it has been recognized that the impact of U.S. feminist theory has always been "the product of dissenting voices within and outside the U.S.A."[6]

In the United States, the feminist political agenda made its entry into social movements earlier than in other countries. Here the Women's Liberation Movement stood in direct antagonism with the male-dominated and patriarchal hierarchies of the New Left, and with the sexism of the movement's main organizations.[7] At the same time, the founding of numerous groups—which differed in terms of both theoretical elaboration and in their political and identity formation—characterized American feminist thought.[8] After the great "collective break" from the Left (the Old and New),[9] which occurred around 1968–1969, the Women's Lib—as it is commonly called—experienced a division between moderate, political, and radical feminists. Many also took separate roads "based on racial/ethnic (and class) difference," as Benita Roth has described.[10]

Although Black Power was a real "catalyst" for American feminists,[11] favoring their theoretical adoption of the double analogy between black and women's oppression, its call for autonomy from white organizations also affected the women's movement. As soon as they developed a sense of self-determination, black women began criticizing male authority, which translated itself into a concrete

1. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 218.
2. Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 3.
3. Aldon D. Morris, "Political Consciousness and Collective Action," in *New Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Carol McClurg Mueller, Aldon D. Morris (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1992).
4. Andrea Hajek, "Despite or in debt to 1968? Second-wave feminism and the gendered history of Italy's 1968," in *Women, Global Protest Movements, and Political Agency. Rethinking the Legacy of 1968*, eds. Sarah Colvin, Katharina Karcher (London: Routledge: 2018), 44.
5. Maud Anne Bracke, *La nuova politica delle donne. Il femminismo in Italia, 1968–1983* (Roma: Storia e Letteratura, 2019), 13.
6. Kathy Davis, Mary Evans, introduction to *Transatlantic Conversations. Feminism as Travelling Theory*, eds. Kathy Davis, Mary Evans (London: Routledge, 2016), 14.
7. I am mainly thinking of the first female protest against the leadership of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1964, and the presentation of the *SNCC Position Paper* and the *Sex and Caste* document at the national convention of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) of 1965. Mary King and Casey Hayden co-authored the two documents, which were rejected by the leaderships of both the SNCC and the SDS. See also Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 233-243; Bruno Cartosio, *I lunghi anni Sessanta: movimenti sociali e cultura politica negli Stati Uniti*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012), 299-309 [epub edition].
8. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Evans, *Personal Politics*, 139-202.
9. Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 249.
10. Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.
11. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 83-101.

attempt to redefine Black Power thanks to the establishment of new models of black womanhood.[12] At the same time, a gradual departure from the demands of white feminism occurred, the latter being less and less capable of recognizing "the complexity of race and gender oppression."[13]

We must keep in mind that, at the time of their development, these processes—now commonly known and studied—were compressed into a span of only a few years and fit into the context of a deeper debate, which constantly changed the New Left's political balance. Sarah Evans has argued that, in several countries, "feminist movements grew rapidly in the aftermath of 1968 even as the movements that had given birth to them were disintegrating."[14] When we consider that American feminist critique transferred to European soil through the "transnational communication circuits of the student new left,"[15] which probably favored an incomplete and fragmentary acquisition of North American feminist thought, it becomes clear that this aspect requires a more in-depth analysis. Similarly, we should not ignore the fact that Western feminism represented only "one specific and historically determined form of feminism."[16] A transnational consideration of the feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s must take into account the theories and practices that broke the "center-periphery" scheme, including the paradigms of postcolonial critique of Euro-American feminism.[17] In the Italian case, which will be discussed in this essay, transnational contacts called into question feminist thought that went "in many different directions,"[18] not limiting itself to a simple appropriation of white feminism's demands. In the last decade, the need to "cross the borders" of Western feminism has deeply involved the Italian historiographical reflection, favoring the definitive affirmation of a Women's Transnational History.[19]

The connection with the United States, which Luisa Passerini called "the first founding relationship of Italian feminism,"[20] had spread to many international experiences. This article aims to analyze the extent to which these international relations influenced the theories, practices and organization of some of the first Italian feminist groups that originated in Turin in the early 1970s. Drawing on newspapers, flyers, letters, diaries, minutes and interviews with some of the protagonists of this experience,[21] this paper will reconstruct a specific episode in the history of Italian second-wave feminism, starting from the study of a local case study. Here, the strategic appropriation of the imaginary, concepts and practices of American feminism will demonstrate that transnational processes of mutual exchange were highly complex and cannot be reduced to a simple adaptation to new political cultures in different contexts.[22] Nonetheless, this essay is mainly concerned with the reception of American feminism in Italy. The early 1970s marked the birth of "a new subjectivity"[23] among Italian feminists,

12. Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (London: Routledge, 2013), 79-118; Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books, 2017).

13. Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 36.

14. Sarah M. Evans, "Sons, Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation," *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009): 341.

15. Horn, *The Spirit of '68*, 219.

16. Martin Klimke, Joachim Scharloth, *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (London: Springer, 2008), 281.

17. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

18. Bracke, *La nuova politica delle donne*, 11.

19. See, above all, the important reflections stimulated by the academic journals: "Donne di mondo. Percorsi transnazionali dei femminismi," *Zapruder*, 13 (2007); "Femminismi senza frontiere," *Genesis*, 2 (2009); "Attraversare i confini," *Genesis*, 2 (2010). See also, Giulia Cioci, "Le associazioni femminili transnazionali: percorsi d'indagine nella *Global Gender History*," *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 78 (2018): 105-125.

20. Luisa Passerini, "Corpi e corpo collettivo. Rapporti internazionali del primo femminismo radicale italiano," in *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta*, eds. Anna Scattigno, Teresa Bertilotti (Roma: Viella, 2005), 184.

21. The author has translated all primary sources.

22. Maud Anne Bracke, James Mark, "Between Decolonization and the Cold War: Transnational Activism and Its Limits in Europe, 1950s–90s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50 (2015): 403-17.

23. Elda Guerra, "Una nuova soggettività: femminismo e femminismi nel passaggio degli anni settanta," in *Il femminismo degli*

which emerged thanks to the confrontation with the international context. Before the most original expressions of Italian feminist thought become recognized abroad, (as in the case of the Wages For Housework Campaign[24]), it is, however, necessary to wait a few years. In this period, new forms of activism and theoretical reflections were articulated in different ways, "within a context in which the local shaped and specified the global and vice versa."[25]

The first part of the essay deals with the birth of the transnational networks of the Italian New Left. In particular, this study draws on the role of the *Collettivo Cr* of Turin, one of the first groups of the extra-parliamentary left to organize exchange visits with the United States. Then, the essay moves on to the founding of the first Turin feminist groups after the translation of the documents from the Women's Lib. Finally, the last section focuses on the exchange of feminist theories and practices between Italy and the United States. It especially deals with the difficult relationship between class and gender, the discovery of consciousness raising and the translation of the book, *Our Body, Ourselves*. The aim of the essay is to re-read the sources—some already known, others unpublished—in light of the recent studies on 1970s feminism, in order to highlight the great political and cultural strength of these experiences, even if geographically and temporally limited.

2 Transnational Networks and the Collettivo Cr in Turin

In Italy, militants of the New Left first made international contacts in the 1950s when former exponents of the official Communist and Socialist Left started to have international meetings across the globe. These contacts were strengthened during the following decade thanks to the journalistic and editorial correspondence of several Italian intellectuals.[26] At this stage, the New Left laid the foundation for a New Internationalism, which in Europe and Italy was rooted in the imaginary of anti-colonial struggles and in the so-called Third Worldism.[27] At the same time, echoes of the political countercultures of the United States multiplied, not only as a result of the growing anti-imperialist convictions of the Western Left, but also because the latter entered into closer contact with the "other America," that of the protest movements.[28]

In the early 1970s, the transatlantic relations between the European and American New Left shifted from a purely informative plan to an exchange of militant practices, borrowed primarily from the anti-Vietnam war movement and the civil rights movement, but also from student and workers' protests.[29] In Italy, these exchanges were made possible thanks to the mediation of individual militants or left-wing extra-parliamentary groups, such as the *Collettivo esteri di Potere operaio*. From 1969, the latter created a network between "transnational radicals," which was mainly aimed at studying workers'

anni Settanta, 25-67.

24. See: Louise Toupin, *Le salaire au travail ménager. Chronique d'une lutte féministe internationale (1972–1977)* (Montreal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 2014); Antonella Picchio, Giuliana Pincelli. *Una lotta femminista globale: L'esperienza dei gruppi per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico di Ferrara e Modena* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2019).

25. Raffaella Baritono, "'Dare conto dell'incandescenza.' Uno sguardo transatlantico (e oltre) ai femminismi del lungo '68," *Scienza & Politica*, 59 (2018): 24.

26. One of the few publications on this subject is by Mariamargherita Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli: tra cultura e impegno militante* (Roma: Donzelli, 2018).

27. Marica Tolomelli, "Dall'anticolonialismo All'anti-Imperialismo Yankee Nei Movimenti Terzomondisti Di Fine Anni Sessanta," *Storicamente*, 12 (2016). See also, Tullio Ottolini, "Dal soutien alla cooperazione. Il terzomondismo in Italia fra il Centro di Documentazione 'Frantz Fanon' e il Movimento Liberazione e Sviluppo" (PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2018).

28. Fernanda Pivano, ed., *L'altra America degli anni Sessanta* (Roma: Officina, 1972). It is important to remember the correspondence work of the magazines of the New Left and the flourishing publishing activity on social movements in the United States in the late 1960s, to which, primarily, Renato Solmi, Roberto Giammanco, Massimo Teodori, Sandro Sarti, Bruno Cartosio, and Peppino Ortoleva contributed, in addition to the previously mentioned Fernanda Pivano.

