

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS  
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF  
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

**SITE: ITALY**

**Transcript of Bianca Pomeranzi  
Interviewers: Lauren Duncan**

**Location: Rome, Italy  
Date: July 10, 2018**

**University of Michigan  
Institute for Research on Women and Gender  
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290  
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: [um.gfp@umich.edu](mailto:um.gfp@umich.edu)  
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>**

**© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2017**

**Bianca Pomeranzi** was born in 1950 in Arezzo. She has been a part of the Roman Feminist Movement of Via Pompeo Magno since the mid - 1970s. With the group *Vivere Lesbica* she organized the first Italian Lesbian Feminist Conference in 1981. As an expert on gender and development issues, she worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Development Cooperation. She served as an Expert on the Commission of the *United Nations Convention for the Rights of Women, CEDAW*. She is vice president of the *Association for the Renewal of the Left* and politically active in the *Wednesday Feminist Group* and the *Alma Sabatini Feminist Studies Center*.

**Lauren Duncan** is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Psychology at Smith College, in Northampton, MA. She obtained her Ph.D. in Personality Psychology and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She teaches courses in the Psychology of Women and Gender, Political Psychology, and the Psychology of Political Activism. Her research focuses on individual motivation for participation in collective action, particularly among women and LGBTQ+ individuals. While at Smith, she began studying the Italian language and culture (Dr. Grazioli was her first teacher, who became her friend and collaborator) and was able to extend her research on the psychology of activism to conduct oral histories with Italian feminist and feminist LGBTQ+ activists. She has recently written about "Better policy interventions through intersectionality" (*Social Issues and Policy Review*, 2022), the childhood origins of Gloria Steinem's feminist activism (*Journal of Personality*, 2022), "Psychology and political participation" for *The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation* (2022), and "Power, gender, and collective action" for *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychology Power & Gender* (2023).

*Keywords: Academia and Women's Studies, LGBTQ+ Rights, Politics and the Law*

**Lauren Duncan: I would like to begin with a conversation about your childhood, and first of all, about your family. What did your parents do?**

Bianca Pomeranzi: So, my father was a teacher, but he was also a sports journalist; he was a very brilliant man, very sociable, etc. My mother was the daughter of a well-off family, so she had the kind of job, as a housewife, just like most women until the end of the seventies in Italy. In fact, she stayed at home, she had a housekeeper, etc. And we lived in this building, it was my grandparents', then above there were my uncles and aunts with the cousins, that is in a building in the historical center of Arezzo,<sup>1</sup> that was like a province kissed by fortune because there had been businesspeople, so it was a city that had passed from a rural society to an industrial society. I was born in 1950, I remember I always lived in this environment of great development, progress, with an attention also to elegance, because we were kissed by fortune, surrounded by marvelous pieces of the Renaissance,<sup>2</sup> so it was a very pleasant childhood. Well, painful during my adolescence, but pleasant beforehand.

**LD: How was it to grow up in your family? How would you describe your relationship with your parents when you were young?**

BP: Very gratifying, in the sense that my mother was in love with me and I with her, so it was also a bit too enmeshed. My father was a good educator, indeed being a teacher, very close to Dewey's theories,<sup>3</sup> so he taught me to be independent.

**LD: Ah, very progressive!**

BP: Very progressive, yes.

**LD: How would you describe your relationship with other important relatives?**

---

<sup>1</sup> Arezzo is a city and commune in Tuscany, Italy. It is known for its historical center and cultural life, as well as its Medieval style architecture. ("Arezzo, Italy." International Living. Accessed September 1, 2022. <https://internationalliving.com/countries/italy/arezzo-italy/>)

<sup>2</sup> The Renaissance designates a period between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, in which artists and intellectuals relied on the intellectual basis of humanism, which included the rediscovery of classical philosophy. Its name comes from the idea of a rebirth or revival of the arts, culture, politics, science, literature, and the economy, following what became known as the "Dark Ages." ("Renaissance." History.com. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/renaissance>)

<sup>3</sup> Refers to American philosopher John Dewey's views on pedagogy and learning. Dewey supported a human-centered approach to education and experiential learning, with the ultimate goal of getting children better prepared for an uncertain future. His ideology was rooted in inquiry, self-direction, interaction, and autonomy. ("John Dewey's Pedagogy: A Summary." TeachThought. Accessed September 1, 2022. <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/pedagogy-john-dewey-summary/>)

BP: Well, I had a great passion for one of my male cousins who was older than me by five years. I was a rather isolated child - I read a lot - But I was very fond of this cousin I measured myself against; then there was another female cousin even older, by ten years... I was living a lot in the confines of my family, very, yes, very loving, yes, very much in the extended family.

**LD: How did you learn the political and social values of your family? Can you give me an example?**

BP: The political and social values... First and foremost, it was certainly a Catholic family, with my grandmother very Catholic, almost militant of the Christian Democrats,<sup>4</sup> because she had been an activist in the Partito Popolare of Don Sturzo.<sup>5</sup> My grandfather, with whom I spent a lot of time, because my mother in fact went out with her girlfriends... So a lot... Essentially, my family were socialists, so-called “moderate socialists,”<sup>6</sup> anti-communist; anti-communist because I remember that in ‘56, given that we were living in the center of town, a march against the occupation of Hungary happened,<sup>7</sup> yet I remember, so I was six years old... So, I was very taken by these things, in my childhood even before I was ten. Then I began to busy myself with politics, in high school, in the seventies. And given that the high school was conservative, we were like the ruling class of this little place, there weren’t many communists, so with the Rotary...<sup>8</sup> I was good at school, so they invited me. And at a certain point I worked with the Liberal Party<sup>9</sup> that put out a little magazine and I

