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OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AND CULTURAL OPPOSITION: THE
CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

City University of New York

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OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AND CULTURAL OPPOSITION:
THE CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

by

TERESA SHTOB

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
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Abstract

OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AND CULTURAL OPPOSITION: THE CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

by

Teresa Shtob

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Feminist protest mobilizations occurred in both the United States and Western Europe during the 1970's, as women moved from participation in other social movements to the establishment of independent forms of organization. This work examines the Italian feminist movement from its origins within the student movement and New Left, and follows its development until the early 1980's, with particular emphasis on the campaigns for abortion legislation and women's health centers that marked the most intense period of feminist protest activities. Research focuses on the changing nature of the Italian feminist movement during the period under study, as it moved from direct confrontation with the political system and some notable policy 'successes' in the mid-1970's, to a period of waning influence over the political system and increasing internal heterogeneity by the end of the decade.

The original model utilized for the analysis of the Italian feminist movement's formation and development combines aspects of both the resource mobilization approaches characteristic of many U.S. social movement studies and the concept of a 'political

opportunity structure'. The work then examines the 'fit' of this model to the Italian movement, and more broadly, to the sort of new social movement phenomena that this specific movement exemplifies. The 'political opportunity' model's explanatory value is strongest in considering the structuring of feminist protest by the Italian political system, while the resource mobilization approach aids in understanding the role of the 'internal' resources of the Italian feminist movement in its development. But because this model leaves crucial empirical and analytic questions unanswered and tends to equate a movement with its public policy goals, another paradigm is introduced, that of collective identity formation, an approach characterizing much Western European work on contemporary social movements. The collective identity paradigm helps to explain conflictual aspects of the Italian feminist movement that transcend immediate political goals and (perhaps) express broader, systemic conflicts and contradictions. Utilizing this paradigm, this work looks to both the visible and latent forms of struggle within the Italian feminist movement in order to decipher the relationship of that movement to its broader social structure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page	1	Introduction
	35	Setting the Stage
	71	The Movement Mobilizes
	104	The Movement and the Abortion Campaign
	151	The Movement and Institutions
	184	Changing Paradigms
	212	Bibliography

Chapter 1: Introduction

A wave of protest mobilizations swept both Western Europe and the United States in the late 1960's and early 1970's, signalling the advent of a period of political and social crisis. Following on the heels of earlier student, anti-war and worker movements, feminist movements emerged in practically every Western country. In a pattern that repeated itself within each feminist movement, women's participation in and identification with other social movements then helped them towards the constitution of autonomous forms of feminist mobilization and organization.

It will be the purpose of this work to examine one of those feminist movements -- in Italy-- from its origins in the late 1960's, following its development until the early 1980's. The early years of both the U.S. and Italian feminist movements look startlingly similar, with their common origins in their respective New Lefts, and with their forms of organization and ideology. Yet national differences asserted themselves fairly quickly in each movement, and it will be the task of this work to describe and analyze the specificity of the Italian movement.

The central questions that preoccupy most scholars of specific social movements is why they arise in a given historical context; how a group of people comes to sense a common interest and organizes to forward their ends, and which combination of circumstances leads to 'movement success', a rather elusive concept that generally refers, in

the literature, to movement maintenance over time, its achievement of desired goals and recognition of its legitimacy as representing a constituency. The central hypothesis with which I began this study involved a prediction about the probable relative success of the feminist movement in Italy as compared to the United States; with a strong reform and social change-oriented working class movement and party in Italy as the potential allies of the feminist movement, and with highly politicized movements arising on the left of the political spectrum, I hypothesized greater success for the Italian feminist movement. In part, this hypothesis has more recently been argued by Hewlett¹ in her comparative work on European and American women's movements, in which she claims that it is European women's movements that have accomplished more fundamental reforms for women than their United States counterpart. Issues of success and achievements, of the degree of social change introduced by feminist movements, are perceived as central to analyses of specific movements.

The development of the Italian feminist movement was strongly conditioned by alignments and changes in its political system that seemed to offer space for new social actors, such as women, to effect change. The Italian political system, in the late 1960's, was challenged by a series of protest mobilizations and the constitution of social movements that created instability in the party system. One of the centers of protest, as in the United

States, was the university system, massively disrupted by mass student mobilizations, and the politicization of every aspect of academic life. In contrast to the U.S., however, this was accompanied by a collective movement of young workers, and the resulting disruption in the economy increased the uncertainty and sense of crisis in the political system. Young women who were later to become feminist activists were recruited and became militants in both the student movement and the political organizations comprising the New Left in Italy, which arose as well in this period.

For many young women, it was the general protest movement that provided their first entry point into political participation, as access to political participation seemed to increase for new political actors. As the movement gained strength and spread, it increased its autonomy from the New Left. During the mid-1970s the feminist movement came to be recognized as the representative voice for women's issues and it engaged in direct confrontation with the traditional political actors, primarily over the issue of abortion legislation. As the period of political crisis passed, the general widespread mobilizations ebbed, and pressure on the political system for structural reforms slackened. New alignments in the political system increased the role of the parties of the left in the government, and decreased the negotiating power of the New Left and the feminist movements. By the late

1970's, the Italian feminist movement was confronting the problem of maintaining its strength and collective identity in a period when autonomous organization for women had become increasingly problematic.

This research focuses on the changing nature of the Italian feminist movement during the period under study, as it moved from direct confrontation with the political system in its first stages and some notable social policy 'successes', to a period of waning influence over the political system. The general political changes taking place in terms of party alignments and the role of the left affected the different phases of the feminist movement. Between 1969 and 1972, small, consciousness-raising groups arose, many of them centered in universities, the circulation of key feminist documents (including documents from the U.S. feminist movement) were circulated and the first stirrings of more inclusive collectives began to link the networks of small groups. The second phase of the feminist movement was characterized by the participation of many women who had remained primarily identified with and active in New Left groups. Increasingly, as these New Left groups underwent a crisis and often dissolved over feminist issues, the women became so-called 'double militants', active in both the New Left and the feminist movement, or came to define their feminist identification as primary, thus enlarging the size and heterogeneity of the movement. The years of these first two stages of the movement were the

years of the greatest political strength of the movement, and the campaign for abortion legislation the primary political activity. The end of the 1970's, on the other hand, could be characterized as a period of relative silence for the movement, part of the more general phenomenon of the riflusso or ebbing of political protest in Italy. This stage has been followed by a period in the early 1980's of renewed feminist activity in which the profile of the movement has changed. When feminists have acted as a movement in the political arena, their activities have been focused on particular themes-- sexual violence, employment, peace, and the referendum attempting to repeal the abortion legislation passed in 1978. Other feminist groups have entered unions, public institutions and other organizations to introduce feminist themes and issues to a variety of social institutions. The ability of the movement to produce alternative services for women has also increased while the degree of confrontation with the political system and state apparatuses has decreased. Many feminists have moved away from direct institutional involvement to focus on 'lifestyle' and cultural issues. What appeared to be silence was instead a re-thinking and re-orientation of feminist activities.

In many ways the feminist movements that arose in the late 1960's exemplify the changed nature of social movements in the contemporary period. In common with social movements of the past, including previous mobilizations of women, the

new feminist movements have often mobilized around issues of full citizenship and political participation-- ie., the vote, and equal pay for equal work-- engaging in direct confrontation with the political system and the state. Yet feminist movements have also succeeded in "establishing as legitimate topics of politics, as areas for claiming, issues which had previously been treated socially as 'personal' or 'natural' and thus beyond the reach of politics."² In addition to pressures for changes in the structure of power and resource distribution (which, for example, in the United States has been associated with the 'women's rights' branch of the feminist movement), feminist movements raise new 'claiming categories' by introducing such 'personal' issues as abortion laws, the division of labor within the family and reproductive rights. The previous separation between public policy issues and personal issues has broken down, creating a complex and often ambiguous relationship between the movement and the political system. The slogan "the personal is political", so important to feminism, expressed the importance of 'politicizing' issues and needs not previously deemed politically relevant, bringing them into the political arena. The slogan emphasized both that private needs and issues were actually of collective social importance, and that the state and political system had already intruded into many dimensions of private life.³

Although there have been other new movements (ecology, youth and counterculture, homosexual rights) that have also

focused on areas thought to be private and individual, it is the feminist movement that has challenged existing social and political arrangements more profoundly than any other social movement. As Peattie and Rein note in their book:

the categories of gender run very deep in the structure of society. The fact that the social categories of gender are built on the basis of natural differences of sex and that the social roles of women are structured pervasively around commitment to the personal and interpersonal means that we tend to think of these things as 'natural' and thus outside the reach of politics and policy. As a result, claims which disturb the traditional definition of women's rights shake the categories which we feel are most natural and most to be taken for granted.⁴

The 'personal politics' of the feminist movement has challenged established definitions of the political and has often succeeded in extending them, but it has also raised issues that attempt to redefine what is 'natural' for women -- the exploration of the family, sexuality, women's culture and morality. These latter issues are not directly amenable to political negotiation, yet the mobilizations which have created cohesion and visibility for the movement have often centered on negotiations with the political system over specific rights and legislation.

Within specific feminist movements, there has been a heterogeneity of stances towards the state and politics. On the one hand, women's rights feminists have made demands for rights analogous to those already granted men, focusing on electoral and public policy influence for women. Socialist-feminists have also seen the state as the appropriate target

for women's political action and feminist mobilizations, arguing that contradictions within the advanced capitalist state can provide a fertile ground for feminist politics,⁵ although their ultimate goals are quite different from women's rights feminists. Yet other feminists have concerned themselves almost exclusively with consciousness-raising, developing new lifestyles for women and focusing on cultural issues, seeing in a collectively transformed private life a possible 'free zone' where women might attempt to counteract the invading intrusiveness of the state into every aspect of social life.⁶ Contemporary feminist movements have expressed a profound ambivalence between emphasizing the politicalness of the personal and focusing on an escape from politics, raising the question of whether feminist movements are asking for an expansion of the political system's limits or for autonomy from the political system, for space within which to recompose a sense of identity assaulted from without.

Examining the history of a specific national feminist movement requires several levels of analysis. The answers to some of the questions we raised earlier-- of why a movement forms in a particular moment and how it organizes to pursue its goals-- require an examination of the historical and political context of Italy preceding and during the period under study. While the answers to those questions may be complex, they are not as problematic as an evaluation of movement success, which is, as we have suggested, a more

thorny issue involving prior definitions of movement goals (including an assessment of what parts of the feminist movement are focused on the political system in their quest for change), its program of reform within the existing political system, as well as possible attempts to alter the very definitions and boundaries of the political system. The major research question this work will address is that very difficult one of how to evaluate the role of the Italian feminist movement in effecting change within its society.

The questions I have raised here lead inevitably to the need for an analytic model within which the discussion of the Italian feminist movement can be located. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the major theoretical traditions within the social sciences, in their treatment of the phenomenon of social movements.

Contemporary Social Movements: The Social Sciences

The proliferation of new social movements in the 70's highlighted the theoretical gaps in the social sciences for the study of collective action. The major traditions which had concerned themselves with collective action were incapable of adequately accounting for the nature of these new social movements. Although most theoreticians have agreed that collective action, or people's joint action in pursuit of common ends, is characterized by variables of interest, organization, mobilization and opportunity operating at both macro and micro levels, there is less

agreement about why groups form and how to describe their relationship to other components of the social system. Most current scholars of collective action and social movements begin with an almost obligatory nod to the definitional dilemma: "the most persistent problem we face in analyzing collective action is its lack of sharp edges- people vary continuously from intensive involvement to passive compliance, interests vary from quite individual to nearly universal."⁷

A brief examination of the major theoretical traditions, in their treatment of collective action, may help explain the theoretical impasse reached by the 1960's. With Marxism, social classes were the primary actors in society, class action being based on shared interests, a consciousness of those interests (shared beliefs) and some form of organization which unified the individuals within the class. When a social conflict emerged, its cause could be explained with reference to classes, material interests, and the organization and development of production of that society. A major explanatory factor for the mobilization and collective action of groups was to be found in the changing relations of production. Marxists have differed in their estimate of how determining a role class position will play in collective action, and what role is played by class consciousness, but nonetheless, it is the group's relation to the means of production that is central to an understanding of collective action.

The contribution of Marxist theory, in this area, was twofold: 1) to see collective action as expressing fundamental contradictions and structural conflicts within a social system, and as being the 'rational', (though qualifiedly so) expression of those conflicts; and 2) the understanding that collective action itself produces a subjective consciousness of common interests within the group, or class consciousness. Yet for Marx, it was the mass working class party alone that constituted the synthesis of the movement's activities and gave it a conscious sense of identity and direction. The equivalence of class struggle and political struggle gave little attention to other levels on which social action takes place. Marxist theory did not have a systematic treatment of how a particular class condition led to a particular class action and how movements actually form and maintain themselves.

Although Gramsci agreed that shared 'objective' interests were the motor of social change, he added the insight that, throughout history, common interests alone did not produce collective movements. He stressed that many forms of collective action, even 'primitive' revolts not led by a political party, reflected opposition to the established order, important as actions by which groups defined their social existence and which increased their consciousness of mutual interests. He argued that the political consciousness allowing movements to emerge involved a profound break with outmoded cultural models and

ideas, and that only when a class develops a comprehensive world view or ideology that permeates society and challenges the dominant ideology, can it become a historical actor. It is significant, however, that Gramsci's insights into the important role of changing ideology and culture as conditions for major social change were 'rediscovered' precisely in the period under study. They do not characterize the typical Marxist approach before the advent of the social movements of the 60's.

Durkheim and Weber, although not offering comprehensive theories of collective action, did provide frameworks for much empirical work in the social sciences on collective behavior in the last fifty years. For Durkheim, society controls individuals through their sharing a "collective" or "common conscience", consisting of the totality of their beliefs and common sense. As modern society becomes differentiated, there is the increasing danger that anomie, or a gap between the differentiation process and the ability of that society to regulate social relations through a shared belief system, will prevail. When the pace of social change outstrips the capacity of the social system to regulate itself, anomie results. Disruptive or non-routine collective action tends to take place as the rate of social differentiation increases and is seen as a direct reflection of rapid social change. As Tilly has pointed out, contemporary Durkheimian treatments of collective behavior have tended to see collective action as the result of the

shared beliefs and needs of individuals, combined with the absence of social controls over those needs. The faster and more extensive the social change, the more it produces anomie collective behavior, social conflict and protest.⁸

For Weber, the structure and actions of collective groups are largely explained by the group's commitment to a belief system. Although the original commitment is most likely to occur because of the exceptional moral qualities of a charismatic leader, the expansion of the group ultimately entails the "routinization of charisma" in which organizational needs, provision for leadership and succession and other everyday aspects of group existence replace the personality of the leader as integrating factors. The charismatic moment, when individuals radically change their ideas about the meaning and coherence of life, explodes sporadically and inexplicably, and then degenerates into the routinized organization of everyday life. There is basic agreement here with Durkheim's idea that rapid social change provides conditions for non-routine collective behavior.

Essential elements of both Durkheim and Weber's thinking are to be found in the mainstream social science approaches to collective action. Durkheim is reflected more specifically in many works of political science dealing with social change, particularly treatments of revolutionary movements⁹, in which rapid change such as takes place in the process of urbanization is seen to cause high levels of

social protest and individual disorder. These approaches point to systemic changes as the producers of collective behavior, that are then seen as reactions to decreasing social control. Weberians, on the other hand, tend to emphasize the importance of the conscious belief systems of the individuals in collective actions that cause them to act together for social change.¹⁰ Yet the Weberian approach doesn't answer questions of the genesis of 'non-routine' social movements and their mobilizations.

Functionalist theory, the dominant American social science tradition by the beginning of the 1960's, when new social movements developed, was unable to adequately treat social movements except as instances of deviant, disorderly behavior or as a symptom of systemic strain that called for measures of social integration. Smelser, in particular, developed a systematic treatment of collective behavior, using general analytic categories of social action to distinguish phenomena ranging from panics to revolutions. Collective behavior is a "mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action"¹¹ and is a reaction to structural strain in the relations among the conditions of rational action, embodied as a system. Collective behavior reorients responses to strain or imbalance by means of a new "generalized belief" that provides the impetus for attempts to restore the social system, given mobilization in the context of social control. The production of collective behavior (and the generalized beliefs that motivate them)

occurs outside the normal institutional social processes-- the new generalized belief sees the possibility of extraordinary, almost magical consequences resulting from the collective action. Value-oriented movements, produced by a crisis in the global values of a society, are based on a generalized belief that "necessarily involves all components of action, that is, it envisions a reconstitution of values, a redefinition of norms, a reorganization of the motivation of individuals and a redefinition of situational facilities."¹²

Smelser was able to use the general analytic category of collective behavior to explain diverse social phenomena; the specific form of collective behavior was determined by the degree of generality of the components of the social system affected. Although the concept of a generalized belief points to an important dimension of social movements-- their capacity to challenge the global orientation of their society-- his model was strongly ideological in nature. Ultimately it is dysfunctions in the institutional processes that create collective behavior, and they are produced by forces external to the system. Collective action in its highest form, social movements, isn't seen as a creative force which produces its own solidarity, identity and ideology, but is produced by the social system. Conflict doesn't arise from within the system but is merely a secondary effect of processes of adaptation which restore the system's equilibrium.

Other perspectives that emerged in the 1960's, while more sympathetic to social movements, still saw unusual social strain as necessary for protest and insurgency. Gurr, with his influential use of the theory of 'relative deprivation',¹³ saw rapid economic change which leads to a discrepancy between individuals' expectations and what they achieve, as the precondition for "strife" and therefore for social movements. Here, too, although the emphasis is on the real grievances and deprivations that lead to movement formation and participation, it is a special state of mind produced by unusual social conditions and stress that creates social disorder. Stability and consensus are seen as the normal state of affairs.

By the late 1960's, the simultaneous eruption of several mass movements, leading into a general period of contestation, produced new paradigms and models for the study of social movements. Research went in several directions, but the shared assumption of almost all the new social movement scholarship of the early 70's was that protest movements are legitimate and usual social and political phenomena and that mass protest is an essentially political phenomenon engaged in by normal people.¹⁴ Social movements came to be considered an intrinsic part of a broader definition of the political system, and an important source of new influences, new institutions and enlarged political participation-- in short, a mechanism for the introduction of social change. From a perspective that had

seen social movements as a threat to the functioning of the democratic process, social movements were now considered to perform a basic function in the democratic political system, by introducing innovation and social change.

There is, by now, a wide body of work which studies the period of social mobilization of the 1960's and 70's, much of it an implicit or explicit attempt to discover the 'keys' to success or failure on the part of these movements (particularly since much of the work was written after these movements were in apparent demise by the mid-70's). Much of the scholarly work focuses on the manner in which movements produce social change, particularly those movements which focus on the political system and attempt to effect political change. Piven and Cloward have looked at insurgent movements of the working class and the poor to discover which historical conditions lead to their emergence and what factors determine their success or failure.¹⁵ They share with their predecessors the notion that it is economic and social structural change that produces social protest, but view this as the normal state of affairs in capitalist society. They agree that it is an increase in grievances or discontent that causes people to rebel, and see this as occurring regularly throughout American history whenever discontent existed and the normal regulatory controls on protest were weakened. Rather than looking primarily to the causes of discontent (which they don't see as really requiring an explanation), they focus on what they call the

'structuring' of protest-- the ways in which the institutional context, particularly the electoral system and its stability, offers or denies opportunities for protest to emerge and to succeed among the lower classes. In their work they give new attention to the interests that link certain social actors and the circumstances that politics offers for collective protest to develop, arguing that it is primarily the nature of the electoral-representative system that gives certain forms of protest greater impact and strength than others. Social movements, in their approach, are regarded as the principal actors in struggles for political power, while the conflictual aspects of social express a situation of political instability. Ultimately it is the government or state that is the target of social protest as movements attempt, in periods of instability, to wrest concessions from the state. In liberal democracies, electoral instability can acts to neutralize the state, enabling insurgents to wrest concessions from political elites.¹⁶

While placing political power at the center of their analysis of movements, Piven and Cloward argue that only mass insurgency can compel concessions from elites; organization-building is counterproductive as leaders are usually co-opted and channel protest into more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behavior. They argue that "it is not formal organizations but mass defiance which won what was won in the 1930's and the 1960's",¹⁷ and offer as examples of the reform and co-optation of movement

leaders the civil rights and welfare rights movements of the 1960's.