29. The most documented context is that of West Germany, see for example Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

struggles in the United States.[30]

The most emblematic case is that of the *Collettivo Cr* (Revolutionary Communications Collective), a Turinese group that specialized in the translation of the newspapers and documents of the American New Left. One of the collective's objectives was that of creating a "bridge" between the two countries, with the aim of merging the theoretical and organizational structure of the Italian Left with the spontaneity of the American protest movements. The group was created in the spring of 1969. Its main promoter was Sandro Sarti, a former Waldensian partisan who—after the war—helped construct the evangelical community of Agape in the mountain village of Prali, near Turin. Agape played a fundamental role in the origin of the transnational networks of the New Left. Founded in 1946 by Pastor Tullio Vinay, who later became a Communist Party Senator, Agape is an ecumenical, Waldensian community linked to the Presbyterian Church, with which it organizes work camps and cultural exchanges for young people from all over the world.[31] Although the main themes it promotes are related to anti-militarism and civil rights, in the late 1960s it was not unusual for meetings to be organized on issues important to the New Left, such as the "crisis of international capital" or workers' struggles in Europe.[32]

Sarti, who at the time lived at the Turin headquarters of the *workerist* newspaper "Quaderni rossi," decided to use Agape to build a network of contacts with militants in the United States. He first established a relationship with the Frontier Internship in Mission (FIM), an experimental project run by the director of Presbyterian Student World Relations, Margaret Flory. Sarti attended meetings that allowed the *Collettivo Cr* to get in touch with the University Christian Movement (UCM), a radical expression of American evangelical Christians, which for many years facilitated the Turinese militants' trips to the United States.[33] Between 1970 and 1974, the *Collettivo Cr* organized annual visits to the United States for two women and two men (Maria Teresa Fenoglio, Alberto Debernardi, Fosca Pastorino, and Peppino Ortoleva), with the aim of disseminating the materials of the Italian New Left and, at the same time, collecting texts about the American movement to be translated in Italy. All four militants stayed in Boston, where they founded the Europe-America Communication Service, a "foreign office" directed by the collective and aimed at facilitating the dissemination of Italian documents in America, following the example of Liberation News Service, the independent news agency of the American underground scene.[34]

A year after its foundation, the *Collettivo Cr* began to print a self-produced newsletter on American movements. Published in Turin on August 15, 1970, the first issue of the publication *Collettivo Cr—Informazioni internazionali* contained information about the release of Huey P. Newton, one of the founders of the Black Panther Party, and of African American workers' struggles in Detroit.[35] The newspaper continued to appear irregularly until 1972, thanks to the Italians' constant correspondence with militants in the United States. Included in the materials sent, in particular, were feminist reflections from the Women's Lib.

30. Nicola Pizzolato, "Transnational Radicals: Labour Dissent and Political Activism in Detroit and Turin (1950–1970)," *International Review of Social History*, 56 (2011): 1-30.

31. Paola Vinay, *Testimone d'amore. La vita e le opere di Tullio Vinay* (Torino: Claudiana, 2009). See also, "Agape sulla frontiera," *Riforma—L'eco delle valli valdesi*, 13 (2016): 1-16.

32. Archivio Vera Nocentini (AVN), Vittorio Rieser Collection, Box 15, folders A, C, D.

33. Ada J. Focer, "Frontier Internship in Mission, 1961-1974: Young Christians Abroad in a Post-Colonial and Cold War World" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2016). See also, Sara M. Evans, *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955–1975* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

34. Interview with Peppino Ortoleva, May 18, 2020. See also, Blake Slonecker, *A New Dawn for the New Left: Liberation News Service, Montague Farm, and the Long Sixties* (London: Springer, 2012).

35. *Cr—Informazioni internazionali*, 1 (1970), AVN, Vittorio Rieser Collection, Box 4, Folder G.

3 The Women's Liberation Movement in the United States and in Turin

In 1970, the New Left in Turin demonstrated a growing attention to women's liberation movements. During the first national conference of *Lotta continua*,[36] held in July 1970, the feminist militants of the Trento-based group *Cerchio spezzato*, with some women from the *Collettivo Cr*, launched the idea of a women's commission.[37] According to Rita Girodo, who became a member of both groups, at that time they began to gain direct knowledge of American feminist materials.[38] A few months earlier, Margherita Plassa contacted Massimo Teodori, a future Professor of American History and a member of the Italian Radical Party, asking for the contact details of some American feminists since she wanted to organize "a group in Turin."[39] Meanwhile, Gianna Faccioli, from the *Movimento Politico dei Lavoratori* that was representative of Italian Catholic dissent, founded a small women's group after having met members of the Women's Lib during a study trip to New Hampshire in 1969.[40]