---

<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1943, the Christian Democracy (DC) was a Catholic, center-aligned political party in Italy that heavily influenced the Italian political scenario in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the largest party in Italy from 1946 until its dissolution in 1994. (“Christian Democracy (Italy).” Wikipedia. Accessed September 7, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Democracy\\_\(Italy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democracy_(Italy)))

<sup>5</sup> The Partito Popolare Italiano, or Italian People's Party, from 1919 to 1926, was co-founded by the priest Luigi Sturzo, representing official Catholic involvement in party politics. (“Italian People's Party (1919).” Wikipedia. Accessed August 11, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_People%27s\\_Party\\_\(1919\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_People%27s_Party_(1919)))

<sup>6</sup> Moderate socialism usually refers to Democratic Socialism, a branch of socialism that is rooted in the notion of a democracy. (Waxman, Olivia B. “Socialism Was Once America's Political Taboo. Now, Democratic Socialism Is a Viable Platform. Here's What to Know.” Time. Accessed September 9, 2022. <https://time.com/5422714/what-is-democratic-socialism/>)

<sup>7</sup> Refers to the Soviet invasion of Budapest, capital city of Hungary, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1956, as a result of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, a nationwide movement against the Communist government and Soviet policies. (“Hungarian Revolution of 1956.” New World Encyclopedia. Accessed August 4, 2022. [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hungarian\\_Revolution\\_of\\_1956](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hungarian_Revolution_of_1956))

<sup>8</sup> Rotary is a global network of individuals who are committed to creating lasting change, solve real-world problems, and promote peace and integrity. It has over 46,000 clubs around the globe, including in Italy. (“Who We Are.” Rotary. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary>)

<sup>9</sup> The Italian Liberal Party (PLI) was a minor Italian liberal political party founded in 1997, succeeding the original Liberal Party that was active from 1922 to 1994. (“Italian Liberal Party (1997).” Wikipedia. Accessed August 4, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Liberal\\_Party\\_\(1997\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Liberal_Party_(1997)))

remember that the first articles that I wrote were in favor of the abortion law [laughs] in '66,<sup>10</sup> it was a pretty tough challenge in Italy, being that I was Catholic until I was twenty.

**LD: In particular, what type of messages did you receive about gender and the role of women and men in society and the family?**

BP: Essentially very progressive because my mother - with my father bringing in a little bit of Jungian<sup>11</sup> influence, one of great agency - my mother was also interested in psychology, so she thought that I shouldn't be a housewife but have a career, so that they educated me into independence. This was a very strong message that was given to me and on this my father and my mother agreed.

**LD: What type of messages did you receive about sexual identity?**

BP: Well, traditional, that is heterosexual. My parents also were very in love, they fought often, but they were raised for a heterosexual life. Homosexuality was not understood.

**LD: What type of messages did you receive about how to resolve political problems?**

BP: Well, on that my parents were rather institutional, especially because, at a certain point - indeed from '66 to '68 - I started to read about the student revolts,<sup>12</sup> then I participated. I have to say that the first protest in which I participated was in favor of Jan Palach,<sup>13</sup> the Czechoslovakian that set himself on fire in front of the Soviet tanks... So, it was an education based a lot on the sense of freedom, of self-determination.

**LD: Was that a common attitude after the Second World War? Was this sense of freedom a common value?**

---

<sup>10</sup> Abortion became legal in Italy in 1978, with the approval of Italian Law 194, which protected a mother's right to terminate a pregnancy. (Caruso, E. *Abortion in Italy: Forty Years On*. *Feminist Legal Studies* 28, 87–96. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-019-09419-w>)

<sup>11</sup> Jungian Psychology is a popular term for Analytical Psychology, a therapy approach that relies heavily on a particular kind of exploration of unconscious parts of the mind and their relationship to consciousness. This method was developed by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. ("What is Jungian Psychology?" Routledge. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://www.routledge.com/blog/article/what-is-jungian-psychology>)

<sup>12</sup> The interviewee is referring to the multiple student demonstrations that took place in the 1960s in favor of an educational reform of Italy's antiquated universities (Hilwig, S.J. *The Italian Student Revolts, 1967–68*. In: *Italy and 1968*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230246928\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230246928_2))

<sup>13</sup> Jan Palach was a 20-year-old Czech student and protester who set himself on fire at a demonstration against the invasion of Czechoslovakia that occurred in Prague on January 16, 1969, as a way to inspire resistance from his compatriots. Palach named himself "Torch No. 1" and quickly became a symbol of defiance and opposition among Czechs and Slovaks. ("Czech dissident Jan Palach inspired action 50 years ago in Prague." *Deutsche Welle*. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/czech-dissident-jan-palach-inspired-action-50-years-ago-in-prague/a-47096868>)

BP: In Italy?

**LD: Also, but more in your family...**

BP: Yes, in my family yes, also because we had had Mussolini,<sup>14</sup> so this sense of freedom, of being in some way masters of our own destiny, even in excessive ways in certain families. Naturally half of Italy – well, not half of Italy, but a good part of Italy - was communist and even there, there was a sense of collective freedom. So on this, my parents were anti-communist, my father especially. My mother also, but more as a consequence; communism was not her scene.

**LD: How do you think that your childhood and your relationships with your family influenced the person you are today, in particular regarding your political activities?**

BP: Mah, I often think that the education that they gave me educated me about feminism, in the sense - how do you say - this idea of being actors in some way independent, as much as an individual can be independent in our society. Rather, the value of humanity, of human piety, also came from my Catholic education, a leftist<sup>15</sup> Catholicism since it was based on centrist politics.<sup>16</sup>

**LD: Can you tell me more about your first political action; what were you trying to do and how did you decide to do it?**

BP: In the sense of feminism?