In contrast to the work of Piven and Cloward, which poses movements and organizations as antithetical, the resource mobilization approach argues that insurgent movements require organizations in order to be effective in pursuit of their goals. Resource mobilization theories have become dominant during the last decade in the study of American social movements. Its practitioners, as one scholar has recently noted, have taken the stance of "social movement leaders concerned with why social movements succeed or fail, and an emphasis on how to make them succeed."¹⁸ The term "resource mobilization" has been used to encompass a wide variety of scholarship, with some notable differences in approach, but there are certain shared assumptions. In general, resource mobilization work assumes that "discontent is at best secondary in accounting for the emergence of insurgency [and] that organizational resources and the changing power position of the aggrieved, not sudden increases in their grievances, are the major factors leading to the outbreak of disorders".¹⁹ This assumption stems from the belief that "there is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grassroots support for a movement if the movement is effectively organized and has at its disposal the power and resources of some established elite group".²⁰ They emphasize that social movements are organized activities constituting a normal part of social and

political life. The unit of analysis becomes the movement organization rather than individual participants, or the movement as the general population supporting similar social change goals. Mobilization is studied as the process by which groups aggregate resources in a system of exchange with their environment. Rather than look at the causes of protest, resource mobilization studies turn to the social supports and constraints for movements, the relationship of movements to other groups and institutions, the dependence of movements on external support in their social and political environment and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements.

Perrow²¹ has identified two main strains in resource mobilization theory: the political process model represented by the work of Gamson and Tilly²²; and the economic input/output model of McCarthy and Zald. Tilly and Gamson, according to Perrow, argue that "protest is the continuation of orderly politics by other (disorderly) means."²³ For example, in studies of the history of protest in France, Tilly has found violent protests, rather than signalling a sharp break from 'normal' political life, tend to accompany, complement and extend organized, peaceful attempts by the same people to accomplish their objectives.²⁴ In his work, he has attempted to link collective action to a population's central political processes, arguing that collective violence occurs when social groups are entering or exiting from the political

system, winning or losing a struggle for power. He has stressed the interests linking social action, the level of organization, the mobilization of resources under a group's collective control, as well as the opportunities within the political system available for action. Both Gamson and Tilly have emphasized the realization of collective goals through the acquisition by organizations and leaders of collective control over resources and political power.

The other strain of resource mobilization theory, best represented by McCarthy and Zald,²⁵ sees social movements as the general set of preferences in a given population for changing some element of the social structure. Their emphasis is on the social movement organization which they define rather traditionally as a "complex or formal organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of the social movement and attempts to implement those goals".²⁶ For them, it is the resources that an organization succeeds in mobilizing that activates protest; their account shifts from the causes of discontent to the conditions that influence movement leaders' calculations and contribute to greater resource mobilization. Social movement organizations operate like other organizations-- institutional maintenance is the primary goal, as they rationally pursue group interests. The individual actors participating in collective action also act rationally in pursuit of their interests. Although collective action is not in the immediate rational self-interest of individuals, groups

offer 'selective incentives (specific benefits) that encourage mobilization.'²⁷ In this rational exchange with other actors, collective actors can be described in their processes of formation, negotiation and acquiring external support for their goals. Hypotheses can be generated (as McCarthy and Zald do in their 1977 article) about which combination of resources will produce the greatest movement 'success' and the greatest amount of resources available to the organization. In their work they stress the competition between groups for resources, often between different organizations within the same movement.

The advantages of this approach, as Tarrow has noted, are that "it directs attention at the relationship between organizational activity and the mass base as an empirically variable one; and it focuses upon organizational elites' mobilizational strategies, using the resources available to them from the mass base as the main activating factor of protest."²⁸ In contrast to Gamson and Tilly, however, the specifically political aspects of the environment structuring protest are not considered central to analysis; although McCarthy and Zald recognize variables such as political repression, most of their work looks at organizational and leadership variables. In addition, their work gives no explanation of why, in a given historical moment, it is possible to mobilize resources, and at others not.

The 'first wave' of resource mobilization theory did contribute to the analysis of how collective actors emerge, constitute and maintain themselves in a system of relations with their social system. The majority of resource mobilization work has, however, neglected the political system as one of the major variables in the environment. Tarrow, particularly in his recent research,²⁹ as well as Garner and Zald³⁰, have turned explicitly to the relationship of movements to their political systems, in an attempt to broaden the scope of resource mobilization models. Garner and Zald define the range of social movements synchronically as the social movement sector. The entire sector is defined as part of the larger structure of political action within that society. They examine the systemic constraints that shape and limit the possibilities of the social movement sector and the reasons why social movement activity in general increases or decreases in certain historical periods. These constraints include production and class relations; business cycles and structural change; and the political and ideological system. The single most important variable, in terms of the environment external to the movement is the party structure, since "movements can only be understood as one part of a range of options that also includes political parties [and] movements compete with parties."³¹

Resource mobilization theory had shown that the patterns of organization of social movements are similar to that of

other forms of organization and that social movements are only one type of organizational action. In this further development, general systemic changes condition and limit the nature of all social movements in a given period. This work contains important insights into how the political environment and the party structure may condition the range of social movements in a given society. The specifics of a movement, however, as distinct from other forms of social organization, disappear. In their words, the only difference between parties and movements "insofar as there is a difference at all-- seems to lie in the use of 'party' to mean an organization that has a method of gaining some degree of power over the state apparatus (whether by elections or revolution) while 'movements' seem more oriented toward civil society", yet both are "organizational forms for pursuing political ends."³²

Tarrow has attempted recently to synthesize the strands of resource mobilization theory, in order to discuss cycles of protest and the nature of contemporary social movements.³³ He points to the need to look at what he calls the 'internal resources' of social movement organizations (similar to the focus of resource mobilization work)-- looking at leadership strategies, organizational variables, and internal solidarity (a factor ignored almost totally by resource mobilization theories, except by Gamson and Perrow). Utilizing Eisenger's concept of a 'political opportunity structure',³⁴ Tarrow describes the other

crucial components of analysis as the openness or closure of formal political institutions; the stability of political alignments (following the argument of Piven and Cloward); and the presence of allies and support groups. Thus one must look at both the movement and the responses of the political system and evaluate the effects of one on the other, including the empirical interaction of elites and protest groups. In addition, he looks at cycles of protest, noting that movements appear to cluster in certain periods and also to have greater success in those periods, leading to a possible qualification of the importance of a movement's internal resources in the overall analysis. Tarrow suggests that the factors explaining the success or failure of movements may be found primarily in the dynamics of the political process.

As we have noted before, identifying the contours of movement success has been important in all the social movement scholarship emerging during the 70's, although it remained largely undefined (or, in resource mobilization theory it referred primarily to organizational maintenance). Tarrow's definition of social protest movements as "groups possessing a purposive organization, whose leaders identify their goals with the preferences of an unmobilized constituency, which they attempt to mobilize in direct action in relation to a target of influence in the political system",³⁵ then makes possible a concept of success measured by policy outcomes. He defines success as the

attainment of the movement's program for the reform of society (substantive goals) and the establishment of power relations favorable to the movement (institutional participation and the acceptance of the movement as a legitimate actor).

The recent work of Garner and Zald, and Tarrow, as well as several recent studies of feminist movements, would lead us then to what we might call a political process or political opportunity model. We might hypothesize that the Italian feminist movement's goals were focused primarily on the political system with demands for social change articulated in terms of policy innovation. We will expect the following factors to be crucial in the development of the feminist movement: the organizational or mobilizational strength of the movement (its 'internal resources'); and the political opportunity structure, including the openness of the political system to participation, electoral stability and the availability of support groups. My original hypothesis in conducting this research, in fact, had been that that the presence of a strong working class movement would increase the political effectiveness of the feminist movement. Given that the feminist movement occurred during a cycle of protest, it is likely that the political opportunity structure will be the major explanatory factor of the Italian feminist movement's success or failure. Movement success can be measured with reference to the degree of achievement of substantive policy goals, as well

as the degree of acceptance of the feminist movement as a valid voice for a legitimate set of interests. Evidence of this will be "the presence or absence of a process of policy innovation in the political system addressing the protestors' stated needs, if not their actual programs."³⁶

There is some empirical work on feminist movements that utilizes parts of this model. Freeman, for example, in her study of the United States feminist movement³⁷, focuses on the two strands of radical/socialist and liberal feminism and uses a resource mobilization perspective to chart their different 'policy outcomes'. She outlines the different strategic choices made and opportunities available to each branch of the movement, privileging the discussion of 'internal resources' of each over any analysis of the political opportunity structure. Her discussion of the success of the liberal branch of the feminist movement focuses on the passage of federal regulations as the only empirical measure of movement success. She has more trouble accounting for the relationship between movement and political system when analyzing the radical branch of the movement, and assumes that the national women's organizations representing liberal feminism have come almost exclusively to 'represent' the movement.

Joyce Gelb's comparative study of British and United States feminist movements³⁸ looks at differences in political activism, leadership orientation and organizational values of the two movements, seeing them

largely as dependent on external factors such as the available resources of the political environment. In particular she looks at the nature of the party structures in the U.S. and Britain as they relate to women's participation in policy-making, as well as to potential alliances of the feminist movement with other reform groups or movements. She suggests that the nature of the political system in the United States has conditioned the American movement's greater success in policy and political participation.

Hess and Ferree in their study of the American women's movement also trace the successes of the U.S. feminist movement to the "variety of organizations arising as a coherent political force" and argue that "liberal feminists in particular, as contenders for political power, have constructed mass-based and elite organizations that can effectively lobby, mobilize women voters and sponsor legislation to advance women's interests. More important than any specific policy outcomes is the fact that these organizations have come to represent women collectively, with a legitimate role in shaping public policy."³⁹ This obviously relates to both of Tarrow's measures of movement success-- policy and participation. It is interesting to note in this context that Hewlett⁴⁰ argues that the American movement has been singularly unsuccessful in representing women's interests in the public policy arena.

Ergas' work on the Italian feminist movement⁴¹ traces developments in the feminist movement both to changes in electoral stability and to the feminist movement's alliances with other groups. In her view, it was both changes in the political opportunity structure and in strategic choices of the movement that explain the relative weakness of the feminist movement in the area of social policy.

This work looks at both the political opportunity structure and the internal resources of the Italian feminist movement through its emergence and development in the 1970's. The organization of this work reflects, to a large degree, the chronological development of the movement itself. Our first task will be the reconstruction of the historical context within which the mobilizations of the late 1960's occurred in Italy. Chapter 2 will provide such a context, highlighting the general conditions affecting the emergence of all the social movements, and the specific factors affecting the possibility of women's political participation and mobilization. Chapter 3 will describe the emergence of the workers' and student movements, and the changing environment of social and political protest. The feminist movement, arising within the student movement and the New Left, remained strongly identified with its 'parent movement' in its first stage. We will trace the development of the movement, as it began to differentiate itself ideologically and organizationally. Chapter 4 analyzes the

period of greatest mobilizing strength of the movement, 1972-76 in its fight for abortion legislation and feminist health centers. In Chapter 5 we look at the outcome of those struggles and their implications for the movement. Finally, in Chapter 6 we evaluate the heuristic value of the explanatory model initially proposed. Weaknesses in this model are discussed and elements of an alternative paradigm presented.

Chapter 1: Notes

1. See Sylvia Hewlett, Lesser Lives: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1986).

2. Peattie and Rein attempt to distinguish between claims that address existing social conventions and systems of legal and customary entitlements; and claims that challenge the boundaries of those customs and conventions; see Lisa Peattie and Martin Rein, Women's Claims: A Study in Political Economy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 109.

3. See Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics", Social Research 52 (Winter, 1985): pp. 817-868.

4. Peattie and Rein, Women's Claims, p. 117.

5. See Zillah Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism (New York/London: Longman, 1981), especially pp. 220-248.

6. In "New Social Movements", Offe makes the point that the common thread of the new social movements and conservative movements and countermovements may be this desire to get away from the invasiveness of government.

7. Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1978), pg. 7.

8. Ibid, p. 18.

9. For example, see Ted Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

10. See Roberta Ash, Social Movements in America (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1972); Michael Useem, Protest Movements in America (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

11. Neil Smelser, A Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p.72.

12. Klaus Eder, "A New Social Movement", Telos 52 (Summer 82), p. 16.

13. See Gurr, Why Men Rebel, especially pp. 22-58.

14. A notable example of this changing evaluation of protest was the Report of the National Commission on the

Causes and Prevention of Violence, convened to analyze black ghetto riots and student protest in the late 1960's; see Jerome Skolnick, The Politics of Protest (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969).

15. See Frances Piven and Richard Cloward, Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

16. Piven, in fact, has recently criticized socialist feminists for not grasping the essential fact that it is the nature of the welfare state and its contradictions that offers new opportunities for women to make demands on the state, provided they make this the focus of their political strategy; see, e.g., her "Women and the State: Ideology, Power and the Welfare State" in Socialist Review 14 (March-April 1984).

17. Piven and Cloward, Poor People's Movements, p. xvi.

18. Frederick Miller, "The End of SDS and the Emergence of Weatherman: Demise Through Success" in Jo Freeman, ed. Social Movements of the 60's and 70's, (New York/London: Longman, 1983), p. 279.

19. Craig Jenkins, "What is to be Done: Movement or Organization?", Contemporary Sociology 8 (March 1979), p. 224.

20. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", American Journal of Sociology 82 (May 1977), p. 1215.

21. See Charles Perrow, "The Sixties Observed" in John McCarthy and Meyer Zald, eds. The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control and Tactics (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1979), pp. 192-211.

22. See William Gamson The Strategy of Social Protest (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1975); Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, Richard Tilly, The Rebellious Century (1830-1930), (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

23. Perrow, "The Sixties Observed", p. 199.

24. See Charles Tilly, From Mobilization, p. 10.

25. See John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, The Dynamics of Social Movements and The Trends of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization (Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1973).

26. Idem., The Dynamics of Social Movements, p. 1218.
27. The resource mobilization explanation of the relationship of individual to collective action utilizes Olson's concept of the role of sanctions and selective incentives. See Mancur Olson, The Logic of Social Action (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).
28. Sidney Tarrow, Struggling to Reform: Social Movements and Policy Change during Cycles of Protest (Ithaca: Cornell University, Center for International Studies, Occasional Paper No. 15, 1983), p. 14.
29. Ibid.
30. See Roberta Garner and Mayer Zald, Social Movement Sectors and Systemic Constraints: Toward a Structural Analysis of Social Movements (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Research on Social Organizations, Working Paper No. 238, July 1981).
31. Ibid., p. 37.
32. Ibid, p. 38.
33. See Tarrow, Struggling to Reform.
34. Peter Eisenger argues that "it would seem reasonable to suspect that the incidence of protest ... is related to the nature of the opportunity structure."; see "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities" in American Political Science Review 67, (March 1973) p. 12.
35. Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 7.
36. Ibid., p. 5.
37. See Jo Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation (New York/London: Longman, 1975).
38. See Joyce Gelb, "Social Movement 'Success': A Comparative Analysis of Feminism in the United States and Britain" in Carol Mueller and Mary F. Katzenstein, eds. Changing Paradigms: New Theoretical Perspectives for the Women's Movements of Western Europe and the United States (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming).
39. Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess, Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 177.
40. See Hewlett, Lesser Lives.

41. See Yasmine Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema: Il percorso delle donne attraverso gli anni settanta", Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia XXI (1980) and "1968-79, Feminism and the Italian Party System: Women's Politics in a Decade of Change", Comparative Politics 14 (April 1982).

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage

The trans-national character of feminist movements would seem to argue for identifying the general causes and patterns behind the empirical diversity of recent protest. I will leave for the final chapter of this work a consideration of the more general significance of the feminist movements of the 1970's. Since logic suggests going from the more specific to the general, in this chapter I will describe the historical context of Italy from the immediate postwar period and the constitution of the new Italian state, up to the mobilizations of 1968-69, with the political opportunity structure conditioning protest as the focus. As Garner and Zald have noted, the amount of social movement activity occurring in any given society, (what they refer to as the social movement sector)¹, will vary decisively from that of another society, depending on the possibilities and constraints offered to protest by that social system. The assumption will be that within Italy the general political conditions affected the emergence of all the social movements of the 1960's and 1970's. At the same time, the social movement sector must be differentiated from within (as Garner and Zald fail to do), and our analysis will look at the specific factors conditioning the environment of women's political participation that can help explain their passage into mobilization.

The Party System

The political history of Italy from the end of World War II to the present has been characterized by the domination of one party, the Christian Democrats (the DC) and the challenge to that domination by the Italian Communist Party (the PCI). The republic created after the war contained governing institutions so weak, and with areas of competence so unclear that state authority was never fully legitimized among the population. As many scholars of Italian political life have noted, the Italian Constitution and the subsequent political practice of the Christian Democrats created an enormous separation between civil society and the state.² According to Barnes, the Catholic Church, unions and other institutions "intervene between the citizen and structures of government so that loyalty to the latter is mediated by non-governmental institutions. As a result, the legitimacy that in many other systems ... is vested in government ... was granted in Italy to the Church, the political parties and their associated organizations."³

In the absence of a strong state capable of efficient public administration and social reform, the political system has been dominated not by government, but by the organizations of the political parties. Since the new Constitution went into effect in 1948, major governmental institutions have either been under the control of party organizations (ie. Parliament and public administration) or

have had to struggle for independence (ie. the judiciary and presidency). Part of the uniqueness of Italy's political system is that the rule of parties extends beyond the control of governmental power to a vast sector of public and semi-public bodies that dominate many areas of national life-- industries, banks, welfare agencies, radio and TV, research institutions, universities-- and which are controlled by the state. As such, they are subject to influence and bartering among the political parties.⁴

To an unusual degree, Italian institutions and social organizations are clientelistic, with the political parties dispensing patronage and favors on the basis of partisanry. Interest groups as well appeal to political parties and not to the governing institutions in their activities. Civil society is therefore highly politicized, since social organizations and associations that mobilize the citizenry do so on the basis of political criteria. This politicization of Italian society, as we shall see, affects the nature of social movements as well.

Governmental instability has also been a characteristic feature of the Italian political system since the war-- there have been 45 national governments since 1945. Since no single party has won a majority of seats in Parliament since 1948, the national governments have been made up of coalitions of parties. Yet the DC has dominated every government of the postwar period. The appararent paradox has thus been governmental instability combined with a monopoly

by one party of state power. This monopoly of the government has been accompanied by a division of society into two dominant political subcultures which have each mobilized fairly stable percentages of the population: the Catholic, represented by the Christian Democrats and the socialist, represented by the Communist and Socialist parties. The Italian party system has thus been called an "imperfect biparty system"⁵ in which there are two parties with stable, large electorates, but where one party remains in opposition and cannot become a formal part of the government. There is also a smaller, but important series of lay parties whose origins lie in the liberal secular forces that supported the unification of Italy against the opposition of the Church; the parties within this tradition are the Liberals, Republicans and Social Democrats. They constitute the swing parties in most governing coalitions.

The postwar political alignment in Italy was conditioned by the Resistance and the struggle to overcome Fascism. At the end of the war, the nation needed to be rebuilt economically and politically and the main political actors in this process were all the parties that had participated in the anti-Fascist struggle-- the Christian Democrats, the lay liberal parties, the Socialists and the Communists. With the collapse of the Fascist state, the Catholic Church and its lay organizations gave rise to the DC. Its strongest presence was in rural areas, amongst small businessmen and shopkeepers, while the PCI originally had

its major base in the factories and Northern Italian cities.

In April, 1944, the PCI, PSI and DC agreed to a coalition of national unity and to elections for a Constituent Assembly that would decide the future institutional structure of Italy once the war was over, through the creation of a Constitution. In the elections for that Assembly, in July 1946, Communists and Socialists had a combined support of 39.6% while the DC received 35.2%, so that a government which included the left seemed likely. By 1948, when parliamentary elections were held, the Christian Democrats had found the right combination of domestic and international support to govern without the Communists and Socialists.⁶ The electoral results were 48.5% of the votes for the DC (305 out of 574 seats in the Chamber of Deputies) while the Communists and Socialists together drew only 31% of the vote.⁷ Thus, the brief period (1944-8) of open collaboration between the left and the lay democratic parties ended, as the PCI (the Communist Party) and the PSI (the Socialist Party) went into political opposition, a situation that would prevail until the early 1960's. The Christian Democrats maintained their control of the government without ever having achieved an absolute parliamentary majority in an election. This position has required them to continually gain the parliamentary backing of several other small parties contributing substantially to the frequent changes in government. Every Italian government has either been a coalition government or a government with

the DC ruling alone with the parliamentary backing of political allies.