In September 1970, the women from *Collettivo Cr* began translating articles and reflections by the American feminist movement, gathered by Maria Teresa Fenoglio (better known as "M.T.") during her stay in Boston. Starting from the third issue of *Informazioni internazionali*, the bulletin *Il movimento di liberazione delle donne in America* became a regular presence in this publication. It constituted a fundamental experience in that it managed to transform, from within, the newspaper's editorial staff and encouraged the founding of the *Collettivo delle compagne*, one of the first feminist groups in Italy.[41] The first issue of the insert opened with the *Lettera di Lise alle compagne italiane*, which was introduced by a brief editorial comment explaining that this letter would help readers to understand the evolution of American women's movements through a "class cut."[42] Written by an American women activist, the letter offered a concise analysis of the movement, criticizing both the Marxist elaboration of "women's liberation" and of "bourgeois feminism." Next, it made an important attempt at restoring the complexity of the situation when it expressed the profound distance—in ideological and practical terms—between the Italian and the American movements: "while you are working in Italy supported by the struggles of Fiat [workers], here we are talking to each other."[43]

In fact, the strong, classist approach of the Italian Extra-Parliamentary Left also permeated the first feminist groups, especially in Turin.[44] The relationship, with news coming from the United States, was always mediated by the need to seek references in Marxist categories as well as a more or less explicit rejection of separate forms of militancy. Bice Fubini, one of the first to enter the *Collettivo delle compagne*, expresses her point of view regarding this aspect:

> I always thought that the characteristics of Turin, a working-class city, influenced the evolution of the various groups of women who in those years were shaped, who dissolved, who re-encountered one another in that continuous process that was our Movement.[45]

The Turin context was strongly influenced by the presence of the Fiat automobile factory and

36. *Lotta Continua* was the largest organization of the extra-parliamentary Left. Founded in 1969, it officially dissolved in 1976, but the Turin group continued to exist until the 1980s.

37. *1970 Donne*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 65.

38. *Cr primi fermenti*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 65

39. *Letter from Margherita Plassa to Massimo Teodori*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 23.

40. Piera Zumaglino, ed., *Femminismi a Torino* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1996), 72-3.

41. Ibidem, 59-98.

42. *Lettera di Lise alle compagne italiane*, in "Il movimento di liberazione delle donne in America," September 15, 1970, AVN, Vittorio Rieser Collection, Box 4, Folder G.

43. Ibidem, 2.

44. Bracke, *La nuova politica delle donne*, 171-93. See also, Biancamaria Frabotta, ed., *Femminismo e lotta di classe in Italia (1970–1973)* (Roma: Samonà e Savelli, 1975).

45. Bice Fubini, *Noi e la sinistra*, in "Bollettino delle donne," November 26, 1979, Archivio delle Donne in Piemonte (ARDP), Fondo Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 64.

by the secondary sector in general, so much so as to earn the definition of "city-factory."[46] The student protest, which began in Turin in 1967 with anti-authoritarian and Third World characteristics, developed an increasingly marked interest in the "workers' centrality" of the struggles, which culminated in 1969 with the emergence of the Worker-Student Assembly and the first groups of the extra-parliamentary left movement.[47] Even the *Collettivo Cr*, despite being an anomalous group, was affected by these influences, as evidenced by the numerous articles on the American working class starting from the very first issues of the newspaper *Informazioni internazionali*. The feminist movement of Turin was also influenced in the same way, which, according to Piera Zumaglino, finds part of its roots in the labor and trade union movement.[48]

The *Collettivo delle compagne*, in this first phase, reflects an operation of transversal continuity with the editorial work of *Informazioni internazionali*, rather than an opposing initiative. Franca Tronca says she joined the *Collettivo Cr* following a personal need to "do something in the political field," in a group that was not, at the same time, "a political elaboration group."[49] M.T. Fenoglio shared this approach to a group that somehow rejected the "groupism" of the extra-parliamentary left:

> I was instantly very interested in this project, also because I must say that this turn of the extra-parliamentary groups had left me speechless, astonished [...]. For me it was a breath of fresh air, because I wanted to continue my commitment and this was a very useful way for me to be able to continue it, to do cultural work.[50]

Sandro Sarti, who at the time worked as a translator, was a mentor to all those who joined the collective. His intention was for the *Collettivo Cr* to play a liaising role between the American and the Italian movements, in the spirit of 1968, outside the sectarian identities and ideological conflicts that were typical of the extra-parliamentary left. It seems that Sarti himself also nurtured an interest in the Women's Lib. His "brilliant political intuition,"[51] in Franca Tronca's words, prompted him to attentively investigate all forms of dissent in the United States. At the same time, his authoritarian personality and his difference in age from the other militants made him almost immediately an uncomfortable figure for the women in the *Collettivo Cr*.[52]

In the early months of 1971, while M.T. was in Boston, the first internal contradictions within the *Collettivo delle compagne* emerged. Women who were also part of the *Collettivo Cr*, or who were militants in other "groups" and more interested in typical political work (especially in factories), clashed with a group of younger women who were close to the sensibilities of radical feminism and mainly interested in consciousness-raising practices.[53] Moreover, the first group forced the newcomers to participate in the editorial work of *Informazioni internazionali*. The refusal of the latter further widened the gap between the two groups, foreshadowing the "generational" clash between the two souls of the Italian 1968, as described by Francesca Socrate.[54]

The biggest confrontation occurred during the May Day demonstration of 1971, when two leaflets—apparently identical yet different in content—were distributed. The first leaflet (signed by the *Collettivo*

46. Stefano Musso, "Il 1969 a Torino: il conflitto industriale nella città-fabbrica," in *Il 1969 e dintorni. Analisi, riflessioni e giudizi a quarant'anni dall'«Autunno caldo»*, ed. Pietro Causarano et al. (Roma: Ediesse, 2010), 205-222.