**LD: No...**

BP: I never have... I have always been closer to a socialist camp... The first political action, the first things that I remember indeed are the battles for civil rights, but I was not very

---

<sup>14</sup> Benito Mussolini was a fascist dictator and nationalist who served as Italy's Prime Minister from 1925 to 1943. His political actions and Fascism are considered to have been an inspiration for Adolf Hitler's Nazism later in Germany. (Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/benito-mussolini-1>)

<sup>15</sup> Refers to support of more liberal and progressive ideals, as well as the promotion of social equality and anti-capitalism. ("Left-wing politics." Wikipedia. Accessed August 4, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-wing\\_politics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-wing_politics))

<sup>16</sup> Centrist usually encompasses political views that do not align with left or right ideologies, but rather promote a moderate point of view that can be seen as a middle ground in the political spectrum. ("Centrism." Encyclopedia.com. Accessed August 9, 2022. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/centrism>)

involved until I was in Arezzo, and despite the Sessantotto<sup>17</sup> there was a thing that my generation lived close to, the first political action in which I participated spontaneously was the occupation in Florence in '69,<sup>18</sup> a student protest in November of '69... We were attacked by the police, I holed up in a doorway, because then there were just the police that sounded a trumpet [*makes the sound of a trumpet*]; they attacked and so then started with the jeeps to take everyone to jail and I didn't want to go to the police station, so I holed up in a doorway very quickly, and it was the first political action, so with the Sessantotto Movement.

**LD: Yes, where?**

BP: In Florence, at the University of Florence.<sup>19</sup>

**LD: Clearly you grew up during a turbulent period.**

BP: Yes, very, especially because in Italy, for people that were coming from small towns... In high school, I participated in the protest for Jan Palach in my small town, then I arrived in Florence and participated in a protest with the students and there I started to exchange views with the student movement, with the ideas of the student movement, because then they were also a bit anti-communist, right? They were of the left, but anti-communist. And this satisfied me. Then, in the course of my life, even in my entry into the world of work, I always maintained a certain distance from the Communist Party,<sup>20</sup> because the Communist Party used to oppose women's great battles including divorce and abortion. They were great battles promoted by the Radicals<sup>21</sup> and by the Socialist Party<sup>22</sup> at an institutional level, never by the Communist Party, if not from the outset, then when there had already

---

<sup>17</sup> The Italian term "Sessantotto" stands for "68," in reference to an important social movement that took place in Italy in 1968. Comprising students, workers, and minorities, protesters acted against capitalism and patriarchy, and argued in favor of worker rights. ("1968 movement in Italy." Wikipedia. Accessed September 7, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968\\_movement\\_in\\_Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_movement_in_Italy))

<sup>18</sup> Translator's Note: occupation of the university.

<sup>19</sup> The University of Florence is a large public research institution in Florence, Italy, with an enrollment of over 60,000 students. ("University of Florence." Wikipedia. Accessed August 4, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Florence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Florence))

<sup>20</sup> The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was active in Italy from 1921 to 1991. It was the largest communist party in the West, and later dissolved into the Democratic Party of the Left, which merged with other minor parties to form the currently active Democratic Party. ("Italian Communist Party." Wikipedia. Accessed August 4, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Communist\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Communist_Party))

<sup>21</sup> The Italian Radicals (RI) is a libertarian political party that promotes the ideals of political, economic, and cultural liberalism. ("Italian Radicals." Wikipedia. Accessed August 9, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Radicals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Radicals))

<sup>22</sup> The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) is an active social-democratic political party in Italy, with a hundred-year history as an umbrella organization unifying different left democratic socialist groups. It was disbanded in 1994. Since that time many other organizations have sprung up on the left ("Italian Socialist Party." Wikipedia. Accessed December 2, 2023)

been a movement raising public awareness... Yes, I always was rather aligned with what had been my education, so libertarian.<sup>23</sup> There were many female admirers of the American culture of the time, because we were polarized - you were with the Soviet Union<sup>24</sup> or with the United States - and I always thought that the United States was better, even though we knew little about it, we only knew it from Hollywood comedies [laughs].

**LD: [laughs] Were there any personal events, movements, books, courses or people that...?**

BP: Well, no, the personal event was the awareness of my sexuality, of lesbianism, that pushed me toward feminism, at first by reading... There wasn't even a big feminism movement in Florence; if there was, it was linked to the Communist Party, to some publications. During university, I often returned to Arezzo instead, being in love with an Arezzian girlfriend, I would return expressly to spend time with her. It was an unrequited love, but it was something that captivated me very much. It took me a long time to become aware, and I talked with my parents about it, then they accepted it, it was also in some way the cause of me coming to Rome<sup>25</sup> because I wanted to go to work in Milan<sup>26</sup> or Rome; in Milan it would have been easier to find work, instead I came to Rome because I had met, in Arezzo, Edda Billi,<sup>27</sup> who was one of those who founded La Casa,<sup>28</sup> she was part of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Libertarians typically believe in the ideals of individual freedom and the rights to liberty and private property, as well as the concept of a free-market economy without economic regulation. (Van der Vossen, Bas. "Libertarianism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2019 Edition)*. Accessed August 9, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/libertarianism>)

<sup>24</sup> The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union, was established after the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a communist nation made up of 15 republics, including Russia. Due to its involvement in the Cold War and influence over emergent communist governments, among other factors, the Soviet Union played a major role in reshaping world politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until its official dissolution in 1991. ("Soviet Union." History.com. Accessed August 9, 2022. <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/history-of-the-soviet-union>)