Two major governmental phases characterized the period from the end of the war to the late 1960's: 1948-63, when the Christian Democrats rose to power and maintained their hegemony, with the aid of several centrist and right parties. The second phase, beginning in 1963 and ending in 1974, saw the DC turning to a leftist party, the PSI, for parliamentary support, thereby instituting a Center-Left government. During this entire period, the PCI was an opposition party; between 1948 and 1956 (the Cold War years) it was essentially isolated and marginalized from the other political parties and tended to pursue a policy of all-out opposition to the DC. From 1956 on, it has occupied a position of opposition from within the system, attempting to win legitimacy as a collaborator in government.⁸

The Christian Democrats followed a strategy in the postwar years of attempting to be a interclass party capable of aggregating electoral support at the political center, while attempting to erode support for both right and left extremes of the party system. The party was dependent for its organization and financing on the Church and business and agrarian interests⁹ and these interests pushed the DC to a strongly anti-Communist position during the Cold War years.¹⁰ After 1953, with the loss of an absolute majority in Parliament, the DC began to form coalition governments and the party moved further to the right in its search for

political allies.

Although the DC originally had presented itself as the centrist party capable of enacting moderate reforms and eroding the power of the political extremes, it proved incapable of playing this role. During the 1950's, the party elites and the recruitment of members were strongly tied to the Church and its lay organizations, and the Church consistently pushed the Christian Democrats to the right. The expansion of the public sector of the economy under party supervision theoretically gave the DC an opportunity for greater independence from business interests and the Church. This failed to produce any reform coalition, partially because of factionalism within the party, which encouraged a politics of spoils and clientalization of the state apparatus by the DC.¹¹

The DC was increasingly a party of state clientelism throughout the 50's and into the 60's, controlling a government with little ability to create policy and institute reforms. The DC used its governmental position to consolidate its hegemony by constituting a centralized state apparatus under its control through a vast patronage system which secured the support of a range of interest groups. The power base included the state-run industries, the state bureaucracy and the Church. The state bureaucracy functioned effectively to block even those few reforms that were legislated, while government inefficiency increased and effective decisionmaking declined. Moreover, the DC proved

incapable of altering the electoral strength of the PCI, which by the end of the 1950's, represented the greatest challenge to the DC.

The fundamental postwar strategy of the Communist Party, announced by the Party Chairman Togliatti at the close of the war, was to create a mass party that would attempt to make Italy a progressive democracy. The 'via italiana al socialismo' (the Italian road to socialism) as outlined by Togliatti consisted of a strategy of collaboration aimed at national unity. In order for this to succeed, the PCI had to be a mass party with an active presence in all sectors of Italian society. For this, the working class and the PCI were to construct a system of alliances with other political parties and other social groups.¹² The party was not to be a small group of professional cadres but rather a mass party, capable of organizing the working class and also reaching out to peasants and the middle class.¹³ Togliatti's strategy for the PCI was to win power by electoral procedures within the framework of democratic institutions. The party wanted to avoid isolation and would therefore try to reach beyond its relatively small working class constituency to other social strata.

This "new party", as the PCI called itself at the time, had to develop a well-organized mass base. It succeeded in doing this in the postwar years. It also had to create a network of working class organizations which would be in

everyday contact with the masses through the trade unions, as well as rural, youth and women's organizations. This strategy was influenced not only by the immediate postwar situation, but also reflected the party leadership's adherence to the Gramscian notion of the need to establish cultural hegemony, a presence in every aspect of civil society, in order to mobilize the masses.¹⁴ Thus the PCI strategy in the postwar period, was focused on strengthening the institutional effectiveness of the party itself, increasing its membership (what Blackmer refers to as the PCI's 'phase of institutional maintenance'¹⁵) and attempting to gain influence in the social, occupational and interest groupings of Italian society by creating unions, cooperatives, youth and women's organizations and cultural associations.

The PCI's strategy of collaboration was an expression of its awareness of the strong influence of the Church among vast sectors of the population. Togliatti voted for the inclusion within the new Constitution of the 1929 Lateran Pacts maintaining the Church's special status within the state, indicating the PCI's desire to avoid a divisive split between Catholics and non-Catholics. The postwar economic policy of the PCI was formulated as well with an eye towards the construction of alliances and the needs of economic reconstruction. Its goals were general reforms-- collaborative economic planning, nationalization of monopolies and land redistribution-- which were to be

pursued without alienating the middle class. Consistent with the goal of national unity, the PCI also supported increasing labor productivity through limiting worker's political strikes, and imposing workplace discipline.¹⁶

The Cold War years were confrontational in many ways. The Church launched an anti-Communist crusade while the PCI organized peasant mobilizations, industrial strikes and mass demonstrations against the Marshall Plan and NATO. Yet even during the Cold War years, when it was politically isolated, the PCI continued to cooperate in many aspects of parliamentary procedures, continuing to adhere to a strategy of alliances, while building up its presence within Italian society. In the phase from 1956 to the present, the PCI has moved out of its isolation into a phase of 'opposition within the system'.¹⁷ It has followed an alliance strategy, both politically, through efforts to extend its influence on the leadership of other parties, and socially, by using the party's program of structural reforms to create social support for shifts in political alliances.¹⁸ However, its reform strategy throughout the 50's and 60's remained vague and did not offer a coherent program, acceptable to the various sectors of the population it intended to represent for the transformation of Italian society, while its definition of alliances was broad enough to cover practically every social group. By the late 60's, while it was dominant on the left, it had not yet overcome its position of strategic inferiority with respect to the DC.

The Socialist Party had received more votes in the 1946 postwar elections than the PCI (20.4% versus 19%) yet by 1948 it had fallen below the PCI (12.4% to 18.6%) and continued an electoral decline throughout the 1950's and 60's. In the postwar years the PSI tried to differentiate itself from the PCI but its attempts to do so resulted in a diminution of the party's political space. In addition, the PSI was characterized by factionalism and splits that further diminished its strength. These factions represented different ideological positions on how to confront the DC and the PCI, and also reflected the struggle within the party over ministerial and patronage positions. Control of such positions depended on a governmental alliance with the DC, and the party became characterized by the same sort of clientelistic relations as the DC.¹⁹ As a result, the political space on the left was monopolized by the PCI as the largest opposition party. Up to 1956, the PCI consolidated its primacy within the socialist alignment and was the center of working class opposition to DC-controlled governments.

By the mid-50's, with the Cold War in full gear, the basic outlines of the Italian party system were in place, outlines that would persist until the early 1970's. The national government was dominated by a center-right party that had difficulty maintaining a stable electoral majority. The major opposition party, the PCI, was excluded from government participation and a number of smaller parties

acted as swing parties or coalition partners. The two major parties expressed a basic polarization of the Italian electorate along a left-right spectrum, where involvement in the social networks of religion and the left were the explanatory variables for political partisan identification in Italy.²⁰ These two parties represented major subcultures, Catholic and socialist, with pervasive and deeply rooted ideological traditions. As Barnes has noted, a particular feature of the Italian party system has been the pervasiveness and inflexibility of its political traditions²¹ that penetrate into and politicize a broad range of institutions and associations in civil society.

This description of the Italian party system would be incomplete without reference to the role of the Church, which occupied a crucial role in the postwar political situation. The Church intervened politically in major campaigns, demanding obedience to its authority by Catholic voters. The new postwar Constitution had included the 1929 Concordat between Church and state which confirmed the Church's strong position. Through its close relationship to the DC, the Church exerted considerable political influence in government policies and electoral campaigns, and contributed to the polarization of the political system in postwar Italy.

The Church's involvement in a wide range of social and welfare institutions enabled its conservative ideology to become particularly entrenched in all aspects of Italian

society. Often Church institutions replaced or supplemented the inadequate state services (hospitals, schools, homes for the aged), and provided key socialization functions that influenced the everyday life of Italians. As Caldwell notes: "This retention by a non-state institution of a whole series of responsibilities which have been associated with the growth of the capitalist state in other European countries ... highlights the weakness of the Italian state in its failure to assume responsibility for cultural and servicing functions...".²²

Legally, the Concordat established Catholicism as the state religion and guaranteed religious instruction in all state schools. Christian marriage was the form of marriage sanctioned by the state and religious marriage ceremonies were given civil status. The Christian family thus became a part of the new state.

The Church is also a powerful economic institution in Italy; the Lateran Accords authorized religious institutions to hold property, exempted them from taxes and compensated the Church for its loss of property at the time of unification, with a financial settlement that became the basis of a financial empire. Among other things, this meant that the Church resisted any reforms that would substitute public institutions funded by the state for Church institutions. The economic power of the Church, in combination with its organizational strength and ties to the DC, meant that the Church continued to press for the

retention of existing laws and institutions that supported its influence and against reform legislation that might undermine it, particularly in the realm of issues regarding women and the family.

The Economic Miracle and the Center Left

The political conditions characteristic of postwar Italy were transformed during the late 1950's and early 1960's, with economic growth constituting one of the main sources of change. During this period, referred to as the "economic miracle", steady economic growth was accompanied by alterations in the old governing alliances and the inauguration of a center-left coalition between the DC and the PSI. The Center-Left government provided the immediate context within which protest mobilizations would arise by the late 1960's.

The focus of economic development during the postwar reconstruction had been the development of large-scale industry in the North at the expense of agriculture in the South and small business. The fundamental mechanisms for this development were technological modernization, industrial rationalization and low wages. Between 1950 and 1963 economic growth consisted of a cyclical boom produced by a sharp increase in exports in 1959, followed by an increase in productive investment and internal consumer demand.²³ Accompanying this growth was a shift in the labor market from agriculture to industry, with mass migrations

from the South, to the North and abroad. The composition of the labor force changed with a larger percentage of Southern immigrants and young people participating. These workers were less skilled, less likely to be unionized and were less divided along traditional party lines. In addition, this process of rapid industrialization meant increasing urbanization, and the breakup of traditional cultural patterns in Italy. This modernizing process was not accompanied by political reforms that could address the basic social problems engendered by the economic development-- sanitation, health, housing and the effects of the explosion in mass education. There were severe structural cleavages in Italian society that weren't created during the 'economic miracle', but were exacerbated by it-- particularly the ever-widening disparity between a modernized industrial North and an underdeveloped agricultural South.

Although the DC had been the dominant force in the government throughout the 50's, the inherent instability in the ruling government coalitions was reflected in the clash of political factions and the fall of successive centrist governments in the mid-50's. By that time, there was considerable interest on the part of the DC in checking the PCI's increasing electoral strength in central Italy by bringing the Socialists into the government. Enlightened elements of the DC were in favor of governmental planning and an increase in government intervention in the economy in

strategic locations, such as the banks, mass media, and certain industries, such as the electrical industry, which it nationalized in November, 1962. This period was known as the "apertura alla sinistra" (the opening to the left) in which the DC debated internally whether or not to launch an alliance with the PSI. Such a government, it was suggested by certain sectors of the DC, would have a more stable majority, pass some needed reforms and isolate the PCI even more effectively. For the PSI, who between 1948 and 1953 had lost votes to the PCI²⁴, their policy of collaboration with the PCI made decreasing sense. Moreover, after the Soviet Union's 20th Congress in 1956, and Khrushchev's revelations, the PSI moved further away from the PCI ideologically and was interested in differentiating itself altogether from the PCI with the electorate. In 1963, the PSI and the DC entered into a governmental alliance, creating a Center-Left government for the first time since the immediate postwar period. This government was based on a program of economic and social reforms and on state economic planning. This Center-Left alliance was facilitated by divisions between Communists and Socialists as the Christian Democrats responded to the challenge of the Communist Party. It was also a response to the unprecedented modernization of Italian society in the 1960's-- with expanding production, social mobility, increasing mass consumption and secularization under the pontificate of Pope John XXIII.²⁵

The Center-Left government developed a national agenda for social and economic reform, reflected in a Five-Year Plan announced in 1967, that would more equitably distribute the gains of the post-war economic miracle. This Plan was almost a complete failure.²⁶ Of the reforms planned by the Center-Left (schools, universities, health, welfare and urban reforms) only the nationalization of the electrical industry and some school reform were achieved. As Melucci notes, one might consider as 'delayed reforms' of the Center Left the creation of the regional governments in 1970 (as set out in the Constitution) and the Worker's Statute passed in 1970,²⁷ but these are generally considered the result of pressure from the worker's mobilizations rather than an achievement of the Center-Left. Tarrow²⁸ sees these reforms as indicative of policy activism on the part of the Center-Left in the late 60's, although he acknowledges that they were passed under pressure from already existing protest movements. The failure to achieve the reforms that had been promised was to have a profound effect on the delegitimization of the government and the emergence of the mass mobilizations of 1968 and 1969.

Rapid social and economic changes during the 60's--urbanization, emigration from the South to the North, increasing consumerism, a rise in mass higher education--were not addressed by the Center-Left; it was unable to develop a coherent economic policy and transform the clientelistic public sector, so that social reforms could be

enacted. The rapid economic growth of the early 1960's and the experiment with a Center-Left government formally committed to reforms, gave way in the late 1960's to a crisis in both the economic and the political system. By the end of the decade, the failures of the Center-Left resulted in a changed political climate, increasing the demands for reforms and political participation by new social actors, and benefitting the PCI.²⁹ The upheavals of 1968-9 marked the effective end of the Center-Left, although the governing coalition continued formally until the general elections of 1972.

Women and Political Participation

We have briefly outlined the contours of the political system, as well as transformations in the economic and political realm that provide the backdrop to the protest mobilizations of the late 1960's. We now turn to women's political participation in the postwar period, as well as social and economic factors, that will help to explain the specific context of women's mobilization into a movement. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the left parties as potential allies for the women's movement.

In the postwar period, there was every indication that political participation among women would increase. The vote was extended to women in 1946 and women began to participate in large numbers in the electoral process (during the 1950's and 60's the figures are roughly 90% for both men and

women). Women had been active in the Resistance, often playing important leadership roles. The socialist political tradition explicitly championed the equality of women; in addition, Socialist and Communist women working in the Resistance had also experienced considerable equality in their clandestine political work.³⁰ The movement for women's emancipation began with the Resistance, as groups of women who were active in the anti-Fascist cause formed into organizations after the war. By 1943 the "Groups for the Defense of Women and Aid to those Fighting for Liberty" had been established with the express purpose of "organizing women to win their rights as women and Italians, in the context of the struggle of the Italian people for the liberation of their country".³¹ The majority of these women were Communists and Socialists, although initially there were representatives of all the anti-Fascist lay parties. By 1946, women had been granted the right to vote for the first time, and the political parties, aware of the need to politically organize women, established women's organizations or sections within each party, which were principally designed to 'deliver' women's votes.³² The Christian Democrats, for example, organized the Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF) in 1945 as their women's organization and the Liberal Party established the Lega Nazionale Femminile. The Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) had originally been formed of representatives from all the anti-Fascist parties, but soon after the war, women from the DC

and the Liberal Party left to join the women's organizations of their own parties. Thus from the beginning, the movement for women's rights was marked by political partisanship. Of these organizations, the UDI was the most oriented towards winning women's economic and legal rights.

Despite the expectations raised by women's participation in the Resistance and winning the right to vote, women's political influence in government did not significantly increase during the postwar years. In terms of women's votes, their participation was consistently high in the 1950's and 60's. Yet women were rarely candidates for and members of Parliament. Women's total presence in parliament actually declined from 1948 to 1968 from 4.5% to 3.1%.³³ The data are similar with respect to local elections and membership in regional, provincial and municipal governing bodies for the period 1956-70.³⁴

Political socialization in Italy occurred through the organizations of each party that carried out recruitment functions, for women as well as men. For the DC, the Church was also a major source of support, as it often mobilized women to vote for the party. Sixty-one percent of women between 1945-61 continued to vote for the DC, a consistently higher number than men, attributable to the greater influence of the Church's electoral campaigns and propaganda on women.³⁵ This is borne out by the even higher percentage of female votes in small towns and villages where the influence of the Church is much stronger than in urban

centers. Thus women during the 1950's and 60's were considered a bedrock of support for the DC- the Pope had even called on Catholic women to go out and make their votes count, to "leave the trenches of the house and family so as to better defend the house and family".³⁶ Women in Catholic Action, the main source of recruitment for the DC, as well as in the Catholic youth organization were sure sources of support for the DC's policies on women. It was only in the late 1960's that an organized Catholic dissent formed to the left of the DC and at that point, women in Catholic Action and the CIF began to clash with the Church and the party.³⁷ But in the 1950's and 60's, women were recruited into the DC without playing any autonomous political role. They were counted for their votes and membership but they had no leadership role in the party or as candidates representing it. The number of women DC parliamentarians constituted, on the average, 2.8% of the total in Parliament between 1946 and 1964, while there was an almost total absence of women from the National Council of the DC (1.6%) and its leadership (.4%).

The PCI as well faced the problem of recruiting women in the postwar period; the party was particularly concerned with attracting women workers, who were practically absent from the party's membership. A major role in the recruitment of women into the party, especially into leadership positions, was played by the UDI. Almost all women leaders active in the PCI had been activists first in

the UDI. The organization of the UDI was in regional, provincial and local committees that often were in close cooperation with local PCI sections. The UDI, although nominally an independent, inter-party organization, acted throughout the 1950's and 60's as a transmission belt for PCI policies. Within the party, the organizational vehicle for women was the women's cells, organized to encourage the participation of women, as well as women's commissions which were to be responsible for formulating policy on women's issues. The institution of women's cells created opposition on the part of women who did not want to be 'ghettoized' into separate female cells, and by the early 1960's the practice had been effectively abandoned.

The membership of women in the PCI remained at about one-quarter of the total membership throughout this period.³⁸ Although the PCI had the highest relative proportion of women parliamentarians amongst the political parties, the figures were still quite small-- between 1946-63, an average of 8% of Communist seats were held by women (with a decline from the 1948 level of 11.2% to a 1963 level of 6.4%). In the direction of the party, 5.6% were women, as compared with 8.1% in 1969.⁴⁰

From an initial membership of 400,000 in 1946, the UDI surged to a strength of one million in 1949-50 (which was double the female membership of the PCI in those years). The UDI then retained a membership of about 400,000 during the 1950's but sharply declined at the beginning of the

1960's.³⁹ It was only at the end of the 60's, with the beginning of the feminist movement, that the UDI began to increase its membership again.

Notwithstanding its lack of autonomy from the PCI, the UDI was the major women's organization mobilizing for women's rights and issues in the postwar period. The political program of the UDI, launched at its 1st Party Congress in October, 1945, aimed at equal rights to education for women, political participation and equal rights within the family. These demands were accompanied by general calls for the need to fight female illiteracy, to raise the cultural level of women so their political participation would increase. But the basis for this was that advancing the cultural level of women would "renew and revitalize the family institution which is, for us, the fundamental and irreplaceable basis of society".⁴¹ These positions were undoubtedly conditioned by the need to proceed cautiously vis a vis the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XII had announced in that same month that: "Every woman is destined to be a mother. Women cannot otherwise see or fully understand the problem of human life except as family matters.... Equal rights, with the abandonment of the home where she was queen, has subjected women to the same burdens and work time as men".⁴²

Despite this program, much of its activities in the late 1940's and early 1950's were devoted to electoral support for the Communist Party and national political issues such

as the fight against monopolies, for agrarian unions, and for the nationalization of the electrical industry. When the UDI mobilized on women's issues, it was often on behalf of women workers, reflecting the PCI concern with recruiting women workers, and consolidating its influence within the working class. In this sphere, with the DC in control of the government, the UDI helped in achieving several gains for women. In 1950 Parliament passed a law for the "physical and economic care of working mothers", giving paid maternity leave and guarantee of job security for pregnant women and mothers,⁴³ a law introduced by the PCI in 1948. The women's associations of the left also pushed in the early 1950's for equal wages for women; an agreement was signed by the industrial confederations a decade later.

Until the 1960's, the UDI remained fundamentally tied to an emancipationist strategy, winning the right for women to work and fighting for legal and economic equality. As we have noted, the UDI lacked organizational autonomy from the PCI, although in 1956 an attempt was made to reinforce the inter-party nature of the organizations by ceasing to give electoral support to the PCI as an organization.⁴⁴ In 1964, at its National Congress, the UDI's position began to change as it began to open up discussion on a series of other issues, such as sexual education, equality within the family and divorce. Then too, the issue of autonomy was once more raised, but not resolved. It was not until the 1970's that the association became transformed; before that time, issues

such as the family, the Church, sexuality, birth control and abortion were not an integral part of the UDI program. Although the UDI moved within a reformist framework in its goals and its relationship to institutional politics, nonetheless it helped create a 'culture of equality' that affected the political system, particularly in terms of women's right to work, education and access to careers.

The PCI and the Participation of Women

The Union of Italian Women, as we have seen, played a subordinate role to the PCI. It reflected the often contradictory position of the left in terms of women's issues, as it often pushed for legislation guaranteeing women access to work and equal wages, while failing to address fundamental issues of the family. Officially, the PCI supported emancipation and equal rights measures, but saw women's role as part of the generalized political struggle. The party was an important agent in pressuring for whatever women's rights legislation was passed in the 1950's and 60's, and an important ally of the existing women's movement. Yet it was remarkably traditional in most of its analysis of women's condition. While women did occupy a proportionally greater number of leadership positions in the PCI than in other political parties, the policies followed by the party were not the product of women's autonomous elaboration within the party.