47. On the influences of workerist thought in Italian 1968, see above all: Maria Grazia Meriggi, "Il lungo '68, l'autunno caldo. Ascoltare gli operai, ascoltare la classe operaia," in *Quando gli operai volevano tutto*, ed. Marco Grispigni (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2019), 33-37; Marco Scavino, "L'operaismo italiano e il '68," in *Forme e metamorfosi della rappresentanza politica. 1848, 1948, 1968*, ed. Pietro Adamo et al. (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2019), 302-313; Marco Morra, Fabrizio Carlino, eds., *Traiettorie operaiste nel lungo '68 italiano* (Napoli: La Città del Sole: 2020).

48. Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 48.

49. *Intervista a Franca Tronca dic.'86*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 65.

50. Interview with Maria Teresa "M.T." Fenoglio, April 26, 2020.

51. *CR, intervista a Franca Tronca - dicembre '86*, ARDP, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 65.

52. Vicky Franzinetti said she left the collective precisely because of a quarrel with Sandro Sarti. See, Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 61.

53. "At Cr we started to have a discussion because some said: we must go to the workers, while I, Margherita, and Bice, said: let's talk about us." Interview with Rita Girodo in Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 112.

54. Francesca Socrate, *Sessantotto. Due generazioni* (Roma: Laterza, 2018).

Cr) made reference neither to the women's liberation groups nor to wages for housework claimed by the *Collettivo delle compagne*. It represented the beginning of a fracture that would widen over time, which particularly challenged the concept of sisterhood borrowed from the American feminists.[55] Maria Clara Ragozinsky, one of the founders of the collective, recalled the incident in a 1976 interview: "[S]olidarity and sisterhood reign in theory, personal conflicts expressed in ideological terms reign in practice."[56]

Maria Teresa Fenoglio's return to Turin in October 1971 marked the eventual dissolution of the *Collettivo delle compagne* and the beginning of a new experience. Her stay in Boston, mostly spent living in self-managed communes, drove M.T. to propose the foundation of a feminist community, which was to be based in an apartment in Via Petrarca.[57] According to Angela Miglietti, at that stage "autonomy and the need for autonomy grew,"[58] marking a decided change of pace compared to the group's formal continuity with the work of the *Collettivo Cr*. In fact, M.T. conveyed great enthusiasm for the American experience, which she wanted to reproduce in all its complexity and radicalism, even though she didn't fully understand the profound changes that had occurred in Turin during the previous months.[59] This led to a meeting in which the role of women in the *Collettivo Cr* was discussed lively and where a plea was made for a clearer division between the feminist commune in Via Petrarca (the *Comune di via Petrarca)* and the activities of the editorial staff. In her 1972 typewritten notes, Miglietti made explicit accusations against the group's male chauvinist management. She claims to have been "used for the labor" of the *Collettivo Cr* and accuses Sarti of having a "fascist character."[60] These latent conflicts emerged on several occasions, leaving more and more room for internal divisions. Consequently, a new division soon occurred, while M.T. Fenoglio was permanently marginalized because she was too close to the *Collettivo Cr*.[61] To some extent, then, the end of the *Comune di via Petrarca* marked the last chapter of an experiment that had exported a model of sharing and subjective exploration, thus anticipating some of the practices that would become pivotal to Italian feminism.[62]

In this regard, it is interesting to consider a letter sent to Miglietti by Fosca Pastorino in March 1972, during her stay in Boston, on behalf of the *Collettivo Cr*. After describing how she participated in a consciousness-raising session of a local feminist group, Pastorino focuses on the internal difficulties of the Turin group, of which she had become aware. "I really don't know what to say about the problems of our group there in Italy, except that it seems to me that many misunderstandings originate from individualism and from the fact that very few things are done together (which is the same thing)."[63]

In sum, the gap between direct knowledge of the American movement and the misunderstandings within the Turin groups again suggest an uneven transposition of theories and ideological suggestions. Those who engage in practices such as consciousness raising seem to affirm the presence of a new subjectivity, which may lead to a "radical break with the forms and languages of politics."[64] The Turin feminists, in contrast, still seem to have been affected by lacerating doubts.

55. *Bollettino delle donne n. 2*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 65. See also: Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970).

56. ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 67.

57. Interview of Maria Teresa "M.T." Fenoglio, April 26, 2020.

58. ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 2.

59. "I wanted to create a situation that was just as alive as the American one, and I had to measure my inability to do so." Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 122.

60. ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 2.

61. Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 169-170.

62. Ribero, Parisi, *Una questione di libertà*, 46-48.

63. *Letter from Fosca Pastorino to Angela Miglietti*, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 3.

64. Guerra, "Una nuova soggettività," 33.

4 Feminist Theories and Practices: A Mutual Exchange?

As we have seen, the contradictions within the *Collettivo delle compagne*—which also had an impact on the *Comune di via Pertrarca*—arose during the complex elaboration of overseas feminist thought in an attempt to integrate certain expressions of radical feminism with the strongly classist matrix of the Italian New Left.[65] The attempt of the *Collettivo delle compagne* to communicate with Margaret Benston in 1971 is exemplary in this perspective.

A letter addressed to the Canadian Marxist scholar thus highlights the importance of a contribution by Benston that was published in the Italian edition of *Monthly Review* in November 1969.[66] There Benston defines women "as characterized by a particular relationship with production." According to Turin feminists, she solves the "dilemma" of whether women are a class or a caste.[67] From their point of view, this reflection could represent "a unifying point for organized groups" as it proposes a theory that articulates female self-determination within a classical revolutionary framework. Benston postulated certain economic preconditions for women's emancipation, such as women's entry into industrial production or the transformation of domestic work from private production to public industry. These preconditions anticipate themes that will become central in the international Wages for Housework campaigns.[68] The latter reflected a key theoretical approach for Italian feminism which, according to Raffaella Baritono, managed to "hold together redistribution and recognition in a context in which gender, race/ethnicity and class are recognized as crucial axes of power."[69]

However, in the Turin context, where the assimilation of different experiences constantly overlapped, this contradiction remained evident in all issues of the bulletin on Women's Lib. In issue 13 of February 1971, the *Collettivo delle compagne* decided to publish the thoughts of Trento's *Cerchio spezzato group*, which already postulated the need for "a movement of women only."[70] In their introduction, the Turinese women challenged the will to open "an autonomous battlefront, separated from the purpose of class struggle," while approving the choice to develop a reflection that started from the self, in order to gain an "awareness of the specific forms of oppression."[71] The same issue also contains another fundamental article by the *Cerchio spezzato*, entitled, *Le donne e i neri. Il sesso e il colore*, in which the continuity between "the process of black people's liberation" and the struggle for female self-determination is explicitly defined. The great success and re-presentation of this "imperfect analogy," as defined by Vincenza Perilli, lies in the concise replacement of "concrete figures with symbols,"[72] as in the case of the "blacks" being exclusively identified as African-Americans who are active in the struggle. These are real characterizations that are useful for an immediate political expediency in the Italian movements, even though these simultaneously deny the "specific characteristics of sexism and racism in their complex and different forms of articulation."[73] In the case of *Collettivo Cr* and the feminist groups that gravitated around it, this idealization of the American movements was doubly influenced by the Turin working-class context and by the exchanges with the United States.

Even the *Informazioni internazionali* bulletin often favored the almost fetishistic interest in workers' struggles by publishing reports that, in addition to overlooking the racial attribute of the involved subjects, failed to avoid celebrating a certain "working-class masculinity."[74] At the same time, the

65. Marica Tolomelli, Anna Frisone, "Gender and Class in the Italian Women's Liberation Movement," in *The Women's Liberation Movement. Impacts and Outcomes*, ed. Kristina Schulz (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2017), 178-97.

66. Margaret Benston, "L'economia politica dell'emancipazione della donna," *Monthly Review*, 11 (1969): 7-11.

67. ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 1.

68. Toupin, *Le salaire au travail ménager*, 54-70.

69. Baritono, "Dare conto dell'incandescenza," 25.

70. *Il movimento di liberazione delle donne in America*, 15 febbraio 1971, ARDP, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 15.

71. *La posizione delle donne all'interno del movimento*, in Ibidem.

72. Vincenza Perilli, "L'analogia imperfetta. Sessismo, razzismo e femminismi tra Italia, Francia e Stati Uniti," *Zapruder*, 13 (2007): 23.

73. Ibidem.

74. Two images are exemplary in this regard: the first illustrated the annex, entitled, "*Sindacato, padroni e classe operaia in Usa*," published in Issue number 7, November 15, 1970, and shows a black worker armed with a rifle breaking into a bedroom

intentions of the *Collettivo Cr* seemed to evoke precisely those "contradictions that shake the largest capitalist country in the world,"[75] without offering an interpretation of the American movements. In contrast, the bulletins dedicated to the American women's movement tended to present opposing, even contradictory, theses that were usually accompanied by an introduction or an editorial note. It is precisely in this "chaotic mixture of moods and lucid elaborations"[76] that we may catch a glimpse of the active and proactive influence of the correspondence between Turin and Boston. In the broader Italian context, these "strategic translations" of materials from the North American movements—and more—became part of the development of transnational feminism thought. On one hand, we find the "feminist trajectories of workerism," which propose contemplation of the hierarchies of work, based on gender and race and no longer based only on class, supporting the need to "go beyond Marx."[77] On the other hand, there is an autonomous and peculiar development of feminist thought in which the analogy between sex and race is pushed to assume "the limit-form of denial, aimed at ensuring the fundamental character of the 'sex' difference."[78]