<sup>25</sup> Rome is the capital city of Italy, as well as the most populous city in the country and an important cultural center, economic hub, and tourist destination. ("Rome." Wikipedia. Accessed August 9, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome>)

<sup>26</sup> Milan is a major metropolitan city and economic center in northern Italy, as well as the second most populous city in the country after Rome, the current Italian capital. ("Milan." Wikipedia. Accessed June 23, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan>)

<sup>27</sup> Edda Billi was an influential women's rights activist who fought against sexist violence, and gender inequality in a broader sense. She is also responsible for founding La Casa Internazionale delle Donne. (Acuña, Fernando G., and Jo Ashworth. "Feminism: Mamma mia is dead!" Cafébabel. Accessed September 9, 2022. <https://cafebabel.com/en/article/feminism-mamma-mia-is-dead-5ae004e0f723b35a145dc16e/>)

<sup>28</sup> Referring to La Casa Internazionale delle Donne di Roma, or The International Women's House in Rome, an association of Italian women activists who advocate for women's rights and fight against sexism and discrimination. The organization also provides support for women in need, shelter for victims of violence, assistance in legal and citizenship matters, and the visibility of women in culture and the arts. ("Chi siamo." Casa Internazionale delle Donne (it). Accessed August 9, 2022. <https://www.casainternazionalelledonne.org/chi-siamo/>)



Roman Feminist Movement of via Pompeo Magno,<sup>29</sup> and so I began to have relationships with Pompeo Magno in 1974 and I found the true party I wanted to participate in, that is feminism.

Actually, I never participated in the political parties, because my family education was also a bit anarchist<sup>30</sup> basically, very based on freedom, libertarianism... You know, it would not fit with life within any party where you needed to have a boss, to be in a group. I didn't have this tendency, so instead, with feminism, yes; I spent a long time becoming self-aware. When I came to Rome, I also knew some people my age, because the people I came with were a little older than me, 10-15 years older than me, and so they were a bit like mothers, and I arrived in Rome in 1975 with the protest in favor of abortion. I had connections in this movement, Pompeo Magno, it was attacked by the men of Lotta Continua,<sup>31</sup> that really kicked us in the ass, so a matter of conflict with the males and so objectively very engaging. And then, during that time, we created consciousness-raising groups.<sup>32</sup> When I arrived, right away, I joined one of the first groups inside the Pompeo Magno, lesbian consciousness-raising, so I began to work on my lesbianism.

**LD: Yes, it's very important.**

BP: [*nods*] And at the same time, however, Pompeo Magno was also doing a lot of actions, a lot of protests, that is, they were the years between '75 and '78-79 in which the women's movement was a very powerful movement because it was widespread, across social classes, it had become a mass movement and it was also supported indirectly by other movements, including the unions. That's what nurtured my political ideas very much. When I looked for a job, in part, they helped me to get a job here in Rome, because I had already graduated, I was qualified to teach in high school. In Florence I had left a research

---

<sup>29</sup> The Roman Feminist Movement of via Pompeo Magno was a collective founded in Rome in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the goal of organizing conferences, demonstrations, protests, and entertainment events to spread feminist ideals in Italy. ("Movimento femminista romano." Herstory (it). Accessed August 11, 2022. <http://www.herstory.it/movimento-femminista-romano>)

<sup>30</sup> Anarchists typically endorse the lack of a central government or authority, advocating for the existence of a society based on freedom and the cooperation between individuals instead. ("Anarchism." Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anarchism>)

<sup>31</sup> Lotta Continua ("Continuous Struggle") was a far-left paramilitary organization and nationwide revolutionary movement founded in Turin, Italy in 1969. The group's focus was the promotion of radical ideals among the Italian youth and working force, targeting especially young immigrants working at large factories. ("Lotta Continua." Wikipedia. Accessed August 11, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotta\\_Continua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotta_Continua))

<sup>32</sup> Consciousness-raising groups were a vital element of second-wave feminism in the 1970s; they aimed to address women's issues by focusing on shared personal experiences, which allowed women to analyze their experience within the patriarchal system ("Consciousness-Raising Groups and the Women's Movement." JSTOR Daily. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://daily.jstor.org/consciousness-raising-groups-and-the-womens-movement/>)

job at the university and - how do you say - I was looking around, I was searching for something else; I kept being a journalist, but I gave up because it was difficult and then I wanted to be independent, so I began to work at the Centro Studi della Lega delle Cooperative,<sup>33</sup> that even though it is called “League” it had nothing to do with Salvini’s League.<sup>34</sup> It was an organization of cooperatives close to the Communist Party. I was working on, already by ‘77-78, projects founded in Brussels,<sup>35</sup> by the European Union,<sup>36</sup> for creating jobs for women, for young people... That is, I had been working on some big projects related to job creation, it was my job until ‘87-88. At the same time, when I came to Rome - because at Pompeo Magno there were a lot of people, feminists that were also in contact with international feminism, Kate Millett,<sup>37</sup> for example - by then, right away I began to think that there must be an international movement, as in fact there was, so American-based somehow, because the fundamental texts were those of Kate Millett, “Sexual Politics,” and the other by Shulamith Firestone, “The Dialectic of Sex.”<sup>38</sup>

### **LD: Simone de Beauvoir?<sup>39</sup>**

BP: Simone de Beauvoir yes, but in some way, this was already second-wave feminism<sup>40</sup> that concerned me the most, even if I had read Simone de Beauvoir, not only the political

---

<sup>33</sup> Translator’s Note: Research Center of the League of Cooperatives.