To a large degree, the stance of the PCI on women's issues was the result of the political and cultural environment enveloping all political parties in Italy. Yet given the PCI's generally progressive stance on women's rights (which was true of the Socialist Party as well) and its claim to be a party representing women's rights to full democratic participation, the explanation for its lack of vigorous leadership on women's issues must be found elsewhere. The explanation involves a complex interplay between immediate political concerns about building legitimacy as a party, and the vestiges of traditional Marxist theories on women and the working class.

Togliatti, the Party Secretary in the postwar period, addressed the "women's question" repeatedly, stressing that women's emancipation was one of the "major problems of a renewal of the Italian state and society" and that "the problem of women's emancipation must be resolved in all its aspects; economic, political, social and moral ...".⁴⁵ Yet the PCI's policy throughout the postwar period was marked by a fear that the Catholic masses would be scared off by more 'radical' positions on women's issues. The anti-Communism of the Cold War engendered a defensive posture about these issues, as the PCI fought to counter the Church's propaganda.

In all its relations with the Church, the PCI was reluctant to confront the political role of the Church and its ideological hegemony. The importance of Catholicism for

the masses of Italy working people and the desire to win legitimacy among Catholic voters, worked to push the PCI to avoid conflict over women and the family. In part, this reflected the party's view that only a broad alliance of democratic forces, including Catholics, the middle classes and women, among others, could renew Italian society. In this light, Togliatti affirmed that the problem of women's emancipation could not be the problem of a single class or party, but must be undertaken on the part of all Italian women.⁴⁶ The movement for women's rights to education, equal work opportunity and legal equality in marriage was seen by the party as demanding basic democratic, not socialist, rights that would advance Italy toward a democratic society.

The cause of the backwardness of women's social status was seen as economic in nature, and not the product of religious institutions and ideology. Thus the role of the Church in perpetuating women's status was never examined. Instead, the assumption was that the uneven economic development of Italy had produced inequalities in social and civil relations between men and women. Togliatti believed that women's entry into the labor force would provide the key to their emancipation. "The key to the solution of the problem of emancipation is that women have access to that which, in social relations, is the substance of the human being, and that is work ... This has to become the departure point for all women, the decisive issue."⁴⁷ This explains the importance of work-related issues as the

cornerstone of the PCI's policy on women. Women workers, in particular, represented an area to be organized into the unions and the party. The dominant cleavage in society was that of social classes. Although searching for social and political alliances, the PCI was the party of the working class, and within that perspective, women's oppression had no specific theoretical basis. There was also no essential analysis of the central role of the Catholic Church in perpetuating inequalities for women. The party was therefore completely unprepared to analyze and assess the kinds of social changes occurring in the 1960's, and in particular, their impact on women.

Socio-Economic Conditions for Women in the 50's and 60's

The political divisions in Italy undermined struggles for women's equality. The Constitution itself expressed both progressive sentiment in favor of equal rights for women and the desire to contain women within the family and traditional roles. Although the Constitution had articles guaranteeing equality under the law, within the family, equal pay and rights to a career, its language did not firmly support emancipation for women. Article 37 on equal pay affirmed that the "working woman has the same rights and, for equal labor, the same remuneration which are due the working man. The conditions of labor must permit the fulfillment of her essential family function and assure to mother and child a special adequate protection,"⁴⁸

underlining this ambivalence toward issues of work and family for women. Within the family, Italian women did not have equal property rights and authority. The Constitution, by state recognition of the Christian family, legitimated traditional roles within it. Legally, the subordination of women was written into the Constitution in other ways, some of which were the subject of legislation during the 1970's (particularly the family law passed in 1975). The subordination of women to their husbands was reflected in many sections of the Civil Code relating to adultery, custody of children, and legal notions of family honor. There was a series of legal practices that were backward in comparison with those of other capitalist, industrialized nations, and which were increasingly at odds with the nature of social and economic modernization within Italy. This was recognized even by the enlightened segments of the Christian Democratic Party; a reform of the Legal Code, particularly with regard to women and the family, was part of the program of the Center-Left, but the legislation was not passed until the mid-1970's. There was thus an enormous lag in the responsiveness of government policy to the evident social changes occurring with regard to women and the family.

The economic miracle in Italy had affected women's participation in the labor force. In several regions of the North and in several industrial sectors, there was a massive entry of women into the work force between the late 1950's and 1964 without a reduction in the number of male workers;

in Lombardy, for example, there was an increased of 6.8% between 1958-63.⁴⁹ Then, starting with the recession of 1964 and extending into the late 1960's, there was once more a decline in women's labor force participation, as one million women were expelled from the work force. Although this decline was true for young male workers as well, the rate was nowhere near as great. This exit of women represented agricultural workers above all else, but affected industrial workers as well. The average skill level was lowered as well, and many more women left the labor force once they married. This meant a younger female labor force and a less skilled one.

Women's legal equality remained an apparently distant goal in the 1960's, while the nature of women's participation in the labor force contributed to a strengthening of more conservative views of women's role. This drop in 'official' labor force participation was accompanied by an increase in the underground economy, which meant a rise in domestic piece work and other forms of marginal work for women.⁵⁰ Women were thus able to contribute to family income, but were maintained in traditional domestic roles.

The economic miracle had meant that many families in the industrial regions had larger incomes with a consequent rise in consumption that, for the first time, approached that of other capitalist countries. In a period of declining labor force participation for women, this increased demand

for consumer goods changed the relationship between private resources and needs, changing the role of the family. Public services for the family were completely underdeveloped. Although health and welfare policies covered almost all salaried workers, the level of health care was quite low and other basic services -- education, mass transportation, housing, daycare-- were inadequate to the burgeoning needs of the population. This incapacity of public services meant that during the 1960's there was greater need for women to supply those services within the family. Thus there was an intensification of women's exploitation through provision of services and domestic piece work employment.⁵¹

In its general outlines, the 1960's was a period of re-privatization of the family, fostered by economic changes and buttressed by conservative Catholic ideology. Balbo notes that, in terms of the possible effects of this on the political participation of women, one can point to the decline already mentioned in the UDI's membership; in 1960 it had only 200,000 members.⁵² The political choices made by the DC, to favor the private solution of social needs, rather than public solutions to social problems, also fostered the increasing isolation of women within the family. There were, however, countervailing tendencies working against a total re-privatization of women's roles, particularly for certain sectors of the female population. The percentage of women entering universities, which had remained fairly stable in the 1950's, underwent a sharp

increased by the mid to late 1960's.⁵³ Average family size was reduced as well, as access to contraceptives, even though illegal, increased.⁵⁴ This meant that extra-familial roles were possible as reference points for young women in the development of their identity. Finally, although we have highlighted the inequality of women reflected in the Italian legal structure, there were important emancipatory laws passed during the postwar period that improved the economic and political status of women, and provided another model of women's roles.

Our survey of the party system in postwar Italy has shown the degree that the Church intervened in the state, helping to explain the survival and resilience of archaic institutions, and the resistance to progressive legislation on women. This involvement of the Church in the political system also meant that, when they did emerge, women's issues could immediately threaten to polarize the political system.

Of the political parties, the PCI, although the most supportive of women's rights, particularly in terms of access to work, never encouraged the autonomous political participation of women, nor did it present a radical analysis of women's issues. The PSI, another possible ally of women's rights had, with its participation in the Center-Left, shown itself impotent to force passage of needed social reforms, while its record on the participation of

women within the party was dismal.

The Center-Left and its failures provided the immediate precipitating cause for the movements of the late 1960's. Social and economic conditions for women in this period created contradictory messages for women, emphasizing both re-privatization within the family and emancipation in some aspects of public life. Those contradictions would be heightened in a particular social context-- that of the university-- and in a particular historical moment, with the worker and student movements of 1968-69.

Chapter 2- Notes

1. See Garner and Zald, "Social Movement Sector", pp 1-2.

2. This point was made by Almond and Verba in their 1960's study of Italian political life; see Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

3. Samuel Barnes, Representation in Italy: Institutionalized Traditions and Electoral Choice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 17.

4. See Barnes, Ibid.; Guiseppe Di Palma, Surviving without Governing: The Italian Parties in Parliament (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

5. See Giorgio Galli, Il Bipartismo Imperfetto: Communisti e Democristiani in Italia (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1966).

6. Donald Blackmer, "Continuity and Change in Postwar Italian Communism in Italy and France" in Blackmer and Tarrow, eds., Communism in Italy and France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 21-68.

7. Frederic Spotts, Theodor Weiser, Italy: A Difficult Democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 295.

8. See Blackmer, "Continuity and Change", p. 55.

9. See Guiseppe DiPalma, "Christian Democracy: The end of Hegemony?" in Howard Penniman, ed. Italy at the Polls: The Parliamentary Elections of 1976, (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977) p. 127.

10. Ibid., p. 127.

11. Ibid., p. 128.

12. Palmiro Togliatti expressed this in his La via italiana al socialismo (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1964).

13. Ibid.

14. This is shown by John Cammett in his Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1967); see especially pp. 204-5.

15. See Blackmer, "Continuity and Change", p. 51.
16. See Barkan, Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Worker's Movement Since 1945 (New York: Praeger, 1984). p. 17.
17. Blackmer notes that although the PCI acted as an opposition party throughout the postwar period, accepting the institutions and procedures of the political system, only after 1956 "has the PCI come to accept its role of opposition in an explicit and fully conscious manner and to act accordingly"; see "Continuity and Change", p. 54.
18. See Peter Lange, "Crisis and Consent, Change and Compromise: Dilemmas of Italian Communism in the 70's", Western European Politics 2 (October 1979), p. 265.
19. See Gianfranco Pasquino, "The Italian Socialist Party: An Irreversible Decline?" in Howard Penniman, ed., Italy at the Polls: The Parliamentary Elections of 1976 (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute, 1977), p. 191
20. See Paolo Farneti, The Italian Party System (1945-1980) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p.85.
21. See Barnes, Representation in Italy, p. 14.
22. Lesley Caldwell, "Church, state and family: the women's movement in Italy", in Annette Kuhn, AnnMarie Wolpe, eds. Feminism and Materialism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 70.
23. See Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 50.
24. In 1946, the PSI and PCI votes were equal, at about 20% each; by 1963, the PCI had 22,7% to the PSI's 14.2%. (The source for these figures is Pasquino, "The Italian Socialist Party" in Penniman, Italy at the Polls (1976), p. 185.)
25. See Guisepppe DiPalma, "Christian Democracy: The End of Hegemony?" in Penniman, Italy at the Polls, p. 127.
26. Ibid., p. 130.
27. See Alberto Melucci, L'invenzione del presente: Movimenti, identita, bisogni collettivi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982), p. 102.
28. See Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 49.

29. See Farneti, The Italian Party System, pp. 73-4.
30. Sciroppo recounts the histories of women activists in the PCI in Erica Sciroppo, ed., Donna, Privato, Politico: Storie personali di 21 donne del PCI (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1979).
31. See Giulia Ascoli, "L'UDI tra emancipazione e liberazione (1943-1964)" in Ascoli et.al., La Questione Femminile in Italia Dal '900 Al Oggi (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 1979), p. 111.
32. See Joni Lovenduski, Women and European Politics: Contemporary Feminism and Public Policy (Brighton, Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), p. 90.
33. Data is from Marisa Ferrari-Occhionero, "Il ruolo della donna nella vita politica del paese", Sociologia 2-3, p.18.
34. Ibid., p. 29.
35. See Maria Weber, Il Voto delle Donne (Turin: A. Guerrini & Co., 1977), p. 6.
36. Ibid, p.17.
37. See Lidia Menapace, La Democrazia Cristiana (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1974), p. 56.
38. Farneti, The Italian Party System, p. 148.
39. Weber, Il voto delle donne, p. 69.
40. For these and other figures on women's participation in the PCI, see Marzio Barbagli and Piernigiorgio Corbetta, "Base sociale del PCI e movimenti collettivi" in Martinelli and Pasquino, eds., La politica nell'Italia che cambia (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1978), pp.158-60.
41. See Guiletta Ascoli, "L'UDI tra emancipazione e liberazione", p. 111.
42. Fiamma Camarlinghi and Nadia Spano, La questione femminile nella politica del PCI, 1921-63 (Rome: Edizioni Donna e Politica, 1972), p. 142.
43. See Annamaria Galoppini, Il Lungo Viaggio verso la Parità (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1980), p. 177.
44. As Ergas points out, this reflected a change in PCI policy toward its mass organizations; see Ergas, "1968-79", p. 257.

45. Biancamaria Frabotta, Femminismo e lotta di classe (1970-1973) (Rome: Savelli, 1975), p. 237.

46. Togliatti, in 1945, had declared, "We are against posing any problem which would destroy or weaken the family unit"; see Palmiro Togliatti, L'emancipazione femminile (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1973), p. 39.

47. Ibid., p. 141.

48. As quoted in Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 32.

49. Figures are from Laura Balbo, Stato di famiglia: Bisogni, privato, collettivo (Milan: Etas Libri, 1976), p.79.

50. Ibid., p. 66.

51. Ibid., pp. 83-88.

52. Ibid., p. 88.

53. In 1952-3, the women entering universities were 25.5% of the total; 28.9% in 1962-3; and 36.1% by 1967-8. Figures are from Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", p. 554.

54. In 1951, the average family was 4 persons; in 1961, 3.6 and 3.3 by 1971. See Chiara Saraceno, "Tempo della famiglia e discontinuita femminile" in Balbo and Siebert-Zahar, Interferenze: Lo stato, la vita familiare, la vita privata (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1979), p. 238.

Chapter 3: The Movement Mobilizes

By 1968 the political climate in Italy was beginning to profoundly change. The electorate's dissatisfaction with the governing coalition was clearly demonstrated in the parliamentary elections: the total vote for the left grew, while the share of the PCI's vote within the left increased. The PCI, which had consistently opposed the Center-Left coalition, and which had assumed an increasingly critical stance toward the Soviet Union, had gained legitimacy among the electorate.

The liberalization of the Catholic Church under Pope John XXIII and its expressed concern for social justice indirectly contributed to a climate in which practicing Catholics could find compatibilities between their religion and the political goals of the left for social reforms. In addition, the war in Vietnam produced a wave of protest and mobilization, organized chiefly by the PCI and the CGIL. In this changed context, two major areas of the social system erupted: the factory and the university.

An unprecedented cycle of protest involving workers and students inaugurated a decade of social mobilization that came to affect many areas of social life. The bankruptcy of the Center-Left led to a crisis of governance, and the

withdrawal of delegation from the political parties, seen as incapable of mediating the demands for participation and reform of the new collective actors. It is in this context, where the hegemony of the political parties over civil society was fundamentally challenged, that the feminist movement came to life.

Hot Autumn: The Worker's Movement

In 1968 there were many indications that worker militance among industrial workers was increasing. This militance was made possible by a labor market favorable to the workers, increases in factory profits and the greater tolerance of political dissent. The labor confederation, the CGIL-CISL-UIL,¹ which had been weakened by Cold War repression in the factories, began two campaigns in 1968 which had the effect of increasing the level of mobilization among workers. One was aimed at the reform of the pension system and the other at the elimination of regional variations in wage scales. Lack of success in their attempts to pressure the government on the pension plan led the confederation to call a general strike in November, 1968, which had enormous adherence to and support from workers. Accompanying these more organized efforts by the unions and the union confederation was an accelerated rate of strike activity, work stoppages and protests by groups of workers in different industries and factories, often initiated outside of the union hierarchy. Whereas the campaigns for

legislation and the general strike were led by the unions (or by skilled workers with past experience of political organizing), the growing protests were characterized by the greater participation of unskilled, young and women workers. They initiated new forms of struggle and injected a different content into the labor conflicts.²

A vast wave of national and local strikes erupted in the fall of 1969 with 5.5 million workers, or one-quarter of the labor force, walking off their jobs.³ Many of these workers challenged the right of the union to represent them, arguing for forms of direct democracy in the factories and expressing a new combativeness in the forms of their struggles (such as 'internal' demonstrations within the factories, wildcat strikes, assemblies). Their demands had a different content as well, with two underlying tendencies, toward egalitarianism and control over the work process. Workers' demands were aimed at the hierarchical organization of the factory, insisting on the right of workers to determine aspects of the production process, including work schedules, speed of production and health and safety conditions. The themes introduced by the young militant workers of a socialist transformation of the nature of production in Italy, of greater worker self-management, of democratic planning of the economy, were adopted by many unions as general goals which shifted the labor movement significantly to the left in this period.

While many of the worker activists were critical of the unions and interested in circumventing their authority by setting up autonomous structures for decisionmaking in the factories, the unions did reassert their control over the rank and file by 1969.⁴ The worker's movement succeeded in altering the nature of the labor movement in Italy in two fundamental ways: within, by an integration of many of its demands, particularly with respect to work conditions and the institution of a permanent delegate and council system representing both union and non-union workers; and without, by altering the relationship of the unions to the political system. The union confederation emerged from this period numerically strengthened-- its membership went from 4.5 million in 1968 to 6 million in 1973.⁵

The mobilized state of the working class gave impetus to the CGIL-CISL-UIL to embark on a reform strategy, demanding that the government negotiate directly with them on a series of reform proposals, bypassing Parliament and the political parties, arguing that the Center-Left had failed to institute major structural reforms. The unions, partly in a bid to win greater support from workers, and partly because the nature of the worker's militance and mobilization enabled the confederation to press for wider reforms, began to work on the dual front of collective bargaining and political reforms. In acting as the political representation of the workers, the unions' new role clashed with the political parties, especially the PCI. Although the PCI

initially saw the unions as channelling worker militance, it soon saw the unions' new role as a threat to their monopoly as the political representative of the working class.⁶

The Student Movement

The first outbursts of student demonstrations and occupations of the universities began in 1967, in response to a proposed law on university reform, but the acme of protest was in 1968, when protest engulfed the entire university system, as more than half the universities were occupied or disrupted by demonstrations.⁷ The student population had grown precipitously in the late 1960's and there had been no fundamental modernization of the university structure. The war in Vietnam had provoked the beginnings of mass protest as students participated in massive numbers. The student movement in France, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the political movements in the United States-- all were immediate contributory factors to a rejuvenation of the area to the left of the PCI.

The student movement was characterized by two tendencies. Some student groups saw the relationship of authority represented in the university as the principal enemy to fight. Analysis looked to the links between the school and institutions (Church, family, police, judiciary) in terms of the relations of power that were replicated from one institution to another. This anti-authoritarian branch

of the student movement would later have an important influence on feminist ideology. For others in the movement, there was an attempt to 'legitimate' the student movement on the basis of more traditional Marxist categories; student contestation was seen in terms of the capital/labor contradiction, with the student as a "social figure within the working class and, as such, subordinate" to working class interests.⁸ These two tendencies expressed themselves in either a move to constitute 'student power' as a basis for a mass political movement, or the student movement as a recruitment source for the working class.

During 1968 the movement maintained its unitary mass character; but by late 1968-9, one part of the movement became attracted towards already existing Marxist groups, with Leninist organization and a body of theoretical doctrine giving primacy to the struggles of the working class. Others were attracted to groups incorporating more of the ideas and methods of the student movement- these were the extra-parliamentary groups comprising the New Left in Italy. All these groups embraced the worker's movement of 1969, although they varied in their analysis of struggles outside the factory and the role of other social actors. Groups like Potere Operaio (Worker's Power) and Avanguardia Operaia (Worker's Vanguard) saw economic struggles within the factory as inherently political, and focused on organizing workers against the reformism of the unions and the parties. Lotta Continua (Continuous Struggle), saw a

need to link spontaneous struggles in the factories with those in the educational system, neighborhoods, etc. More than the other New Left groups, Lotta Continua retained (at least in its rhetoric) more of the anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical thrust of the student movement. The Manifesto group, composed largely of intellectuals who had left the PCI in 1969, stressed the importance of new areas of social conflict-- the school, the neighborhood-- while supporting the worker's councils established in the factories as a result of the worker's movement.

The student movement, which had begun as an anti-authoritarian movement for university reform, very quickly was transformed into the anti-capitalist formations of the New Left. The worker's movement, essentially a response to transformations in the productive system and the rationalization of the enterprise taking place in the 1960's, also broadened its political challenge.