The difficult relationship with the various souls of the Women's Lib is also evident in the failure of transnational exchanges. Among M.T.'s tasks while in Boston was that of contacting an American feminist and inviting her to Italy where she would participate in public meetings. The choice fell on Ruth, a lesbian feminist from New York, which was a decision that also reflected M.T.'s approach to "political homosexuality" during her visit to the United States.[79] Yet, after having defined the logistics of her trip to Italy, Ruth sent a letter in which she did not accept the invitation because she was concerned about not being able to find an organized gay movement to refer to in Italy.[80]

Ellen Cantarow, one of the people who welcomed M.T. in Boston, encountered the same difficulties a year later. It was 1972, and Cantarow visited Italy as a guest of the *Collettivo Cr* with the aim of writing a report on the extra-parliamentary left for the American underground newspaper "Liberation." She had a simultaneously militant and journalistic point of view, which vividly reflected her experience in Italy, also seen in the description of the meetings in which she actively took part: "I was always *la compagna americana* [the American comrade]."[81] Cantarow's description of a meeting at M.T.'s house, (presumably in the *Comune di via Petrarca*), mainly reports the formal nature of the discussion, which remained unrelated to the American women's groups, and explains the difficult relationship of Turin feminists with homosexuals. After a group of comrades took part in a meeting of *Fuori!* (Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Unitary Front), it was decided that they would no longer participate in this type of initiative: "the gay liberation is not likely to become part of the Italian Left any time soon,"[82] Cantarow caustically points out.

The account of a meeting in Milan still recalls the complex relationship within the Italian movement, between the will to support overseas theories and the Italian Marxist tradition. "Down the shelf from the volume of Marx, Lenin, and Engels, is *Sisterhood is Powerful*,"[83] Cantarow stated, a moment before expressing deep embarrassment when someone uses the motto, "Woman is beautiful," based on the Black Power slogan, "Black is beautiful." According to Bruno Cartosio, in America "Sisterhood

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where two men, referred to as "union" and "master," sleep in an intimate pose. The second figure opens the annex entitled, "*Minatori USA*," in Issue number 8, November 30, 1970, and represents two very muscular male miners, one white and one black, standing behind one another. AVN, Vittorio Rieser Collection, Series 4, Folder G. See also: Andrea Sangiovanni, "Masculinités ouvrières dans l'Italie du second xxe siècle," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 38 (2013): 97-121.

75. *Cr—Informazioni internazionali*, 12 (1971), AVN, Vittorio Rieser Collection, Box 4, Folder G.

76. Ribero, Parisi, *Una questione di libertà*, 139.

77. Silvia Federici, *Genere e capitale* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2020), 9-14. See also, Morgane Merteuil, *Traiettorie femministe dell'operaismo* (available at https://.effimera.org/traiettorie-femministe-operaismo).

78. Perilli, "L'analogia imperfetta," 14.

79. Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 160-162. See also, Liana Borghi, "Connessioni transatlantiche: lesbismo femminista anni '60-70," *Genesis*, 2 (2011): 41-64.

80. Interview with Maria Teresa "M.T." Fenoglio, April 26, 2020. See also, Zumaglino, *Femminismi a Torino*, 160-63.

81. Ellen Cantarow, "Women's Liberation and Worker's Autonomy in Turin and Milan," *Liberation*, October 1972, 4.

82. Ibidem, *5*.

83. Ibidem.

is powerful" had the same evocative force as "Black is beautiful" had had a few years earlier.[84] The Italian feminists' semantic twist, however, betrayed not only an analog link between two different forms of oppression but, at the same, time it contributed to formalize the "masking" of black feminism.[85] Nevertheless, at the end of the report, Cantarow herself acknowledged that the feminist movement in Italy may have been the only movement that was capable of identifying a point of synthesis between the various instances that animated the extra-parliamentary left:

> I am moved, even shaken, as I realize that in all of Italy the only part of the left that may be able to fuse the larger question of political economy, of class, of power, with the politics of personal experience, is the women's movement.[86]

However, the moment of maximum convergence between American and Turin feminism was undoubtedly due to the translation of *Our Body, Ourselves* by Angela Miglietti.[87] The Boston Women's Health Book Collective wrote the original English text on the issues of health and female sexuality, and its translation into Italian began as a collective effort by the *Comune di via Petrarca*. Amber Jamilla Musser has highlighted that in the United States the volume's passage from the first to the second edition mainly highlighted the contrast between two models of understanding female subjectivity:

> The 1971 edition used the concept of embodied knowledge to promote virtual membership of a feminist collective. The purpose of this collective was to fight capitalism and patriarchy. By contrast, the 1973 edition relied on the politics of individuality; biological notions of Woman displaced the feminist social collective.[88]