<sup>34</sup> Matteo Salvini an Italian political leader with radical conservative and populist beliefs. He is well-known for his anti-immigration policies and currently serves as a Senator in the Italian Senate, as well as head of the conservative Lega Nord (Northern League) party. (“Why Italy’s Matteo Salvini Is the Most Feared Man in Europe.” Time. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://time.com/5394448/matteo-salvini/>)

<sup>35</sup> The city of Brussels is the capital city of Belgium and an important administrative center for the European Union, hosting many of the principal EU institutions. (“City of Brussels.” Wikipedia. Accessed August 11, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City\\_of\\_Brussels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Brussels))

<sup>36</sup> The European Union is a political, socio-economic union that encompasses 27 European countries. It was established in the aftermath of the Second World War to foster good relations between European countries and ensure peace and stability, avoiding further conflict. (“The European Union. What it is and what it does.” European Commission. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/>)

<sup>37</sup> Kate Millett was an American activist and author, known for her early contributions to the women’s right movement, including her first book *Sexual Politics*, which examines the subjugation of women in a male-dominated culture and the power dynamics of gender and sexuality. (“Kate Millett.” Britannica. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kate-Millett>)

<sup>38</sup> *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* is Shulamith Firestone’s landmark manifesto. Firestone criticizes the traditional structures of family and the sexual class system, arguing that these are the root of the oppression of women. She deals with marriage, childbirth, and childhood, among other themes, drawing attention to what she believes to be the source of the problem. (Faludi, Susan. “Death of a Revolutionary.” The New Yorker. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/15/death-of-a-revolutionary>)

<sup>39</sup> Simone de Beauvoir was a highly influential French existentialist philosopher and writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her work addressed subjects that ranged from ethics and politics to feminist theory. Published in 1967, *The Woman Destroyed* is her second collection of short stories, in which she explores themes such as familial relationships, freedom, and responsibility. (“Simone de Beauvoir (1908—1986).” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://iep.utm.edu/simone-de-beauvoir/>)

<sup>40</sup> Second-wave feminism refers to the Western feminist movement in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s. At that time, the movement became mainly concerned a broader range of issues related to women’s

text, but also the literary texts, they were interesting, like “The Woman Destroyed.” I have to say, Simone de Beauvoir was the representation of a heterosexual couple, so she wasn’t so close to me. The Americans had more of this sense of independence and of conflict, so not only the books, but also the texts we got to read at Pompeo Magno, they came translated, on lesbianism, masculine sexuality.

**LD: In the seventies?**

BP: Mid-seventies. There had already been that famous text, it was an essay...

**LD: Can you remember any moments in which you said “aha!” In which you had awareness of the gender inequality or sexual inequality?**

BP: I always thought of male sexuality as predatory, violator; this perhaps has more to do with my relationship with my mother, but also the perception of the body as an object of personal control. I had the impression of choosing my sexuality. At a certain point, I was on vacation in Sardinia<sup>41</sup> with a female friend, in 1974, there was a group from Genoa,<sup>42</sup> one of the guys was courting me, while I liked a woman, and I went with her. It was my first, very late, sexual relationship. So, I had the impression of choosing my sexuality, I had not perceived homosexuality as a condemnation but as a choice, as a very deliberate choice. I believe that this, together with feminism, also gave me a very positive sense of my choice, not a marginal sense.

**LD: Many women in the United States have expressed the same idea, sexuality as chosen.**

BP: Certainly, sexuality as your own choice. Also, these were the years in which we fought the battle for abortion. I had a sense of amazement at every protest. I had arrived in Rome in April of 1976, I was 26, so I had already started this work of self-awareness. In June, there was the violent episode at Circeo:<sup>43</sup> two girls raped by a group of Pariolini,<sup>44</sup> an event

---

rights, beyond suffrage and voting rights. These issues included reproductive justice, gender equality in the workspace, rape prevention, and cultural inclusion. (“A Brief Summary Of The Second Wave Of Feminism.” Feminism In India. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://feminismindia.com/2018/04/25/summary-second-wave-of-feminism/>)

<sup>41</sup> Sardinia is an island in the Italian Peninsula and one of the 20 Italian administrative regions. (“Sardinia.” Wikipedia. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardinia>)

<sup>42</sup> Genoa is a city in the region of Liguria, in the northwestern part of Italy. (“Genoa.” Wikipedia. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genoa>)

<sup>43</sup> Translator’s Note: promontory in the Province of Latina, a tourist destination.

<sup>44</sup> Translator’s Note: from the residential neighborhood of Parioli, Rome; young men from good families with right-wing tendencies.

that marked the Seventies. In June, I went to Latina Together<sup>45</sup> with my friends from Pompeo Magno to the courthouse of Latina, it was a very fascist place, and even to this day it is so, but first it was really MSI.<sup>46</sup> We went to be present for the trial to prosecute these Parolini, who had killed one girl while the other had survived. This had a formative effect on me, I have to say with sorrow, because violence gave me pain. When we returned to Rome in September-October of 1976, there was a big gathering and I immediately said that I was a lesbian, like this: “I am a lesbian from a small town.” There was an enormous silence because “lesbianism” was not being mentioned. I said that this was common concerning sexuality, as we were examining our own sexuality at a time in which lesbianism wasn’t tied to the male homosexual movement, just a different path, our own self-awareness, our own openness. It wasn’t anti-social values, not just anti-heterosexual, but more cognitive, empowering. Rather interesting. Then with Lia Migale, we were young, we organized an evening protest, “Take Back the Night”<sup>47</sup> like in Philadelphia in ’76, I don’t know which came first, I think we were first in November of ’76. So, in that moment you could feel the power of feminism, even a sense of “it can be done,” that is, you can be the starting point politically as women and transform society; only those in the parties, as the leaders, had experienced something like this. In some way, we felt like the leaders. I was living one hundred percent for feminism’s goals, I was a “full-time feminist.”