There were important shared aspects to these mobilizations. The demand for direct participation and the rejection of political delegation were elements common to both movements. The demand, on the part of young workers, for the elimination of hierarchical skill categories, as well as aspects of worker's self-management, was reflected in the egalitarian, participatory ideology of the student movement. Both movements signalled the entry of new collective actors onto the political scene, carrying new demands for political participation. New political actors,

new demands and new forms of contestation began to shift the boundaries of the political system to include spheres which had either been emarginated during the Cold War (for the working class) or which had never been addressed as political (students and youth). These mobilizations were an expression of a legitimation crisis in which key collective actors withdrew delegation from the political system, and relations between the parties and social actors were dramatically transformed.⁹

This general period of mobilization provided a context in which the political 'rules of the game' were thrown into question, and where the relations between traditional political actors were disrupted. Ergas has argued that it is in just such a systemic crisis that women have historically been able to enter the political marketplace and collectively negotiate their status,¹⁰ utilizing the space created by other collective actors. The feminist movement, arising within the student movement and the New Left, only gradually established its autonomy from its 'parent' movement. We will now turn to a consideration of the emergence of the feminist movement.

The Feminist Movement

We have seen that in the late 1960's there were sharp social, economic and cultural changes occurring in Italy which constituted the essential preconditions for women's protest to develop. Scholars of contemporary feminist

movements have looked to many of the general factors we have mentioned-- a declining birthrate, participation of women in the labor force, the role of higher education-- as important background causes for the birth of these movements.¹¹ These conditions, as general as they are, do not in and of themselves, generate a new feminist movement. Instead, the Italian feminist movement arose in a very specific institutional setting-- the university-- and within a very specific political milieu-- the New Left. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the features of that setting, as if affected the possibilities and nature of feminist protest.

It is clear that the university played a crucial role in helping to galvanize women into collective action. The importance of the secular resocialization that can take place within the university experience is particularly true in Italy, with the overriding influence of the Church. Within the university, women were able to break away from their families and from a traditional model of women's emancipation.¹² The university represented a sort of emancipatory island where women were free to interact with male students for the first time. Within this relatively emancipated institution, young women were caught up in the wave of protest that engulfed the universities. Many of those who would become feminists were first mobilized into the student movement,¹³ the youth organizations of the left parties or the intellectual groups forming in the late 1960's to the left of the PCI.

The early feminist documents were strongly marked by the language of the student movement and Marxist categories of analysis. The first stage of the movement occurred during the years from 1968-72. At this time women's collectives and groups began to meet, and emergent forms of organization developed, but one could not yet talk of a self-conscious and organized force for social and political change. Groups of women began to form within the student movement in 1968-69. For example, within the Rome student movement, the Women's Collectives published a Proposal for a Political Platform in 1969 that analyzed women's subordination within the class struggle, criticizing their 'comrades in struggle', yet arguing for a common 'revolutionary front' against capitalist exploitation.¹⁴ With the formation of the extra-parliamentary groups of the New Left, feminist ideas were also discussed by women in those groups and women's collectives began to appear inside the groups of the New Left by 1971. The genesis of the feminist movement from the student movement and the New Left is essential to an understanding of the unique features of the Italian feminist movement. As such, it requires some analysis.

Studies of the American feminist movement have pointed to the importance of participation in the civil rights movement and in the New Left for one strain of the feminist movement.¹⁵ In Italy, the formation of the feminist movement from the groups of the left was much more uniform, and the connection between the New Left and the movement remained

close throughout the 70's. Especially in this early period, the feminist movement was marked quite profoundly by identification with the left.

The importance of the movement's complex relationship to the left can be expressed in various ways. In a practical political sense, participation in the student movement gave many women political resources-- the ability to speak publically, to write and communicate their ideas, to organize meetings.¹⁶ Women participating in the student movement belonged to a national movement with organizations and networks of individuals; this too provided a vital resource that helped the feminist movement to develop. Freeman has pointed to the importance of pre-existing networks of shared experience and interests in the emergence of movements-- she discusses it with specific reference to the American feminist movement and as a general prerequisite of movement development.¹⁷ The groups of the student movement provided women with an already organized context within which to meet collectively and share experiences. Many of the first feminist collectives came immediately out of existing groups and organizations, and although other sources of recruitment became important in the later development of the movement, militance in a New Left group was often the first step on path to involvement in the feminist movement. Other organized networks that provided recruitment into the early feminist groups were the intellectual groups of the critical New Left¹⁸ and the newly

reorganized Radical Party.¹⁹ In all cases, the previous organization or movement served to politicize and organize women and to provide a forum for communicating and publicizing their new ideas.

Although resources were available within the organizations of the student movement and the New Left, in order for women to mobilize into a movement, a changing perception of both themselves and the social world around them was necessary. Ferree and Miller have emphasized the cognitive processes in movement formation, when people begin to see "their outcomes as the result of controllable forces external to themselves",²⁰ a perception which delegitimizes the social system, and begin to develop an analysis which explains their reality and justifies their involvement in the new group. Access to organizational or financial resources alone does not explain the emergence of a movement, since an ideology is required which sifts the use of resources through the filter of beliefs and values.²¹ The New Left's critical reappropriation of Marxism provided women with a framework of ideas, a sense of how society functions, that could then be reworked and reconceptualized to address their own experiences-- it provided an "alternative education in critical social theory".²² In addition, participation in the student movement and the New Left offered women the possibility of living in a relatively egalitarian community; even when it did not live up to its ideology, it promoted ideas about equality essential to

encouraging women's mobilization.²³

The mobilizations which immediately preceded the feminist movement radically altered the participants' sense of their political efficacy. As we have discussed, the crisis of representation that the 60's movements expressed called into question the role of the parties as the mediators of social needs. New social protagonists went outside the traditional political channels and seemed to directly confront the state and its institutions. Within these mobilizations, women felt empowered as well, as they perceived "a basis for seeing their outcomes as the result of controllable forces external to themselves". This was a period of tremendous upheaval, in which fundamental social change seemed imminent and the possibility of sweeping away traditional values likely. One feminist activist, ex-militant in the student movement wrote during this period: "everything was motivated by a sense of great precariousness; by the expectation of that moment when we were going to overthrow the state, change the world; neither work nor study had any importance any longer."²⁴

In addition to this changing perception of political efficacy, there were specific elements of social analysis within Marxism and the New Left that became important to feminist ideology. In fact, much of the early literature of the movement resembles an attempt to 'apply' Marxism to women's condition. The idea of a material basis for relationships of exploitation and oppression within

capitalist society was the inheritance of traditional Marxism, but there were also aspects of critical Marxism contributed by the New Left that were adopted by feminists. The student movement and the New Left had arrived at an analysis of the power and authority relations within the family, largely through the works of the Frankfurt School and British critical sociology. The discovery of the connections between political domination and private family relations was to be extremely important to feminist analysis, as it was an essential part of the critique of the separation between the public and private spheres.

As Donolo has pointed out,²⁵ the Italian student movement could be analyzed in terms of three sorts of rebellions: one against the dysfunctions of archaic institutions (the university); the second a critique of the gap between social and political roles (particularly of the traditional left) so that one had to 'live one's contradictions in one's own name'; and lastly, the critique of capitalist rationalization, particularly as regards the cultural sphere. All three of these elements can also be found as essential components of feminist ideology. We shall see further on how these elements were fused into a new ideology. For the moment, it is important to note that the cognitive changes necessary for reinterpreting one's world were begun through participation in the New Left.

Organizationally as well, the feminist movement adopted important aspects of the student movement, where there had

been a critique of political vanguards and a rejection of political representation. Ideally, the groups of the student movement were to practice direct democracy in the effort to create non-authoritarian and egalitarian structures. The organizations of the student left bore little relationship to these ideals.

In fact, at the same time that women were incorporating important aspects of the ideology of the student movement, women began to turn this ideology against the men in these groups.²⁶ The student movement had produced strong male leaders; those who spoke for the movement at demonstrations and assemblies were almost invariably male. There was considerable sexual division of labor within the groups, with women doing much of the office work. This testimony from a member of one of the first feminist collectives is typical:

We are a group of comrades who have gone through the political experience of the student movement and the political groups that followed, that went beyond that movement. These political groups have reaffirmed our own systematic subordination: we're the girlfriend of 'that comrade'; those who you never hear, so that we've come to really believe we're inferior.²⁷

An exemplary cartoon from this period succinctly expresses the double standard that women experienced within the groups of the left: a young woman, disheveled, stands talking into the telephone propped up against her ear, a broom in one hand, a baby on her neck, another child at her feet and

says, "No, my husband's not in, he's out fighting for the oppressed."²⁸

Although women's sense of disillusionment was high, nonetheless the polemic of the new women's groups was focused more against the New Left than toward society at large, indicating that the sense of identification with the left was still strong. As Gramaglia has pointed out, the feminist movement arose in Italy as 'revolutionary pedagogy for the revolutionaries'.²⁹ For feminists, it was important not only to begin to define women's specificity, but to preserve an ideological location within the New Left in a way that distinguished themselves from the reformist, institutional women's movement.

The student movement, after its high point in 1968, began to revert back to more traditional organizational forms and, particularly after the worker's movement in 1969, to a greater emphasis on the importance of worker's struggles. This was then accompanied by an abandonment of many of the more innovative aspects of their organization and ideology.³⁰ Alberoni argues convincingly that the New Left saw itself as the 'true' revolutionary movement that would replace the PCI in guiding the working class movement. Although the means of their struggles were often innovative, ultimately their total identification with the goals of the traditional left made them adopt the organizational model of a vanguard party.³¹ Simultaneously, women began to leave the student movement, forming small groups that began to

formulate a specifically feminist analysis. The spread of these groups followed the mobilization pattern of conversion described by Ferree and Miller³² in which friendship and informal contacts are used to transmit information to potential converts. Adding to this conversion process was the influence of writings and information from other national feminist movements, particularly the French, German and United States movements.

This early stage of the feminist movement involved complex processes of differentiation from an existing movement, incorporating much of its ideology, language and paradigms.³³ Identification with the original movement remained high during this period, reinforced by the continued importance of the worker's movement and the New Left during the early 1970's.³⁴ In its early years the development of the Italian feminist movement incorporated a sort of defensive autonomy-- the attempt to both break away and differentiate the movement from other organizations and movements while maintaining its location within the New Left.

By 1971-2, the process of detachment from the student movement was underway. The documents from the early women's groups focus on the experience within the left, the need for separatism as a way to construct autonomy for women; a critique of the organizational forms and emancipatory strategies of the traditional women's movement; and the first new analyses of women's oppression and exploitation.

In 1971 writings from Cerchio Spezzato (Broken Circle), a collective of women's groups coming out of the student movement in Trent, in northern Italy, the theme of the necessity of separatism and autonomy was expressed:

We decided to meet autonomously, emerging from the individual ghetto of oppression, to grasp our own condition in depth and in the first person, seeing our condition as a social and therefore political problem... The decision to exclude men in this first phase was a specific political position. The oppressed must first affirm themselves through the freedom of their rebellion and then from this position of strength accept the confrontation.³⁵

Only within the small group would women discover the specific form of oppression that women experience, without subordination to the struggles of other oppressed groups.

We deluded ourselves that within the political group there would be an end to the oppression of women by men. We believed that automatically, the general consciousness of class oppression would raise these issues. This has not happened. The political groups reconfirmed our systematic subordination... like proletarians we don't know how to talk, especially when we have to compete with male language, created by others, about things carried out by others.³⁶

The small group constituted one of the two organizational bases for this first stage of the movement, in the sense that women were recruited either into a small group or into the larger collectives. Starting in 1970-71, the collectives of women within the student movement gave rise to smaller groups of women meeting to conduct consciousness-raising (the writings from the U.S. groups had been published in 1972 in the feminist journal Donna e bello).³⁷ The expansion

of the movement in this phase, however, depended more on the type of conversion experiences characteristic of the small group. This was largely because its focus on communication and personal experience allowed women to take the specific facts of their daily lives and construct a new sense of collective identity, creating links between the private and the political.

The small group was characterized by an attempt to implement egalitarianism, the absence of hierarchy, a rejection of leadership and the refusal to delegate authority to representatives. These had all been aspects of the student movement, although never fully realized. For the feminist movement, the nature of the small group was inextricably bound up with women's social experience of domination; this new form would both help women discover aspects of their oppression and begin to change that oppression within the group, as a prefiguration of wider social change.

The small group, as the basic unit of the movement, was counterposed to the organizations of the traditional women's movement. In particular, the emancipatory strategy, traditional organizational form and hierarchical leadership of the UDI were criticized, as the feminist movement sought to differentiate itself from its reformist predecessors. A new relationship between women and political life had to be constructed, but it could not involve using traditional forms and merely injecting them with a new definition of

issues. The goals of the traditional women's movement, equal rights and entry into the work force, were seen as aiming at the assimilation of women into the male world, goals which had failed to eliminate the sexual division of labor and change fundamental aspects of women's oppression.

The new feminist movement, starting from its Marxist inheritance, and drawing on United States feminist writing that was being translated and published in Italy, began to develop its own analysis of women's condition. This first stage of the movement was characterized both by the attempt to take Marxism and critical Marxism and apply it to the social category of women, while trying to develop a language and analysis that went beyond Marxism. Marxist theory was particularly important in terms of methodological premises, as feminist groups attempted to find a materialist basis for women's social existence within the family. The family became "one of the first goals of struggle."³⁸ The basic components of the new emerging analysis in these early years was that the family was used under capitalism as a unit for consumption and for social control as it privatizes individuals. The family, and not capitalism, was seen as the principle contradiction for women; within the family, women's submission and passivity is reproduced. The attempt to forge an analysis of the family was strongly conditioned by the desire to maintain a connection with the analytic traditions of the left and of the new political movements. As we have noted, much of the motivation for this was to

legitimate the feminist movement's own claims as a new political subject in the spectrum of the left. This was particularly true in the emergence of the influential group Lotta Femminista, and their analysis of women's domestic labor and their demand for wages for housework.³⁹ In terms of their analysis of the family, feminists succeeded both in establishing the role of women within a fundamental social institution, but also demonstrated how essential to the economy that institution was.

The theoretical analyses of the nascent movement served not only to maintain links to its originating movement and to locate it on the left, but also to find the unifying elements of women's condition that would define women as a specific social and political protagonist. This identification of themselves as the subject of collective oppression also pointed to their potential role in revolutionizing society. At the same time, feminists analyzed pointed to the patriarchal base of women's oppression in the family, in a perspective that went beyond capitalism and Marxism.

During this first stage we have seen the strong organizational and ideological links between the movement and the New Left. Although not yet coalesced into an organized, visible force, the movement had already begun to develop an analysis and organizational form of its own, had begun to differentiate itself from its 'parent' movement. In addition to the resources women had gained from their

participation in the New Left, fundamental themes and analyses of the New Left and Marxism were adapted and transformed in these early years, as the movement sought a definition of women's condition and an ideology. Ferree and Miller emphasize the importance of an ideology in the process of group identification, seeing ideology as "a flexible structure of beliefs about the nature of social relations, one's position in the social structure and the causes and consequences of social action".⁴⁰ The ideology of Marxism and the New Left were, in this sense, facilitating elements for the feminist movement, for they allowed participants quickly to see the social and material bases of women's condition. Differentiating themselves from the older ideology aided women in developing an ideology that would constitute for participants a 'structure of belief about the nature of social relationships'. The social networks of the student movement and the New Left with their fairly homogeneous and intensely interacting groups also facilitated a definition of common interests among women in those groups. Both of these are elements of what Freeman calls the cooptable network necessary to movement formation.⁴¹

Organizational forms, as well, at this stage focused not on external goals, but on the formation of identity and solidarity between women.⁴² The concentration on interpersonal relations, egalitarianism, on forms of communication within the small group attest to the important

of solidarity as the goal of the groups in this first stage of the movement. Consciousness-raising promoted attitude change and new beliefs by bringing the commonality of experience to the attention of the group's participants. As Ferree and Miller note, consciousness raising can both lift the burden of negative personal attribution and lead to the discovery of a more positive evaluation of self.⁴³ This process enhanced commitment to the group and the movement as feminists felt their individual empowerment linked to collective liberation.

Melucci, among others, has noted that new movements arise within a structure of preceding relations.⁴⁴ The first stage of the Italian feminist movement saw women in the student movement begin to raise new demands, so that from the original identification women began to define, with increasing clarity, a new collective identity. They were facilitated in this process by a prior experience of participation, resources gained in that participation, pre-existing communications networks, and the ability to recognize common, shared interests. As women in the movement acquired a collective identity, they separated physically from the groups of the student movement, often posing those groups and other organizations of the left as their adversaries; this also enhanced the sense of solidarity within the new movement. By the end of the early 70's, a new social movement with its own 'genetic code'⁴⁵ could be identified. Although numerically limited as yet to groups of

hundreds of women on campuses and among intellectual circles, several key issues would provide the terrain on which the movement would enter the political arena.

The Response of the Political System to the New Movements

One principal characteristic of the cycle of struggles at the end of the 60's in Italy was a push to modernize social institutions, although for both the student and worker movement the content of demands went far beyond a social program of modernization.⁴⁶ The government responded to the first wave of mobilizations of workers and students with a range of modernizing reforms. As Tarrow points out, although some of these reforms had been on the Center-Left agenda for years, the atmosphere of crisis engendered by the movements prompted their rapid passage in this early period. He raises the interesting issue of the "relationship between the reforms demanded by protesting groups and those enacted by the elite... and to the relative role of 'internal' resources and the structure of political opportunities of these groups in determining which protests achieved policy success and which did not" ⁴⁷

Although this issue will be discussed in greater detail for the feminist movement in subsequent chapters, for the student and worker's movement, fundamental reforms followed quite quickly after the most intense period of mobilization in 1968-9. For the university, access of all students increased after a 1970 law liberalized entrance. The peak of

worker protest was followed, in 1970, by a Statute of Worker's Rights which guaranteed the presence of the unions in the workplace and individual and union rights for workers. The major achievement of the worker's movement had been the development of a new form of labor representation in the workplace-- rank and file delegates and worker's councils. As Pizzorno and others have shown, however, by 1972 the movement had peaked and the more autonomous worker's structures ceded way to new representational structures that favored the consolidation of the unions in the workplace.⁴⁸

The struggles of the worker's movement resulted in new advantages (from the Statute of Worker's Rights to a changed structure of collective bargaining more favorable to workers, and improved working conditions), but there was a response by the government to the increased demand for access to political participation by the unions. But this too favored the more institutionalized structures of the unions, as the confederations were able to use the combativeness of their rank and file to win leverage in their demands for participation in a reform strategy with the government. For example, the confederations launched their so-called "strategy of reforms" by calling a nationwide general strike in November, 1969. This strategy included plans for pensions, housing, health insurance and transportation. The unions were also aided by the PSI, which responded to the cycle of protests by increasingly

pressuring the DC to pass reforms as the price for its continued presence in the coalition government.⁴⁹

The worker's and student movement increased the pressure for broad social reforms, only some of which were enacted by the early 70's. Although the intensity of social ferment and other political considerations (such as electoral instability) forced the government to pass legislation responding to certain demands, the level of conflict was still high by the early 1970's and had spread to other areas of social life-- urban life, housing, women's issues-- and each new issue that arose immediately became a political issue. Tarrow notes that early reforms, in some cases, may have provided encouragement to further protest or the institutional basis for protest actions, thus explaining the continuance of conflict in the early 1970's.⁵⁰

The outcome of the mobilizations of the late 60's remained linked to the policies of the Communist Party, as the major political actor on the left. The PCI had consistently opposed the Center-Left government and argued for meaningful reforms, but it did not instigate or fully support the worker's or student's militance, which arose to its left and was often directed at the party. Hellman demonstrates that, in this early period of labor and student unrest, the PCI acted to slow the unification of the unions when they appeared to take too radical positions, gave little support either to the student movement or to its own more conservative youth federation, and expelled the

Manifesto group for its sympathies with the worker's struggles.⁵¹

In 1971-2, the PCI elaborated and embarked on a policy of 'historic compromise' that indicated a definitive turn in its claims to become a major actor in the political system.⁵² This policy viewed with alarm the confrontation and polarization characterizing the Hot Autumn period, since it had not only produced a strengthening of the left, but a right-wing backlash as well.⁵³

The PCI believed that student and worker struggles had contributed to reforms, but attention had been too narrowly focused on the working class, to the exclusion of other sectors of society. The party would need to form a bloc of alliances that included all groups in society so that fundamental reforms could be enacted, and to do this Communist, Socialists and Catholics would have to collaborate. The policy of the historic compromise, the PCI believed, would legitimate it as a party of government and would also help to extend its possible influence to a more heterogeneous electorate. The party believed that attempting to confront the Church head-on could provoke a major crisis in the political system, and the PCI was afraid of its fate in such a confrontation. At the same time, the Communists had increased their vote in the 1972 anticipated elections (with the PSI losing votes) and this, along with the preceding mobilizations, gave the party more legitimacy as the representative of the entire left vis a vis the political system.