When Angela Miglietti wrote to the Boston collective in November 1972 to edit what would become the volume's first international translation,[89] she actually owned only the first edition of the pamphlet, "Women and their body," which M.T. had introduced to Italy. At that point, the Boston women sent her the complete edition, however, Miglietti was forced to continue the translation on her own after a very heated confrontation with the other comrades. The collective's refusal to pursue the translation reveals how divided Turin feminism was, according to an interpretation that seems to implicitly confirm Jamilla Musser's observation. After the first moment in which they were strongly influenced by the "class struggle paradigm of social change,"[90] and by the desire to maintain a militant female community within mixed groups, women increasingly started opening up spaces for political reflection based on subjective experiences and on the practice of consciousness raising. This resulted not only in the rejection of external interferences, but also, at the same time, in a progressive abandonment of a traditional political perspective.

We may see a transposition of this phenomenon in the conflicts that provoked the end of the *Comune di via Petrarca*, where M.T. Fenoglio soon ended up living alone.[91] This event led to the birth of a new group in 1972, *Alternativa femminista*, and at the same time marked a period of reflection and loneliness for Miglietti: "I cried for this book, I shed bitter tears, because you looked at me bored and with an air of sufficiency."[92] *Alternativa Femminista* marked a decisive development from a generic

84. Bruno Cartosio, *I lunghi anni Sessanta*, 312.

85. Liliana Ellena "L'invisibile linea del colore nel femminismo italiano: viaggi, traduzioni, slittamenti," *Genesis*, 2 (2011): 17-39.

86. Ellen Cantarow, "Women's Liberation," 6.

87. The Boston women's health book collective, *Noi e il nostro corpo: scritto dalle donne per le donne* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974). See also Stefania Voli, "Noi e il nostro corpo. Storia di una traduzione," *Zapruder*, 13 (2007): 108-15.

88. Amber Jamilla Musser, "From Our Body to Yourselves: The Boston Women's Health Book Collective and Changing Notions of Subjectivity, 1969–1973," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 35 (2007): 94.

89. Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels across Borders* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007), 52.

90. Tolomelli, Frisone, "Gender and Class," 180.

91. *Bollettino delle donne n.4,* marzo 1979, ARPD, Zumaglino Collction, Series 1, Folder 65.

92. Angela Miglietti, *Storia di una traduzione. Noi e il nostro corpo*, Bollettino delle donne, February 16, 1979, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 64.

"women's movement" to proper "militant feminism." The group's members themselves summarize this position as follows: "self-awareness yes, but also outside activities."[93]

5 Conclusion

The birth of *Alternativa Femminista* reflects a dualism between theory and practice that attempts to reconcile different needs among Turin feminists. Over the years, practice escalated to meet the transformations within the Italian movement that were not always resolvable with experiences from abroad. The feminist commune of Via Petrarca and the undeniable success of the Italian translation of *Our body, Ourselves* mark a decisive paradigm shift in Turin feminism, leading to greater autonomy and awareness of its potential. These attempts anticipate experiences based on self-help practices that will become a prerogative of Italian feminism, such as self-managed health centers.[94]

At the same time, the failure—or the premature abandonment—of these experiences shows how the attempt to deal with the suggestions coming from overseas remained unsolved. I am not only referring to the difficult relationship between class and gender and, therefore, not only to the "difficult articulation" of other axes of oppression, such as those linked to race or sexual identity.[95] The lack of an encounter with intersectionality, which has developed in the United States from the mid-1970s, is perhaps to be sought out more in the consequences than in the causes of the development of Italian feminism.[96] Perhaps the relationship between Italian and American feminism was at the basis of a "subject-object" relationship,[97] which made international exchanges not very fruitful at first. At the same time, though, we could say that the real importance of this encounter resides in the individual and intersubjective changes made possible by direct contact between people. These relationships, in addition to clearly placing the movements' development in a transnational perspective, also represent an aspect that deserves further historiographical attention.

93. *Alternativa Femminista*, Bollettino delle donne n.5, May 1979, ARPD, Zumaglino Collection, Series 1, Folder 64.

94. Maud Anne Bracke, "Our Bodies, Ourselves: The Transnational Connections of 1970s Italian and Roman Feminism," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50 (2015): 560-80.

95. Vincenza Perilli, Liliana Ellena "Intersezionalità. La Difficile Articolazione," in *Grovigli. Femministe a parole*, ed. Sabrina Marchetti et al. (Roma: Ediesse, 2012), 130-35.

96. Vincenza Perilli, "Il concetto di intersezionalità nel contesto europeo: il caso francese e italiano," in *La Straniera*, ed. Chiara Bonfiglioli et al. (Rome: Alegre, 2009). See also, Sabrina Marchetti, "Intersezionalità," in *Le etiche della diversità culturale*, ed. Caterina Botti (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2013), 133-48.

97. Luisa Passerini, *Corpi e corpo collettivo*, 191.