**LD: Now a big question, central to my work: there are other women that have had experiences similar to yours, that however did not become activists. What do you think are the determining factors, personality, experiences, etc. Which factors distinguish you from them?**

BP: I don’t know, I think that the fact of growing up very loved, very recognized also in high school, thought of as one who would “make it,” as a “having to be” so that everything you do you have to do well, that is do it from beginning to end. Objectively, it seems to me that despite the doubts about my own culture, the errors that even the movements made, by and large, the fact of having come here, so having had wanted it, I wanted to be a feminist, it wasn’t a thing to resolve some little personal problem and then put aside. The same went for having met my female partner, which happened toward the end of the Seventies, beginning of the Eighties, and we have been together for 36 years, a ton of time, what we have in common is... Feminism, for me it also meant to have relationships with feminists, those of Pompeo Magno, those of the Libreria<sup>48</sup> of Milan, so to have feminist friends, that

---

<sup>45</sup> Latina is both the region and the capital city of the region, within which this incident happened.

<sup>46</sup> Translator’s Note: Movimento Sociale Italiano, political party founded in 1946 by neo-fascists.

<sup>47</sup> These protests are organized by Take Back The Night Foundation, a volunteer organization that combats sexual violence and assault, and offers support for survivors and promotes healing. (“History of TBTN.” Take Back The Night Foundation. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://takebackthenight.org/history/>)

<sup>48</sup> Translator’s Note: Libreria delle Donne, or Women’s Bookstore.

has been my world for 42 years. It would be difficult to be different, even building a privileged relationship with Mariarosa,<sup>49</sup> even to this day the meaning of our being together is feminism. Feeling in some way responsible to make it exist, our type of feminism, in a different world from the one we had come from.

**LD: How important are relationships, personal relationships, for your activism?**

BP: Fundamental. I have to say that as a personal contribution, with another group of people, I added the transnational to feminism, or transnational feminism, very important, fundamental. The urgency of globalization has almost erased it by now, but I started to deal with it in Aidos,<sup>50</sup> an association I founded with other people. Then I worked at the Foreign Ministry on this subject, I was the senior gender advisor, I was a what the Anglo-Saxons<sup>51</sup> call “femocrat,”<sup>52</sup> I am exactly this, because I was an expert member of the United Nations Committee on the elimination of every discrimination against women, that agreement wasn’t ratified by the United States, even if you have cities like San Francisco,<sup>53</sup> Cities for CEDAW,<sup>54</sup> a rather interesting movement.

**LD: What year was the association founded?**

BP: In 1981. Always a bit in the Socialist camp. It was an association for development cooperation, but for my part also a way to take part in the international movement, so also reading works by Vandana Shiva,<sup>55</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,<sup>56</sup> together with those on

---

<sup>49</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa was an important feminist figure and author in Italy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. She is well-known for her texts on reproductive rights, environmental justice, and especially the debate around domestic labor, housework, and capitalism. (“[Tribute to] The work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa.” The Commoner. Accessed September 9, 2022. <https://thecommoner.org/tribute/tribute-to-the-work-of-mariarosa-dalla-costa/>)

<sup>50</sup> Translator’s Note: Associazione Italiana di Donne per lo Sviluppo, Italian Women’s Association for Development.

<sup>51</sup> Referring to individuals from English-speaking countries that are influenced by English culture and history. (“Anglosphere.” Wikipedia. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglosphere>)

<sup>52</sup> A female bureaucrat, especially one who deals with women’s issues in politics. (“Femocrat.” Wiktionary. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/femocrat>)

<sup>53</sup> San Francisco is a major city and commercial center located in the state of California, in the United States. (“San Francisco.” Wikipedia. Accessed August 9, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San\\_Francisco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Francisco))

<sup>54</sup> Translator’s Note: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and ratified by 189 states.

<sup>55</sup> Vandana Shiva is a scientist, scholar, activist, author, and one of the most prominent ecofeminists in the modern world. She argues that women are disproportionately affected by climate change and that the ongoing environmental crisis is caused by gender inequality, tackling these issues through an intersectional approach. (“What Is Ecofeminism? 3 Key Takeaways from Vandana Shiva’s Activism.” Impakter. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://impakter.com/what-is-ecofeminism-3-key-takeaways-from-vandana-shivas-activism/>)

<sup>56</sup> The Indian American intellectual and professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is well-known for her studies in literary theory from the perspective of Non-Western women and women in colonial countries, along with her

lesbianism, Monique Wittig,<sup>57</sup> etc. I must say that I closely followed the evolution of the lesbian feminist movement until 1982, when a small group within Pompeo Magno organized a national convention on lesbian feminism, based on the style of Adrienne Rich,<sup>58</sup> “Nato di donna;”<sup>59</sup> I admired Rich very much, less so Wittig with her more anti-heterosexual discourse... I think that there are so many subjectivities, not a lesbian anti-feminist subjectivity, that I have never accepted. When the lesbian movement began to go more toward the homosexual movement, detaching from feminism, then I had some problems and I cultivated more this international part that was my true passion.

**LD: What do your family and your friends think about your activism?**

BP: My true girlfriends are activists, that is they are like me feminists, so we think very badly of each other because each one of us has her own feminism [*laughs*] but we are feminists of a certain generation. My parents unfortunately died very young, my father at 67 and my mother at 76, so they are no more. My mother had always accepted my life to the end of her days (and she died in my arms); she said, “I have been good.”<sup>60</sup> My family of origin had some problems accepting me because it was more conservative. We had some run-ins, but now it seems that we are becoming close again, it may be because of our old age. Then I have a nephew and a niece, children of my cousin, the girl lives in San Francisco, my “true” relative, being intelligent, the other in New York;<sup>61</sup> they are enthusiastic to have this non-conforming Italian “aunt.” For me, social relationships count more than the family of origin, in particular relationships with my feminist girlfriends.