The Center-Left and the party system had shown themselves unable to respond to the social needs emerging from a modernizing, secularizing society. The period from 1968-72 saw a widespread social mobilization, with demands for reforms and for political participation in Italian society. The first rapid responses of the political system to these mobilizations were the implementation of some needed reforms, most particularly in the area of industrial relations, the university and the plan for regional decentralization that had been promised since the beginning of the Center-Left and which supposedly would enlarge the scale of citizen participation in local government.⁵⁴

But in the first years of the 1970's it still remained to be seen what relationship these reforms would bear to the movement engendering them-- which specific demands were being met and which not. Any potential alliance of the PCI with these movements was discouraged by its strategy to move from opposition to governance. The primacy of the political parties, particularly the DC, appeared to have entered a period of crisis, challenged by movements demanding fundamental structural changes in Italian society. The PCI, through its strategy of historic compromise, entered into a crisis of legitimacy with its own constituency, as its credibility as an opposition party began to be challenged.

Chapter 3- Notes

1. Most organized workers in Italy belonged to one of the three labor confederations: the CGIL, with strong Communist Party influence; the CISL, linked to the DC but with a growing left Catholic component during this period; and the UIL, with a membership of Social Democrats, Republicans and some Socialists.

2. See Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 71. Pizzorno and others have emphasized, however, that the second stage of young worker militance was predicated on the prior stage in which skilled workers with experience in union organizing played a primary role; see Pizzorno, ed. Lotte operaie e sindacato in Italia 1968-1972 Vol I (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1974), p. 21.

3. Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 75.

4. Pizzorno traces the various methods used to regain control of worker insurgency in "Le due logiche dell'azione di classe" in Martinelli and Pasquino, eds. La politica nell'Italia che cambia (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1978) pp. 230-53.

5. Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 88.

6. Apparently they were correct in their assessment. Barbagli and Corbetta note that, while PCI working class membership increased between 1968-72, the period of the most intensive worker mobilizations, it did not increase at a rate commensurate with the general growth of the PCI: "From that extraordinary process of mobilization of the working class ... the organization of the PCI made few gains, certainly much less than the union organizations." (Barbagli and Corbetta, "Base sociale del PCI e i movimenti collettivi" in Martinelli and Pasquino, La politica, p.170).

7. See Massimo Teodori, Storia delle nuove sinistre in Europa (1956-1976) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976), p. 342.

8. Ibid, p. 350.

9. See Claus Offe in Contradictions of the Welfare State (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984) and Jurgen Habermas in Legitimation Crisis transl. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975) for the general discussion of legitimation crises. Carlo Donolo, in Mutamento o transizione?: Politica e societa nella crisi italiana (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977) outlines some specific dimensions of the Italian legitimation crisis in this period.

10. Yasmine Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", pp. 544-5.

11. See Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation; Maren Carden, The New Feminist Movement; and Hess and Ferree, Controversy and Coalition.

12. See Simonetta Piccone Stella, "Crescere negli anni 50" in Memoria 2 (Oct. 1981), p. 10.

13. Various documents from the feminist movement attest to the prior participation of many feminist militants in the student movement. See, in particular, the main anthologies of documents from the early years of the movement: Rosalba Spagnoletti, ed. I movimenti femministi in Italia (Rome: Savelli, 1977); Biancamaria Frabotta, ed. Femminismo e lotta di classe in Italia 1970-1973 (Rome: Savelli, 1975) and La politica del femminismo 1973-76 (Rome: Savelli, 1977).

14. See Spagnoletti, I movimenti femministi, pp. 66-72.

15. See, in particular, Sara Evans, Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movements and the New Left (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

16. Freeman makes a similar argument that women gained important resources from their prior participation in the New Left or in more traditional political organizations. See Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation, especially pp. 49-70.

17. Ibid, p. 34.

18. See Bianchi and Mormoni, "Militanti di se stesse", Melucci, ed. Altri Codici: Aree di movimento nella metropoli p. 128.

19. The Radical Party, formed in 1955, was reorganized in the early 1970's. It primarily pressured for civil liberties and minority rights. Within the Radical Party, the Women's Liberation Movement formed in the early 1970's as a non-separatist organization federated to the party and committed to women's rights.

20. Myra Marx Ferree and Frederick Miller, "Mobilization and Meaning: Toward an Integration of Social Psychological and Resource Perspectives on Social Movements" in Sociological Inquiry 55 (Winter 1985), p. 44.

21. Ibid., p.45. McAdam, too, refers to 'cognitive liberation' when people collectively define their situation as unjust and subject to change; see Doug McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

22. Hess and Ferree, Controversy and Coalition, p.63.

23. Ergas refers to this as a selective incentive encouraging the political participation of women. See "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", p. 547.

24. As quoted in Mariella Gramaglia, "1968: Il venir dopo e l'andar oltre del movimento femminista" in Ascoli et.al., La questione femminile, p. 196.

25. Carlo Donolo, "La politica ridefinita" in Quaderni Piacentini 33 (Feb. 1968)..

26. Evans has traced a similar path with women in the groups of the American New Left. Although there are notable similarities, in Italy the relationship between the feminist movement and the New Left remained more complex and long-lasting.

27. From the Gruppi Femminili di Trento, Cerchio Spezzato, as quoted in Spagnoletti, I Movimenti Femministi, p. 175.

28. As cited in Lidia Menapace, "Le cause strutturali del nuovo femminismo" in Ascoli et. al., La questione femminile, p. 162.

29. Gramaglia, "Il venir dopo", p. 180.

30. See Melucci, L'invenzione del presente, p. 195.

31. See Alberoni, Movimento e Istituzione, pp. 377-8.

32. Ferree and Miller, "Mobilization and Meaning", pp. 51-2.

33. Melucci notes that, in contrast to the New Left, the feminist movement represented a change in paradigms in its break with Marxism; see especially, L'invenzione del presente, pp. 195-6

34. This corroborates Garner and Zald's argument in "Social Movement Sectors", p. 3, that in Italy, movements locate themselves on a left-right spectrum.

35. Spagnoletti, I movimenti femministi, p. 172.
36. Ibid., p. 170.
37. See Guiseppina Ciuffreda, "Organizzazione" in Fraire, ed. Lessico politico delle donne 3 (Rome: Edizioni Gulliver, 1978), p. 127.
38. Simonetta Piccone Stella, "Femminismo e sociologia della famiglia" in Fraire, ed. Lessico politico delle donne 4-5 (Rome: Gulliver, 1979), p. 49.
39. See their founding document in Frabotta, Femminismo e lotta di classe, pp. 23-28.
40. Ferree and Miller, "Meaning and Mobilization", p. 42.
41. See Freeman, Politics of Women's Liberation, p. 41.
42. Bruce Fireman and William Gamson, in "Utilitarian Logic in the Resource Mobilization Perspective" in Zald and McCarthy, The Dynamics of Social Movements, discuss the importance of solidarity as a premise to a sense of collective identity in their critique of resource mobilization theories on incentives to participation. Pizzorno notes that the recognition of collective identity in a group is distinct from merely shared instrumental goals and will lead to particularly intense and new forms of protest; see "Le due logiche", especially p. 234.
43. Ferree and Miller, "Meaning and Mobilization", p. 51.
44. See Melucci, Sistema politico, p. 109.
45. According to Melucci, "the different fragments that constitute a movement integrate themselves in a new system of relations ... In the course of this process there is a true mutation, the 'genetic code' of the group is restructured and gives way to a new social unit, capable of creating new resources." (Sistema Politico, p. 105).
46. See Melucci, L'invenzione del presente, p. 103.
47. See Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 49.
48. See Pizzorno, "Le due logiche", pp. 244-51; Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, chs. 5-9.

49. Michele Salvati, "Muddling Through: Economics and Politics in Italy 1969-1979", in Lange and Tarrow, eds., Italy in Transition: Conflict and Consensus (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 36.

50. Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 50.

51. Stephen Hellman traces the implications of this policy in "The Longest Campaign: Communist Party Strategy and the Elections of 1976" in Penniman, ed. Italy at the Polls (1976), p. 162.

52. The main lines of this strategy were developed in the XIIIth Congress of the PCI; see XIII Congresso: Atti e risoluzioni, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972) and "Alleanze sociali e schieramenti politici" in Rinascita, Oct.12, 1973, pp. 3-5.

53. The so-called 'strategia della tensione' (the strategy of tension) refers to the neo-Fascist escalation of terrorism in the early 1970's, which attempted to push the political system in a right-wing authoritarian direction.

54. The regional law passed in 1970 provided for the transfer of authority in certain spheres, including welfare and health services, tourism, some transportation and local taxation, to regional governments.

Chapter 4: The Movement and the Abortion Campaign

The preceding chapter described the early years of the feminist movement, a period characterized by relative homogeneity in its composition, as well as its organizational forms. This phase corresponds to Pizzorno's model of the formation of collective identity¹ where the group goal is not the maximization of individual advantage as a calculation of costs and benefits, as incentive-based models would have it, but rather the formation of collective identity which, as yet, has not defined specific interests to defend or negotiate. The highly charged process of conversion to new ideological beliefs occurred through the focus on individual experience, shared through consciousness-raising and related then to collectively shared aspects of women's condition. Homogeneity within the groups and intense personal interactions favored this formation of collective identity, in which a new self-concept became linked to the definition and defense of a new collective subject.

Alberoni, in his definition of the stato nascente, or nascent state of social movements, points to the discontinuous moment or rupture when the nuclei of a social movement "live an experience sui generis that brings them to develop an alternative interpretation of that which

exists..." and the sort of group recognition that emerges from the nascent state is not based on a program, but on "a way of understanding and producing themselves and the world."² This is a useful concept for considering the first stage of the feminist movement. He goes on to note, however, that either a movement disintegrates after this point, or it must, to some degree, "explore the frontiers of the possible, given a specific type of social system, in order to maximize whatever part of that experience and that solidarity that is attainable for themselves and for others in that historical moment",³ that is, some process of institutionalization ensues.

In its second stage, the feminist movement did begin to develop a "sweeping program for the reform of society", to use one of Turner and Killian's requisites for development of social movements,⁴ which was both anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal. As Tarrow has pointed out, however, within social movements such a program "is often not the operative goal of social protest movements but the ultimate value orientation which helps them to mold a constituency...", while "actual political action may be carried out on behalf of much more mundane objectives".⁵

In fact by the early 1970's, the 'value orientation' of the feminist movement was clearer than its 'operative goals'; it had only begun to engage in political action as a collective actor. It will be the purpose of this chapter to describe the period from 1972-76 when the movement mobilized

on behalf of political campaigns and struggles. Before entering into that description, however, some definitional issues should be clarified. Although we have described the feminist movement's original groups as fairly homogeneous, with expansion came an increasing heterogeneity of recruitment patterns, organizational forms, group focus and ideological approaches. It would be quite impossible to exhaustively describe or analyze the entire range of groups occupying the "area of the movement" as it has been defined and delineated.⁶ We will follow the framework developed by Bianchi and Mormoni in their 1984 study of Milanese feminism,⁷ first distinguishing between the feminist movement, an autonomous mobilization around issues of women's condition, and the women's movement-- the institutionalized women's organizations of the parties, unions, etc. But beyond this distinction, we also distinguish those groups in the movement making 'withdrawal demands'; that is, their feminist ideology challenges the legitimating premises of the dominant ideology but they make no assertive claims on the system to change. These groups were more typical of the movement in certain regions of Italy (i.e. Milan) and in certain milieus (ie. intellectual groups committed to psychoanalytic investigation within the small groups; certain cultural initiatives of the movement); they usually refrained from initiating or leading political struggles.

For the moment, we shall focus more attention on groups that made "proactive demands" challenging the dominant ideology while presenting assertive claims for rights, privileges or resources not previously enjoyed.⁸ Since the range of problems we have defined as the scope of this work regard the relationship of the movement to the political system, we are particularly interested in that part of the movement that attempted to be recognized as an actor in the political system and to win a certain influence over political processes. While we are chiefly concerned with the new autonomous feminist mobilizations, within specific campaigns the institutionalized women's movement also played a significant role as it began to undergo profound transformations. Having made this distinction, however, we must emphasize that it is quite schematic. As we shall see, even within the 'politically-oriented' part of the movement, the issue of how and whether to organize, to gain influence, to effect political and social change was in no way uniform. And the 'non-political' part of the movement did not totally withdraw from political engagement. More importantly, such a definition begs the important question of the relationship of less political, more 'submerged' branches of the movement to the political system, and how different currents in the movement interacted with and affected each other. This is a question which we will address only in the final chapter.

During the mid-1970's the movement expanded, its component groups changed and its orientations shifted in a

constant dialectic between withdrawal from and participation in the political sphere. Each involvement of feminists in political issues and campaigns created new difficulties for the movement in terms of how to define an autonomous political practice. These difficulties were particularly acute in a period when the public recognition of the movement seemed to demand a unitary response from feminists. This chapter will attempt to chart the trajectory of the movement in those 'political' years and the dilemmas they raised for the feminist movement.

The Divorce Campaign

The passage of divorce legislation in 1970, and the opposition that it provoked, created the first opportunity for feminist issues to be discussed on a national basis and helped to expand interest in the ideas of the movement. In 1965, during the Center-Left, a Socialist deputy, Fortuna, had introduced a bill to legalize divorce. Despite the pressure of the Christian Democrats and the Church, this bill was eventually passed in 1970. Immediately following passage of the divorce bill, Catholic lay groups supported by the Vatican and the DC began a campaign to annul the law by gathering the necessary one-half million signatures to call for a national referendum.⁹

The Vatican's campaign was primarily geared towards women, arguing that divorce would undermine their families and their economic security.¹⁰ The divorce referendum

provoked dissension within Catholic organizations. In 1970 ACLI, the Christian Worker's Organization, had officially refused to support the DC in their opposition to the divorce law; the Catholic-influenced union, the CISL, left it up to the individual to vote their conscience on the referendum,¹¹ indicating that the Church's cultural and political hegemony on these issues was breaking down. Nonetheless, the PCI, embarked on its strategy of the historic compromise, and anxious to avoid a polarizing confrontation with the DC, went along with the early dissolution of Parliament in 1972, in order to postpone the referendum until 1974.¹² The PCI had fought to avoid the referendum; when it could no longer do so, its support for the law was based on the 'democratic' nature of the family, arguing that marriage could be made into a more egalitarian institution and divorce would reinforce rather than weaken the family.¹³

In May, 1974 the divorce referendum was defeated and the pro-divorce forces won by 60-40%. Although it had not actively championed the divorce legislation, in its support for the divorce legislation the PCI was aligned with a majority of the country, and the results represented a major defeat for the DC. For the first time since Liberation, the DC was completely isolated in its policy from all the other constitutional parties and was allied with the neo-Fascist party, the MSI. Opposition to repealing the divorce law was strong, moreover, even in such DC strongholds as the Veneto region and peasant regions of the South.¹⁴ In the 1975

regional and local elections, and then in the June 1976 parliamentary elections, the PCI made significant gains.¹⁵ Divorce thus became a watershed issue, representing to the parties the extent of social changes occurring among the electorate, particularly as regards attitudes towards the family and women.¹⁶ The referendum was a defeat for the Vatican and the Christian Democrats and encouraged campaigns to bring issues like abortion into the political arena.

Although the referendum indicated a more favorable terrain for feminist ideas, the movement did not play a major role in the campaign. The public campaign had been initiated by anti-clerical lay forces, and subsequently by the UDI and other women's organizations. Feminist groups did participate in the demonstrations that were usually initiated by the left parties and the UDI, but did not initiate activities around the divorce issue. The movement was not of sufficient numerical strength at this time, and, given its social composition-- primarily single, unmarried, well educated-- it was unlikely that divorce would have become a galvanizing issue for feminists. But the campaign did give feminists the chance to differentiate themselves and their analysis of the family from those being presented by the political parties, and to place issues of the role of the Church, marriage and the family within their own ideological framework.

The Abortion Campaign

The divorce referendum had indicated that the quickening pace of economic and social change had altered social concepts of marriage. The same cluster of conditions also contributed to changing attitudes about abortion and birth control in Italy. Increasing labor force participation, higher levels of university attendance for women, lower birthrates, later marriage and childbearing were instrumental factors in increasing the positive reception that birth control and abortion issues received in these years.¹⁷ While the social and political conflict over these issues was particularly sharp in Italy because of the entrenchment of Catholicism, by the end of the 1970's the changing social realities of women were reflected in a series of social policy changes. As elsewhere, however, there were notable differences between the political forces supporting (or obstructing) an issue like abortion legislation, and the feminist movement. It is also important to note that, as a public policy issue, abortion was posed first by the Socialist Party and the MLD; the movement then had to decide whether and how to respond on the legislative front.

The divorce referendum provided a public forum for reconsidering women's role in the family and, in that context, facilitated public debate on abortion. There had been some organized demand for abortion starting even before

the referendum, with private clinics established in the 1950's by lay organizations that provided information and distributed birth control devices (the AIED and the AED), but it had only been during the late 1960's that there was a significant increase in political pressure to change the existing Fascist laws that had criminalized birth control propaganda and distribution of birth control devices. The UDI, the two organizations mentioned above, and the Radical Party were particularly active in pressuring to change this legislation. In 1971 the Constitutional Court nullified the constitutional articles relating to birth control but did not provide for any alternative regulation to be instituted. Their action was, however, a clear indication that there was pressure to modernize social policy on the family. At the same time, while there was no public regulation of birth control, abortion was the major technique used in the population to regulate births. The estimates in 1971 were that between 1-3 million abortions were performed each year, with a female population of 23 million.¹⁸

The MLD had raised the issue of contraception and abortion in its founding program in 1970, demanding "free and legal abortion, without distinction as to civil status or medical need, with the creation of appropriate health structures that can make legal abortion available to those who choose it."¹⁹ Starting in 1973, with financial support from the Radical Party, leaders of the MLD had formed the CISA (Italian Center for Sterilization and Abortion) which

began to run public clinics for abortions, as well as training in abortion techniques for doctors.²⁰

In February 1973 a legislative proposal for the partial depenalization of abortion was presented by the PSI deputy Fortuna. Under its provisions, abortions could be performed whenever the pregnancy posed a risk to the physical or psychological health of the woman or child., subject to the approval of three medical specialists.²¹ The bill had no support from other political parties at this time, for reasons that we will discuss below, and was not considered by Parliament.

The first public mobilizations on the abortion issue also began in this period, encouraged by the fact that abortion campaigns were being organized in France and the United States. In February 1973 the Manifesto group and the Rome Feminist Movement organized a meeting on abortion at which representatives from the French women's movement spoke about a major French trial involving prosecution for abortion taking place at the time.

During the period leading up to the referendum on divorce, there were the first steps toward mobilizing attention on the abortion issue by the MLD, the feminist movement and some of the extra-parliamentary groups. In June 1973, a trial against a member of Lotta Femminista for having aborted turned into a forum for feminist beliefs. In January 1974, 263 women in Trent were accused of having had abortions; the movement began to mobilize for the upcoming

trial on a national scale. The MLD began to collect the names of women who admitted to having had illegal abortions, a technique that had been used during abortion trials in France to publicize its prevalence as a form of birth control. Public attention was increasing as the MLD and the Rome Feminist Movement started a fast to pressure the government to begin consideration of the abortion proposal.

By 1974, the feminist movement's activities were focused primarily on abortion as its major issue; it began to autonomously organize direct actions. Feminist collectives also organized trips to London for abortions and to the CISA clinic in Florence, where illegal abortions were taking place. The abortion issue focused the energies of the movement for the first time on a shared collective task.²²

Freeman has pointed to the importance of crisis in movement formation, as those disposed toward the new ideas of the movement become convinced of the need for change.²³ Others have noted that a movement needs to define an adversary in its earlier stages.²⁴ Both these needs were met when leaders of the CISA clinic, along with their patients, were arrested in Florence in January, 1975. The adversaries of the feminist movement had been, in theory, fairly abstract-- capitalism and patriarchal culture. This event made the DC and the state the adversaries, as the government tried to repress the right of women to abortion. The movement, in a relatively brief period, became a mass movement in which the initial nuclei of militants with

previous political experience, were joined by broader sectors of women with no prior experience of political participation. It was primarily the abortion issue, then, with its capacity to symbolize a wide range of women's issues and demands through a single issue, that provoked the rapid mobilization of the movement.²⁵

From the moment of the arrests at the CISA clinic, the feminist movement showed great strength in mobilizing thousands of women in national demonstrations. A large demonstration against the arrest in Florence was followed by a series of demonstrations in other major Italian cities, involving ten thousand women. In February of 1975 the Constitutional Court invalidated those parts of the Penal Code that had criminalized abortion, making it possible for the legislative process to begin. What this entailed, then, was a series of proposals offered by the different parties for new abortion legislation.

The attitude of the political parties in these early years of feminist mobilizations for abortion echoed their earlier response to the New Left, underestimating the strength of the movement and the importance of the issues it expressed. For the DC, after the elections of 1972, the Socialists abandoned their Center-Left coalition, pushing the DC further to the conservative pole of the political spectrum. Their campaign for the divorce referendum had emphasized the importance of the family and posed the choice as one between Catholicism and secular Communism. The DC,

riding the right wing backlash, presented itself as "the last beachhead of Western civilization against the Communist hordes."²⁶ Even after the defeat of the divorce referendum, when the electorate no longer responded positively to traditional religious appeals, the DC did not immediately change their strategy. Although there was dissent from within the Catholic associations linked to the DC, the party itself had an antagonistic attitude towards feminism and the issues it was presenting.

Preceding and after the inauguration of the historic compromise, the PCI party leadership, as Hellman has argued, had "come to the conclusion that the party's aims can best be achieved in the "cool" political climate."²⁷ This involved their desire to moderate social conflicts, and appear as the responsible, efficient party capable of entering the government. The party's alliance strategy with the Christian Democrats meant that for the issue of divorce and later, for abortion, the PCI gave little support to the policy aims of the feminist movement.

On the contrary, the specific policy issues that the feminist movement focused on were threatening to the PCI's potential alliance with the Christian Democrats; when divorce legislation was first proposed, as we have seen, the PCI sought to avoid what they thought would be a divisive referendum. Likewise, with abortion legislation, the PCI believed that negotiation and compromise with the DC would be extremely difficult, and therefore the party sought

to postpone the eventual confrontation.

In presenting themselves as the party capable of governance, the PCI was interested in channelling any mass mobilizations on the left through the party, and therefore showed hostility to the feminist movement as a challenger to the PCI's own women's movement. In Donna and Politica, an official PCI publication, in 1973, Marisa Rodano referred to the 'petit bourgeois' origins of the feminist movement, explaining its appearance in Italy as an "import of the general influence of American lifestyles ... and Anglo-Saxon culture", stating that feminist positions represented an "incorrect way to come to terms with the women's question."²⁸ In that same issue, Gruppi contrasts the feminist's "sterile and individualistic protest" with the PCI's reiteration that women's liberation occurs historically when women enter the labor force, as women workers represent the "advancing wing of the entire movement. The appeal of feminism in Italy, it was argued, was quite weak, given that there was a "strong presence of worker's organizations in which feminist demands are already connected to the struggles of the worker's movement."²⁹

It appeared, from the Socialist sponsorship of progressive legislation on divorce and abortion, that the PSI was the party most sympathetic to the feminist movement. After the worker and student mobilizations of the later 1960's, with PSI support for the union's strategy of reforms, the party had hoped to become the spokesman for the

new social movements, their channel of access to the government.³⁰ The Socialists had introduced and supported divorce legislation, and because they presented the most progressive among the various proposals for abortion legislation, they believed they could acquire the support of the new feminist groups, and draw support away from the PCI. But the Socialist Party itself was internally divided over whether its alliance potential lay to its left or right, and therefore its support for the new social movements was never consistent. Moreover, as Ergas has shown³¹, the relationship of the feminist movement to the PSI was often mediated by the particular nature of the Radical Party, which was less a party than a rallying point for single issue movements focusing on civil liberties. The Radicals allowed their members to have dual membership in other parties and during the early 70's, Radicals increased their influence within the PSI. The Socialists became closely tied, in this period, to the Women's Liberation Movement, the women's group affiliated with the Radical Party. But the main body of the feminist movement that had developed within the New Left had no working relationship with the Socialists. Thus the PSI did have a greater influence over some parts of Italian society that had been mobilized by the new movements, but not with the majority of the feminist movement.

The degree of aperture of the political system toward feminist demands on abortion seemed quite small. This was

corroborated when the Constitutional Court had invalidated the existing abortion law, and the legislative process required that the political parties present their proposals for a law. In the winter and spring of 1975 the PCI, DC, and other parties added their proposals to the 1973 PSI proposal. A parliamentary commission was then formed to examine the proposals and to develop a unified text favorable to all political parties. The PSI proposal had been for the legalization of abortion when a committee of three doctors could certify that it would endanger the woman's health. The PCI proposal, quite similar, called for a committee of 3 medical specialists to certify the potential harm to the woman's health. For both the PSI and the PCI, abortions would be free of charge. In its first legislative proposal, the DC argued for a law that would reaffirm the illegality of abortion. All these proposals were fundamentally at odds with the demands emerging from the feminist movement. The movement had been mobilizing for abortions to be legalized subject only to the decision of the woman; the first legal proposals of the PCI and the PSI gave decisionmaking powers to a medical commission. Some of the other lay parties had proposed abortion legislation that would make abortions legal, but their cost would be borne by the woman; the movement had demanded free abortions paid for by the state. In addition, all the proposals for legalizing abortion required minors to get the permission of either their parents, legal guardians or a state court; the

movement insisted that minors be allowed to have abortions without such permission.

The proposals of the political parties indicated they had failed to appreciate the specific themes and issues being raised by women in the feminist movement, as will become clear in our discussion of the abortion law below. (The exception was the PSI, which changed its first proposal so that women would have free choice, once again expressing its desire to mediate politically for the movement). As various scholars have noted of this period of Italian history, in analyzing the response of the political system, the parties had difficulty recognizing the new central themes of the feminist movement and mediating their new demands.³² Melucci notes that "Everything that doesn't lend itself to this translation (into the language of the political system) and this mediation risks being ignored or undervalued, unless it becomes the subject of collective conflictual pressures and gives way to forms of struggle."³³ In fact, the events around the abortion legislation in 1975-76 bear out this analysis.

The Christian Democratic Party, under pressure from the other parties, supported a very limited law, unacceptable to the feminist movement, particularly as it denied women decisionmaking power and gave authority to a medical commission. In response to the unified law proposal which had emerged from the parliamentary commission, a national meeting of the groups of the feminist movement involved in

abortion and women's health issues met in Bologna in October 1975 and planned a national demonstration to demand full abortion rights, in Rome in December. Fifty thousand women participated in this national demonstration, which was separatist.³⁴ This demonstration marked the first mass public demonstration of the movement and was a watershed for the movement in terms of public recognition .

In April of 1976 the DC, with the support of the neo-Fascist Party, voted against the legislative proposal on abortion, and this re-established the criminality of abortion. The day after the vote, once again the feminist movement called for a massive demonstration in which 100,000 women participated. At this point, the UDI, which had objected to the separatist nature of previous feminist demonstrations, participated as well, marking a definitive turn in their process of autonomy from the PCI. This demonstration forced the political parties to recognize the feminist movement as a political force speaking for a constituency of women. This new recognition and consolidation of the movement occurred at the same time as the parliament entered into a crisis. Since the divorce referendum, the PSI had been moving toward withdrawing support from the DC coalition government, with a strategy of creating an alliance of the left that could displace the DC. Especially after the gains registered by the left in the 1975 regional elections, the PSI distanced itself from the government and in April, 1976, when the DC and MSI voted to

re-criminalize abortion, the PSI withdrew from the majority, and Parliament was dissolved. Early elections were then called for June, 1976, and their results would again fundamentally alter the political configuration in Italy.

The Organization of the Movement

In the two-year period between 1975 and 1976 the movement grew in both numbers and in the degree of internal differentiation. Yet in all spheres of its activities-- cultural, services, and political-- the major organizational form remained the "small group" with its characteristics of collectivism, egalitarianism, self-realization, and its opposition to hierarchy, power and leadership. This structure, which accentuated personal communication and discussion in a tightly cohesive group, became the locus for discovering the common grounds for a collective identity,³⁵ whereas the subsequent activity of the movement in support of a public policy objective constituted the demand for recognition in that identity.

This form of organization and its practice of consciousness-raising characterized the Italian movement perhaps more than any other feminist movement as the predominant structure. This deserves some attention. In her discussion of the two branches of the American women's movement, Freeman asserts that the different style and organization of the women's liberation and the women's rights branches of the movement are due to the differing

political education and experience of the women in each one. She states that "the different structures that have evolved from these two distinctly different kinds of experiences have, in turn, largely determined the strategy of the two branches, irrespective of any conscious intentions of their participants"³⁶ (my underline). She argues that while the decentralized segmented structure³⁷ of what she calls the women's liberation branch of the movement was ideologically innovative, it was politically ineffective. For instrumental action to be successfully pursued, a more bureaucratized, centralized form of organization was needed. Cassell, too, in her study of the American women's movement, argues that the women's liberation branch "provides the entire women's movement with an ideological and symbolic focus", while women's right groups are result-oriented and "operate to achieve concrete social changes."³⁸

These analyses would seem to argue for 'expressive' and 'instrumental' branches of the American feminist movement, each characterized by a specific form of organization, assuming that only certain kinds of organization can achieve certain kinds of social change.³⁹ But the Italian case seems to introduce complexities into this model, since it was precisely "the conscious intentions of the participants" to create a structure that differed from their previous political experiences. We have noted that the structure of the small group was influenced by the ideology of the New Left, but there had been no precedent in Italy for this kind

of organizational structure on a mass scale. In addition, even when instrumental policy or social change goals were pursued by the movement and other more organized structures appeared, the small group and consciousness-raising remained as essential elements of those other structures. The small groups, for the movement, embodied principles essential to the collective identity they had established, and the solidarity it engendered was seen as a necessary component of the movement. Moreover, more traditional organizations like the UDI were transformed under the influence of the feminist movement toward a structure more similar to its "decentralized segmented" structure.⁴⁰ The small group and consciousness-raising as a practice were in a constant dialectical relationship to other organizations that arose within the movement, as the movement as a whole searched for a way "to organize autonomously, to carry on political work without a coordinating or synthesizing party."⁴¹ Particularly in the period under consideration, the issue of organization became paramount as the movement pursued a concrete social policy goal requiring greater coordination of movement groups.

The small group was seen as the basic structure of the movement. In a continuous process of self-reflection on themselves, the 'health' of the small group was seen to indicate the general well-being of the movement; its periodic crises spawned attempts to reinvigorate it.⁴² The relationship between the small group and other structures of

the movement was seen as follows: "the small group is the basic structure of the movement, the spontaneous organization that women have created for themselves in order to acquire consciousness, as the basis for their political practice amongst women, as the place to change personal behavior so as to be able to change all of society, as a place to develop the content of a theory of women's oppression."⁴³ It would be hard to imagine the rapid extension of the movement without this structure, for it offered its participants a structured interaction within which to discover the ideas of the movement, a community with other women that fostered participation and commitment to the movement, and personal attitudinal change and a resocialization of the self that was so essential to the new collective identity. These groups also offered women an experience of empowerment on a small scale, which could then be translated into broader political activity. There is evidence that the small group remained the crucial link between the individual and the larger collectivity of the movement.⁴⁴

The ideology of the movement arose from the interaction within the small group. As Cassell points out, for the U.S. case, in such groups women came to see themselves as having certain attributes, socially and historically produced, which constituted the basis for their collective bonding, their sisterhood.⁴⁵ Yet, Cassell and Freeman assume that once collective identity is formed, the small group becomes

almost a liability since its necessary emphasis on group process, to the exclusion of other political ends, and its incentive structure that favors "consummatory activities" rather than instrumental ones, can at best produce service projects, but not politically efficacious action.⁴⁶ To be sure, in the years of the abortion campaign, the issue of organization and structure became problematic for the Italian feminist movement, but nonetheless, no branch of the movement developed into a formal organization. On the contrary, even those women's organizations like the UDI that had been more centralized, hierarchical and 'politically efficient', began to follow the example of the feminist movement. As McWilliam argues, feminist consciousness-raising groups can be seen not merely as pre-political vehicles for creating and reaffirming solidarity between women, but as constituting as the essential political act.⁴⁷

The rapid expansion of the movement in 1975-76 encouraged the development of other organizational structures to coordinate movement activities. Collectives promoted specific activities of the movement, provided services and studied particular issues. These formations were usually task-oriented or were general political collectives. The collectives served as broader reference points for the movement than the small group. Neighborhood collectives which arose in many cities, represented the attempt to extend the movement to new strata of women, usually by organizing small groups, or health and abortion

services. Several collectives formed women's health centers, as alternative institutions to the neighborhood health centers planned under regional decentralization laws. Collectives also emerged in work places, although this dimension of the movement grew increasingly after 1976-77. Finally there were collectives that coordinated interaction and discussion among the groups oriented away from the political sphere and towards "the practice of the unconscious", most characteristic of Milanese feminism.

In addition to these more organized structures, there was an explosion of groups that developed the themes of feminist culture and, through their activities, communicated and spread the ideas of the movement.⁴⁸ They also increased movement solidarity through the creation of a language and aspects of cultural production specific to women.⁴⁹ There were bookstores, publishing companies, theatres, artists cooperatives, and women's groups at the national television and radio stations. This cultural production was aimed at two different uses: one was for internal use, to increase the solidarity of the movement and spread its ideas to other possible participants, and the other was to present and legitimate its ideas to an external audience-Bianci and Mormoni term this 'entrepreneurial' tendency of the movement, although two uses were often mingled in the same cultural product. An example of this is Effe, a national weekly which was written 'to' the movement, but was read widely by many women beyond the movement.

The structure of the collective and the small group originated with the movement itself, but the mass mobilization spurred by the abortion campaign created a need for other structures that could address the political nature of the campaign. The coordinamenti, or coordinating committees, which arose in 1975-76 were usually created by feminists who were also activists in the groups of the New Left. CRAC, the Roman Committee for Abortion and Contraception, was created in 1975 and was composed of all the Roman feminist collectives, as well as feminists in several extra-parliamentary groups. It began to organize trips to London for abortions, as well as forming clandestine self-help abortion centers. Both CRAC and the Turin Coordinating Committee of Women's Health Centers were the major coordinating bodies that helped organize the national abortion demonstrations. These coordinating committees were important for the abortion campaign, but did not resolve a fundamental ambivalence of the movement towards more formal organizations. Most feminist groups were wary of creating representative or delegative bodies, or of constituting any organization as a vanguard group.

There were several tendencies within the movement in terms of organization expressive of this ambivalence. One part of the movement believed that any organization was tantamount to the destruction of the movement, since it would inevitably create hierarchy and power relations. Although in its pure form this tendency was adopted by only

a few groups, there was a general fear among feminists of the demobilizing force of organization and institutionalization. A second tendency was that of groups that were "practicing the unconscious" in which traditional organization was seen as negating female language and sexuality. Their interest was in using psychoanalytic tools to investigate the relationship between women and to transform women from within. This was based on their belief that the power relations of patriarchal culture were internalized within women and would inevitably re-emerge within the small group or other larger structures.

The tendency which was predominant during the mass mobilizations of 1975-76 was that of the more 'political' feminists from the larger Marxist-feminist collectives who, even though having abandoned certain aspects of Marxist theory (and certainly Leninist organizations) were interested in linking feminism to larger issues of social class and political participation. These women were more concerned that the movement collectively define some political goals, such as abortion on demand and public financing for women's health centers. The more 'political' collectives, in this phase of the movement, took on the major organizational tasks, identifying goals and priorities and possible allies. They were responsible for the creation of work commissions and the coordinating committees that attempted to bring together the heterogeneous groups of the movement for direct action and mass demonstrations. They

were also largely responsible for coordinating and expanding the women's centers that acted as the physical and informational reference points for the movement in different cities.

The more organized structures of the movement arose largely in response to the abortion campaign. Given the heterogeneity of organizational forms within the movement and the differing attitudes towards organization expressed, a uniform platform on abortion and other women's issues was difficult. Rather than view this as a necessary sign of movement weakness in its ability to negotiate with the political system, it might be useful to look at some concrete aspects of the feminist abortion mobilization.

Abortion and Women's Health Centers

For many in the feminist movement, the abortion campaign represented a test of whether women had developed an ideology and organizational structures that could carry out political activities differently than the parties and differently from other movements on the Left. Feminists faced the dilemma of how to develop forms of collective action that expressed the goals of the movement, but that did not mimic the organizational reality of the PCI and the New Left. In the protests that developed over the abortion issue, there were some common elements constituting a feminist position on abortion that was quite different than the position of the political parties or the other women's

organizations. It did not represent for the movement, as it did for the MLD, a civil right. The movement saw the right to abortion linked to fundamental themes of sexuality and control of one's body. The slogans of the movement expressed this desire for collective 'power over one's self'-- "my uterus is mine", "I belong to me", "let's reappropriate life"-- so that larger issues of collective identity and self-determination for women were linked to the issues of abortion for the movement.

Direct action and demonstrations, which were sources for enlarging the movement and achieving negotiating power over the political outcome of the issue, were combined with the expansion of new collectives that practiced self-help techniques and performed abortions, since the abortion issue was part of the larger themes of women's health and sexuality. For the years of the abortion campaign, these two strategies were both crucial to the feminist mobilization on the abortion issue

There was considerable heterogeneity in the feminist movement about what was the best strategy for the abortion campaign during 1975-76. The MLD, which had always made abortion one of its primary goals, began a campaign in 1975 to collect signatures for a referendum which would repeal the entire penal code sections on abortion. The MLD continued to organize around the presentation of a referendum, but no part of the feminist movement considered this strategy a particularly feminist one.

In 1975, CRAC and the Turin Coordinating Committee began to organize the feminist movement around the issue of abortion and the establishment of women's health centers. Most of the feminist campaign consisted of direct action and organizing massive separatist demonstrations. In addition, although the CISA clinic, as well as other private clinics, had been performing abortions before this time, the feminist movement created clinics which were intended primarily not as services but as part of the political practice of the movement, capable of creating a new medicine for women and a new relationship of women to their bodies.

The establishment of the feminist health centers occurred in a particular context of health services in Italy. Health services in Italy had been, prior to the mid-1970's, extremely backward, characterized by the simultaneous presence in any given geographical area of separate, badly coordinated services run by centralized governmental bodies. In 1971, the Constitutional Court legalized the dissemination of birth control information. In fact, the first feminist health centers that arose in 1973-4 dealt primarily with birth control. Then, as part of the general mobilization around abortion, which raised a whole series of issues about women's health, feminist consultori began to perform abortions and to promote self-help and self-examination for women. This process was accelerated when information about the women's health movement in the United States was available in Italy, and when the U.S.

feminist book on women's health, Our Bodies, Our Selves, was translated and published in 1974.

In the first two years, the women's health centers were largely uncoordinated, local initiatives. By 1975-6 the feminist movement continued to expand its health centers, but there was national coordination from such groups as the CRAC and the Turin Coordinating Committee. The feminist health centers were created as specific structures of the movement embodying feminist principles and themes. As such, they were one of the few alternative institutions the movement created.

The clinics provided various services--birth control information, physical examinations, abortions--but they were not envisioned by the movement primarily as service institutions. "The center doesn't intend to be an alternative service, a leftist clinic. Through the consultorio, the information on and distribution of birth control in factories, schools and all work places, we want to carry out an activity of propaganda and political education so as to create a massive pressure by women to demand the right to health."⁵⁰ It was the belief of many of the collectives running health centers that they could function to give women greater strength to demand a different service from doctors and change their subordination to the medical profession. For many health collectives, one of the major goals in constituting these centers, was to convince the state to deliver adequate

health services for women that would be modelled after the feminist consultori.⁵¹

The model for running the consultorio was to be self-management, an attempt by women to collectively control procedures, techniques, information and their relationship to their sexuality and health. Auto-gestione, or self-management, referred not merely to the structure of the consultorio itself, but to self-management of women's bodies. The reappropriation of the body away from medical science and away from the health-care institutions was a recurrent theme. The center was seen as a prefiguring institution which could mobilize women, raise their consciousness, and in which women could begin to practice "control over their bodies".

In addition, the consultori were important structures in expanding the movement to other groups of women. Here was a concrete activity that engaged women collectively and in which many aspects of one's new feminist identity could be reaffirmed. The consultori were seen as centers of political education and mobilization. In almost every document from a women's health center, one can read this message: "the politics of the center: to meet, to have a woman-to-woman relationship, to know each other, and to act about our sexuality. The demands, the struggles, the political projects can and must exist. But only after the consciousness-raising, or else we will only have integration rather than a real process of liberation."⁵² Aside from

engaging many women in an activity, since the centers were run collectively by volunteers, the centers were also established in hundreds of urban neighborhoods and thus offered services and contact with the movement indispensable to the dissemination of its ideas. Almost all centers had consciousness-raising groups or else collective sessions in which women who came for services discussed the ideas and themes of the movement. For a movement without a great many physical places to anchor its activities, the women's health centers were seen as the aggregating moment for the movement. The number of consultori rapidly increased after the December 6, 1975 demonstration in Rome.⁵³

As the abortion campaign progressed, and as the movement itself became more focused on a concrete goal, its activities intensified around the centers. For both abortion legislation and the consultori, women tried to inject the themes and analyses already developed by the movement, but encountered difficulties. This was determined in part by the heterogeneity of the movement discussed above and the difficulty in reaching any consensual agreement; in part by the entire movement's ambivalence about negotiating with the political parties and public institutions. As Melucci points out, the possibility for negotiated regulation of conflict depends on two factors: the capacity of the political system to open up political channels for dealing with collective demands and a movement's desire to invest part of its resources in institutional action.⁵⁴ The

movement's stance/s on abortion and the approach to the feminist consultori expressed a profound ambivalence about whether the movement should invest its resources in the direction of negotiating with the political system.