I am afraid of the movement that finds a rather “managed” space inside institutional seats, a return to the conservative idea of the family, the individual and the family, a return to patriarchal values, that fits well with conservative populism. I think that we have to stand

---

essays on colonial oppression and power dynamics. (Smith, Dinitia. “Creating a Stir Wherever She Goes.” The New York Times. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/09/arts/creating-a-stir-wherever-she-goes.html>)

<sup>57</sup> Monique Wittig was a writer, activist, and an important figure in the French radical lesbian and feminist movements in the 1970s. She has published a number of novels and essays on feminist theory, philosophy, and the lesbian experience, among other subjects. (“Biography.” Monique Wittig. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.moniquewittig.com/bio/>)

<sup>58</sup> Adrienne Rich was a renowned American poet whose work incorporated themes such as the civil rights movements, racism, women’s role in society, the feminist movement, and the Vietnam War. (“Adrienne Rich.” Poets.org. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://poets.org/poet/adrienne-rich>)

<sup>59</sup> Translator’s Note: “Of Woman Born.”

<sup>60</sup> Translator’s Note: to accept her.

<sup>61</sup> New York City is the most populous city in the United States and one of the most populous megacities in the world. Along with its tourist appeal, New York serves as an important commercial and economic center. (“New York City.” Wikipedia. Accessed July 11, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City))

firmly against this great talk of family and families, even though I'm part of a civil union;<sup>62</sup> it is a return to the past, to the patriarchy. It is a very tough period, like you know in the United States, like we also know, like Latino-American women know. There is an air of suffocation of female freedom; this freedom exists, so it is an open battlefield, a very important symbolic battle that is complicated by neo-liberal financial globalization.<sup>63</sup> All of this continues to interest me, as what is happening in India interests me. In short, the transformation from old developing countries into new emerging countries with ideas that are a bit conservative; so Russia, perhaps China, and India push the patriarchy.

**LD: How do you perceive the relationship between the women's rights movement, the political system, and movements for the rights of other groups in society?**

BP: "Women's rights movement" and "political system" are very much about emancipation.<sup>64</sup> The feminist movement in Italy isn't perceived as a women's rights movement, but more a cultural, philosophical, and political movement. I am in favor of recognizing some rights because they are founded on agency, free subjectivity; to embody feminine freedom also means to have a job, a language to be independence. The Italian feminist movement rather works on language more than rights. I view the parties with suspicion, even as they interest me, being part of cultural and political groups for the renewal of the left, and I think that they should give priority to feminism and sustainability, etc. With the gay rights movement there are constant conflicts, especially between feminists and gay men on the subject of reproduction, the so-called "uterus for rent"<sup>65</sup> is a big problem. Seeing as we are dominated by the technology, I think that this technology will go forward until, as Shulamith Firestone<sup>66</sup> said, "we make children in the refrigerator."

---

<sup>62</sup> A civil union is a legal arrangement between a couple, comparable to marriage, entailing certain legal protections and benefits. In Italy, same-sex partnerships and civil unions were not recognized until 2016. ("Same-Sex Weddings in Italy." Just Get Married In Italy. Accessed September 9, 2022. <https://www.justgetmarriedinitaly.com/gay-wedding-italy/>)

<sup>63</sup> The notion of a neo-liberal financial globalization implies that globalization is rooted in the neo-liberal ideals of economic freedom, privatization, a free market, and minimal state intervention in the economy. (Wikan, Vilde S. "What Is 'Neoliberalism', and How Does It Relate to Globalization?" E-International Relations. Accessed September 9, 2022. <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/03/21/what-is-neoliberalism-and-how-does-it-relate-to-globalization/> )

<sup>64</sup> Emancipation is the idea of being free from restraint and authority or a controlling force, thus having personal responsibility and individual rights. In the context of feminism, the concept is typically applied to citizenship matters, social equality, economic liberation, and suffrage. ("Emancipate." Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emancipate>)

<sup>65</sup> Referring to surrogacy, a process in which a woman agrees to conceive, carry and give birth to a child for another person or couple, the child's intended parents. The process is fairly common among gay men who choose to become parents. ("Surrogacy." Better Health Channel. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyiving/surrogacy>)

<sup>66</sup> Shulamith Firestone was a radical feminist activist and writer, as well as prominent figure in early radical feminism movements. (Faludi, Susan. "Death of a Revolutionary." The New Yorker. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/15/death-of-a-revolutionary>)

Males will seize the means to deprive women of their great power, maternity. They are movements that think of the future, that is real politics, to confront this question, to talk about it, to educate rather than ban, to ensure in a way that there are not women in another country that have children so they can buy a house for their descendants.

I believe that on this we must also maintain a focus to give shape to how feminism thinks of humanity. If we say to those women “don’t believe you have rights,” there is also a need to express more understanding of their situation. I think that, in Italy, the politics of the left is in great crisis, a crisis linked to the difficulty involved in advancing the social democratic model, but also linked to the uncertainty of the passage between the past and the future, from a fundamentally rural society that in fifty years has seen major changes. It happened to everyone, but for us like for Japan, for China in an amazing way, the change was too fast. Our institutions were not prepared. I think that we need to adapt, to understand ourselves better, including the divide with Southern Italy, including our heritage, to how to conserve it. We don’t make anything sustainable; you can see it in Rome, we are overwhelmed by the tourist market, a huge pity. So, in all of this the various movements and the feminist movement are important. For about a decade, starting in 2005, I was close to parties like the Communist Refoundation Party,<sup>67</sup> never a member because I have never been a communist - I am afraid of it - and I can’t stand the hierarchy of the parties. While I was a Ministry official, I related to the hierarchy in a free manner, with the party hierarchy I had a harder time not having a specific job to do; it is based on the willingness of the head,<sup>68</sup> a sort of paternal permission.

**LD: What does the word “feminism” mean to you?**

BP: For me, feminism is politics, culture, philosophy, relationships, it is thinking about one’s life and the world in a way in which it wasn’t possible to think before. I had the job of gender advisor that hadn’t existed before, a job that I invented with other female friends and thanks to the international network. I had a life that hadn’t existed before, that is, in 1980, the possibility of same-sex couples hadn’t existed before, and so I think that life has to be invented, that humanity has to progress inasmuch progress is difficult and there is not one idea of progress, that the left is not just about progress, but there is a need to advance resolving the problems that we have. All of us Italians are guilty of acquiescence<sup>69</sup> with respect to the extermination of Africans, like you Americans are guilty... I feel very

---

<sup>67</sup> Translator’s Note: has not had a member in the Italian Parliament since 2008 but has one in the European Parliament in 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Translator’s Note: of the party.

<sup>69</sup> A passive or unwilling acceptance of something; reluctant compliance. (“Acquiescence.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acquiescence>)



engaged, and it is feminism that moves me, this relational modality, despite the difficulties - it would be easier to have a party. This is my life horizon.

**LD: What do you think about the current state of feminist politics in Italy?**

BP: We are living a crisis. They want to take back this Casa. There is a very strong generational gap because neither the women in political parties - that don't know feminism; they think that is it a left-wing thing and they have classified it "in crisis" like the left, which perhaps is even true having feminism been historically supported by the left, but not only - nor the women in the movements, the young women perceive us as those who no longer want to fight for class, etc. There is a generational gap that makes them perceive us as overshadowing mothers, that they have to run away from, while we resent the absence of communication. This is one of the problems. At the institutional level, we have not been able to preserve a central role in the political debate, which doesn't mean that we aren't in the political debate, but it is objectively difficult to manage, like it was difficult when we started, and so we have to spend what little energy we still have on it.

I think that it is a battle that is worth engaging, especially because rebellion to this culture of violence runs inside and throughout feminism, this language of violence, violence against the defenseless. With another seven people, long-time feminists, we are part of the Gruppo del Mercoledì<sup>70</sup> that wrote a text in 2012; a text on "taking care" because we think that politics has to "take care," but nothing to do with the care theory of J. C. Tronto.<sup>71</sup> It is an argument that would like to be much more ambitious: if politics doesn't "take care" then it isn't politics; politics is relationships with others. We also say that we have great difficulty theorizing - we are all people over 60 years old - but we are all doing our best to continue talking because it is our way of doing activism. Now, we want to have a big seminar on "women's places," in favor of the Casa to give political dignity and to help the Casa to have the political centrality that it deserves. Beyond the physical place, the Casa has become a symbolic place, which is what we wanted it to be when we created it. With Edda Billi and Elena Gentili,<sup>72</sup> we three of Pompeo Magno, I spent the first night of the old occupation of

---

<sup>70</sup> Translator's Note: Wednesday Group, a group of men and women journalists trying to counter the androcentric nature of news reporting.

<sup>71</sup> Joan C. Tronto is a political scientist and professor, known for her studies of the intersection of care ethics and feminist theory, in which she explores the phases and implications of care as it relates to women and other minorities in the society. ("Care Ethics." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://iep.utm.edu/care-ethics/>)

<sup>72</sup> Elena Gentili is an Italian activist who focuses on promoting gender equality and inclusion, women's access to politics and policy making, and refugee shelter, as well as the protection of women from gender-based violence. ("Elena Gentili." Rise & Lead Women. Accessed September 7, 2022. <https://riseandleadsummit.com/rise-lead-summit-2020/speakers-2020/elena-gentili/>)

1976 when Emma Bonino<sup>73</sup> and the women of the Radical Party<sup>74</sup> were there; then we saw that it was a party operation, but a year later I wanted to return to all the feminist groups. Even though forty years have passed, I continue to stay in this fight for the Casa.

**LD: If you had to choose one important point in your story that other women could learn from, what would it be? Is there a message that you want other women to learn from your story?**

BP: As in Eastern cultures, I also think that one teaches others with one's actions. I have done what I wanted to do, rarely I did things that I didn't want to do - perhaps never. I think that the new generations also have to enter into the public political agony yet to lay claim to the independence of the feminist argument about male power, and both doing politics and being independent from male power is very difficult. This is the message of my life. Also to practice mediation to maintain an independent political lifestyle but also take some action; that is, not only to stand by, to not only be against, but also to know when to take an action. The radicalism which I think my life was inspired by is the radicalism of a subjectivity that needs to cross through and negotiate and it seems to me that women do negotiate, but where are they? Argentinian women wouldn't have the abortion law if they weren't negotiating. This is more difficult with the new generations, it makes me feel as if I wanted to hold back the young people but instead, I would like to convince them that there is a different radicalism; the fact of being independent from male thoughts not so much regarding heterosexuality, which I don't care about, rather as regarding independence from the man's judgement, because you can't exist if you aren't "capable of defining yourself." This is what I think feminism is.

---

<sup>73</sup> Emma Bonino is an Italian senator who was formerly served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister for International Trade and European Affairs, as well as a parliament member and Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Fisheries, and Consumer Policy. She is a leading member of the Italian Radicals. ("Emma Bonino." European Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://ecfr.eu/profile/emma-bonino/>)

<sup>74</sup> Referring to the Italian Radicals, the political party Emma Bonino is a member of. See footnote 21.