In July, 1975 a national law was passed legislating the creation of family health centers. From its passage until its implementation there was a delay of two to three years as the legislation mandated each region to pass specific regulations. During this period, the feminist consultori were faced with the possibility of state funding and the problem of what strategy to take in terms of the relationship of their health centers to the future public ones. CRAC, for example, the group tending most toward a political negotiation of some sort, thought that the regions should finance feminist consultori as well as create public ones that would be influenced in their practice by many principles of the feminist movement, such as joint co-management of public health centers by both professionals and consumers; a primary orientation of the centers towards women and not the couple; and the right of women health consumers to hire and fire professional staff. Others believed that while public health centers were necessary and should use the model of the feminist consultorio, requesting state funds was robbing the structure of its autonomy. "The function of the feminist center is not to collaborate with the state, to create a more efficient service, but to create something new for women, to initiate a feminist political

discourse about how women beginning with the issue of health can change their own situation in society."⁵⁵ This approach to the new public consultorio was to keep the two structures absolutely separate in order to maintain the autonomy of the feminist movement.

In terms of the abortion issue, there was great unanimity in the movement over the feminist demand for women's right to unconditional abortion; it was this demand which effectively mobilized so many women into direct action in opposition to all the political parties.⁵⁶ The right to abortion was seen as linked to a woman's right to limit her own reproduction and therefore to control the conditions of her life. But in contrast to the more civil libertarian approach of the MLD, most feminist groups in their documents on abortion, discussed it as a violence experienced by women.⁵⁷ The abortion campaign could be used to win a right for women, but more importantly, the movement could begin to transform a private anguishing experience into a collective fact.

The political impact of the feminist movement's activities on abortion began to be felt increasingly as the women's health centers expanded. Although they had not been seen as an alternative service institution, nonetheless, the fact of providing abortions to thousands of women through structures of the movement did create a demand and pressure in which women's growing need for access to abortion became a publically recognized fact. In addition to the feminist

movement's massive demonstrations, the women's health centers that met women's health needs with a minimum use of highly trained professionals and at a low cost, constituted a threat to both medical institutions and the state. In addition, the fact that so many of the health centers were performing abortions made it clear that the laws criminalizing abortion were unenforceable. As Petchesky makes clear in her description of the U.S. pro-abortion movement, both militant protests and the threat of alternative services can be powerful stimulants to changing abortion policies.⁵⁸

Yet the movement had difficulty developing consensus on the desirability and nature of playing a role as a 'negotiator' in the abortion campaign in a way that went beyond mass protest or alternative services. This difficulty is best exemplified by positions that different groups within the movement took on the abortion legislation being proposed by the political parties. For one part of the movement, the demand was simply depenalization-- the removal of state control over abortion and the rejection of any further involvement in legislating this issue. Another position argued that the movement should make its own legal proposal to be carried to Parliament, while a third position supported some sort of law of popular initiative which, by going outside normal political channels, would maintain the autonomy of the movement and avoid any possible identification of the movement with political parties.

It is important to examine some of the sources of this difficulty in finding a unitary position in terms of negotiating with the political system. In the first place, it is obvious one part of the movement rejected any negotiation with the political system. Yet it did so based on feminist principles shared by the entire movement, that is, a rejection of traditional political mediation, and a denial that organizations of the movement could possibly represent the movement in a formal sense by promoting any particular legislation. Political change for this part of the movement, if it did occur, would happen through direct action by the movement which would completely bypass normal political channels. In addition, the New Left ideology inherited by feminists had stressed participatory democracy, not a movement whose organizations represented it to the external world. This made direct engagement in the political process extremely unlikely for that part of the movement. Even the part of the movement more favorable towards political negotiation (ie., organizations like CRAC and the Turin Coordinating Committee) were unsure whether they could with justice represent the movement. Most importantly, as Ergas has noted, the nature of the feminist movement had been centered on a new collective identity for women rather than instrumental goals. She points out that

... the feminist movement had embodied women's tendencies to establish themselves in a redefined identity, as a new collective actor... Viewed in this light, the threat that a large part of the movement perceived as coming from negotiating with the

"official" parties over abortion becomes intelligible for it symbolized the latent fear that the movement's non-negotiable goal (the full-fledged acceptance of feminism) might be overshadowed or basically compromised in the course of the processes of bargaining over specific goals.⁵⁹

The dilemma of how to relate the movement's activity on abortion to events in the political sphere became increasingly problematic, particularly after the first defeat of abortion legislation in April, 1976. In September 1976, the National Coordinating Network of Women's Health Centers met but could reach no consensus over its strategy. Documents from this meeting describe the bitter dissension that erupted over whether or not to promote the feminist movement's own legislative proposal (distinguished from the so-called proposal by popular initiative that had been presented by the Radicals). This proposal was to be presented to the legislature by Democrazia Proletaria, the party representing Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia and PDUP. Some feminists suggested that any parliamentary participation would be antithetical to the goals of the movement, and suggested focusing on mobilizations that would strengthen the autonomy of the feminist consultori.⁶⁰ The movement had become, by 1976, a heterogeneous force with organizational structures that helped to expand the ideas and activities of the movement. The movement's relationship to the political system remained, however, ambivalent. Their stance was primarily determined by the movement's goal of

altering the form and content of traditional political activity, and their conviction that they could effect social change through bypassing normal political routes. The difficulty in achieving unity on how best to fight for abortion legislation reflected internal dissension within the movement which remained unresolved in the course of the abortion mobilizations.

The Changing Relationship of the Feminist Movement and the Left

In this period, when the feminist movement erupted on a national scale, and was mobilizing for women more effectively than any of the political parties or organizations on the left, those parties and organizations were undergoing changes that, in part, reflected the influence of the movement.

In the first place, many feminists were still active within the groups of the New Left while being feminist militants. This phenomenon of double militance was fairly common in Italy, in contrast to other countries. Double militance, although criticized by some feminists in the movement as an unacceptable contradiction, was fairly widespread, and indicates that many participants in the movement stayed close to an identification with the left.⁶¹ The changing relationship of the feminist movement to the left included both the phenomena of double militance and its effects on the New Left, as well as the changing response of

the PCI and PSI to the movement. Finally, the nature of the UDI was undergoing transformations at this time, largely in response to the feminist movement; we will briefly describe some signs of those changes.

The only extra-parliamentary group that had shown interest in feminist issues from an early date had been the Manifesto group, which had been actively involved in the divorce referendum and had then held a large meeting on abortion as early as 1973. After the Manifesto group had run electoral candidates in 1972 and lost, many women from the group joined feminist collectives. Although giving support to feminist ideas, the males in the group were opposed to feminist separatism. When the Manifesto group became transformed into a party prior to the 1975 elections, the feminists within it formed a separatist autonomous structure within the party, the National Feminist Coordinating Committee. There was the attempt of women within this New Left group to introduce a changed practice into the party. A motion at the founding convention of PDUP in 1976 stated: "the Feminist Coordinating Committee is the structure that allows us to pose the relationship of party and movement in a new and correct way, transcending the classical Third International schema of the women's commissions."⁶² With the electoral campaign of 1976, in which New Left candidates appeared on the PDUP-DP lists, the PCI regained its hegemony over the left and PDUP underwent a crisis; in the process most of its women members left.

For Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia, two other important New Left groups, the experience was somewhat different in that both groups were critical of the feminist movement and its themes in the early 70's. Women's commissions, analogous to those of the PCI, were created in each group, and the notion of women's autonomy was criticized as a divisive element in the class struggle. The hostility of Lotta Continua towards the feminist movement resulted in male members attacking the massive feminist demonstrations in December, 1976. This event marked the rupture of the group as women left en masse.

From the point of view of the New Left, the feminist movement constituted an element of crisis in all three extra-parliamentary groups, as women carried their feminist critique within the New Left and counterposed their ideas about organization and the class struggle to those of their fellow militants. The exit of feminists from these groups coincided with the more general crisis of the New Left, brought on by the 1976 elections, but as men from these New Left groups entered into the PCI and the PSI in the late 1970's, they carried with them a definite feminist influence.

At the beginning of the 1970's, the position of the UDI still reflected PCI policies fairly consistently. Its initial approach to the abortion issue was identical to that of the party, although by 1973, with its XIth National Congress, the new themes of the feminist movement were

already being widely discussed. At this conference, both the traditional PCI position and an emerging 'dissenting' position could be observed. The concluding statement reaffirmed the major objective of the organization as "the struggle for skilled and steady work for women, while reaffirming its centrality with respect to the problem of emancipation."⁶³ Alongside this objective was the need for a series of reforms, such as enactment of the law on public daycare that had been passed in 1971; the law on family rights (which was finally passed in 1975); the need to defeat the divorce referendum. On the abortion issue, it declared the need for a network of health centers offering birth control and other services for women that would diminish the need for abortion. It called for an open discussion of the issue of depenalizing abortion, while acknowledging that there had been dissension on this issue at the Congress.

By early 1975, the position of the UDI was undergoing change. A document issued in January, 1975 discussed two issues: the importance of emphasizing the social value of maternity and the right of women to sexuality. Their analysis of the need for self-discovery and sexual emancipation for women, couched in the language of the feminist movement, revealed the influence of the movement on the organization. Acknowledging that abortion was a negative form of birth control, nonetheless they supported full depenalization, free abortions in public clinics, and

women's free right to choose. The organization rejected the notion of defining allowable cases for abortion, giving others the right to decide whether a woman was 'entitled' to an abortion (the definition of cases being part of most of the parties' proposals).

By the time the first abortion law had been defeated by the DC and the MSI in April, 1976, the UDI had significantly increased its autonomy from the PCI, participating in the feminist demonstration called immediately after the vote. From that point on, there was a gradual process of rapprochement between the UDI and the feminist groups, spurred by changes in both the women's organization and the movement. In the late 1970's, as the feminist movement began to reconsider many issues and strategies, and in a changed political context, the adversary nature of their early relationship would change as well.

The first responses of PCI leaders to the feminist movement had been negative; with the intensification of the abortion campaign, there was a greater frequency of articles and polemics against the movement. Several prominent PCI leaders, including Seroni, one of the few women leaders of the party, argued against the complete liberalization of abortion.⁶⁴ Yet the PCI's call for a medical commission to decide on the legality of abortions in each case drew so much criticism from the UDI, the PSI and the feminist movement, that by September 1976, during the next legislative session, the PCI had changed its proposal so

that an individual doctor could approve of an abortion. On the ideological level of political debate, there was an evident influence of the movement on the party; by the time of the VI Conference of Communist Women in 1976, Communist leaders were acknowledging that they would have to come to terms with feminism, especially on the cultural level.⁶⁵ In addition as the UDI distanced itself from the party, there was increasing criticism from its leaders of the PCI's policies on women.

The PCI responded to the feminist movement and its mobilizations by presenting more women candidates in 1976, and consequently the number of Communist women parliamentarians increased. Notwithstanding this fact, and the fact that 50% of those who voted for the PCI in 1976 were women, the women in the party represented only 24% of its total membership. Leadership positions for women did not significantly increase during this period, indicating that the PCI's response to the mobilizations of the movement were strongest in terms of increasing its electoral advantage.

Analysis of the Italian feminist movement's campaigns for abortion and women's health centers has shown that the movement's approach to politics made institutional participation difficult, while alliances with other forces of the left were either not sought, or difficult to implement. The feminist movement, from its New Left origins, had been born expressing a critique of traditional politics;

aspects of the movement centered around solidarity and identity were difficult to translate into a policy-oriented campaign. The conflicts within the movement were the expression of a struggle to find new ways of being political; the movement's internal difficulties were exacerbated by the changing role of the New Left and the PCI in the aftermath of the elections of 1976.

Chapter 4- Notes

1. See Alessandro Pizzorno, "Identita e interesse", in Loreadana Sciolla, Identita: Percorsi di analisi in sociologia (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1983), pp. 170-171.

2. Francesco Alberoni, Movimento e Istituzione (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977), p. 37.

3. Ibid., p. 37.

4. The other two pre-requisites are "the establishment of relations favorable to the movement and the promotion of membership gratification." (Ralph Turner and William Killian, Collective Behavior (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 256). The need to acquire institutional political power as the main criterion for movement success will be examined in subsequent chapters.

5. See Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 7.

6. See Alberto Melucci, Altri Codici, pp. 25-26.

7. See Bianchi and Mormoni, "Militanti", pp. 127-174.

8. Ferree and Miller make these distinctions in "Mobilization and Meaning", pp. 45-47.

9. Since the early 1970's, referenda, as provided for in Article 75 of the Constitution, have repeatedly been organized at the grassroots level. A referendum is required whenever 500,000 voters or 5 regional councils request it. They can only repeal legislation and the validity of a referendum must be assured by the Constitutional Court. The use of this increased in the 1970's, promoted especially by the Radical Party, as a way to circumvent Parliament or force it to action.

10. See Caldwell, "Church, state and family", p. 89.

11. Mauro Paissan discusses the Catholic dissent that coalesced around support for divorce legislation in "La guerra di religione c'e, ma fra i cattolici" in Luciana Castellina, ed. Famiglia e societa capitalistica (Rome: Alfani Editore, 1974).

12. The Constitution states that referenda must be postponed for a year after a general election is held. Caldwell argues that holding the elections was one effective way of postponing the divorce referendum; see Caldwell, "Church, state and family", p. 82.

13. See Giovanni Leonetti "Il movimento femminista e i partiti della sinistra storica" in Fraire, ed. Lessico politico 3, pp. 186-7.

14. See DiPalma, "Christian Democracy", p. 132.

15. In comparison with 1970, the PCI increased its votes in the 1975 regional elections by 5.59% while the entire left including the PSI and extra-parliamentary groups increased by 8.67%. The DC declined by 2.55%. The increase in the left vote was attributed in part to the vote of young people (18-year-olds voted for the first time in 1975) and women; see Celso Ghini, Il terremoto del 15 giugno (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1976) pp. 106-8.

16. Farneti, in the Italian Party System, attributed the increase in women's left partisanship to a breakthrough after the divorce referendum; see p. 99.

17. Rosalind Petchesky in Abortion and Women's Choice: The State, Sexuality and Reproductive Freedom (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), as well as Kristin Luker in Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) trace similar changes leading to a groundswell of support for abortion in the 1970's in the United States.

18. See Frabotta, Femminismo e lotta di classe, p. 60.

19. From "Draft of the Platform of Principles of the Women's Liberation Movement" in Spagnoletti, I movimenti femministi, p. 74.

20. See Frabotta, La politica del femminismo, p. 92.

21. See Cristina Papa, Dibattito sull'aborto (Rimini: Guaraldi Editore, 1975), pp. 203-5.

22. Alberoni, in Movimento e Istituzione, refers to the collective task as one of the basic constitutive elements of a social movement, and it is indissolubly linked to a proof of success or failure in carrying out the task.

23. Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation, p. 69.

24. For example, see Alberto Melucci, Sistema politico, p. 106.

25. Bianchi and Mormoni describe the growth of the feminist movement in "Militanti", p. 149: "The mobilization

developed along lines of general content, activated by campaigns that referred to the political system."

26. Stephen Hellman, "The Longest Campaign", p. 169.

27. See Stephen Hellman, "The PCI Alliance Strategy and the Case of the Middle Classes" in Blackmer and Tarrow, eds. Communism in Italy and France, p. 417.

28. See Marisa Rodano, "Neo-femminismo: Un modo sbagliato di fare i conti con la questione femminile", Donna e Politica 17 (May 1973), pp. 134-138.

29. Luciano Gruppi, "Matrici ideali e sociali delle formazioni neo-femministe" in Donna e politica 17 (May 1973), pp. 139-41.

30. See Gianfranco Pasquino, "Partiti e società nell'Italia che cambia" in Martinelli and Pasquino, eds. La politica, pp. 9-33.

31. See Ergas, "1968-79", p. 265.

32. See Melucci, Sistema Politico, especially pp. 154-72; Marcello Fedele Classi e partiti negli anni '70 (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1979).

33. Melucci, Sistema politico, p. 158.

34. Ergas, "1968-97", p. 267.

35. Pizzorno describes this phase of emergent collective identity in "Identità e interesse", pp. 144-46.

36. Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation, p. 51.

37. The original conceptualization of this sort of movement structure was by Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine in People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970); especially p. 77.

38. Joan Cassell, A Group Called Women: Sisterhood and Symbolism in the Feminist Movement (New York: David McKay & Co., 1977), pp. 168-99.

39. Carden, in fact, makes this point in The New Feminist Movement; see p. 78.

40. See Anna Maria Guadagni "Nuove facce dell'UDI" in Memoria 13 (1986).

41. Guiseppina Cuiffreda, "Organizzazione" in Fraire, ed., Lessico Politico 3, p. 84.

42. See Biancamaria Frabotta, "Potere" in Fraire, Lessico Politico 3, pp. 126-30.

43. Ciuffreda, "Organizzazione" in Fraire, Lessico Politico 3, p. 75.

44. Bianchi and Mormoni in "Militanti" assert that this is true for Milanese feminism.

45. See Cassell, A Group Called Women, p.168.

46. See Freeman, The Politics of Women's Liberation, p. 126.

47. See Nancy McWilliams, "Feminist Consciousness-raising and Changing Visions of the Political" in Jane Jacques, ed. Women in Politics (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 164.

48. Alberoni, in Movimento e Istituzione discusses the importance of the symbolic integration of the group which proceeds through the "invention or adoption of collective activities that symbolically represent the experience of the stato nascente as it is incarnated in that historical group and thus reaffirms solidarity."; see pp. 207 ff.

49. Bianchi and Mormoni in "Militanti", p. 132, refer to a process of cultural production that had as its goal the definition of female identity.

50. See documents from Il centro per la salute della donna di Torino, in Fraire, et.al., eds. L'almanacco (Rome: Edizioni della donna, 1978), p. 42.

51. See Ibid., p. 41, where the Turin women's health center defined their program as fulfilling "the need to be a service for medical consultation; not as an alternative to public health services but to indicate how those services should respond to women's needs. The center has to enable women to acquire a different knowledge that will give them direct control over their health, through a different relationship with doctors and medicine."

52. See the documents from Il centro per la medicina delle donne di Milano, as cited in Clara Jourdan, Insieme Contro: Esperienze dei consultori femministi (Milan: Salamandra, 1976), p. 40.

53. See the documents from Comitato Romano Aborto e Contracezione in Fraire et. al., eds. L'almanacco, p. 40.

54. Melucci, Sistema politico, p. 115.
55. See Jourdan, Insieme Contro, p. 68.
56. Petchesky, in Abortion and Women's Choice points out that U.S. feminists as well opposed any distinction between therapeutic abortions and unconditional abortions; see especially, p. 125.
57. CRAC, in their document published in L'almanacco, argued that "We consider abortion always as a violent act, one of the major ones committed against women; it doesn't free us, its only allows us to reject the consequences of a sexuality that we don't recognize as our own, that forces us to make the sexual act coincide with maternity. They've expropriated everything from us: our work, our humanity, our sexuality, our maternity, our bodies." See L'almanacco, p. 50.
58. Petchesky, Abortion and Women's Choice, pp. 125-32.
59. Ergas, "1968-79", p. 270.
60. See "CRAC: Il punto sull'aborto" in Effe V (November 1976), pp.37-38.
61. Alberoni views the feminist movement as part of the general left front in the 1970's; see Movimento e Istituzione, p. 378.
62. Norma Rangeri, "Il movimento femminista e la nuova sinistra" in Fraire, ed. Lessico politico 3, p. 174.
63. Frabotta, La politica del femminismo, p. 197.
64. See Adriana Seroni, "Ragioni e torti di femminismo" in Rinascita 8, (1975).
65. See Leonetti, "Il femminismo e la sinistra storica", p. 179.

Chapter 5: The Movement and Institutions

The Changing Political Terrain

The elections of 1976 occurred at a particularly important moment in Italian political history. By the mid-1970's, the political climate in Italy had moved significantly to the left. The divorce referendum had demonstrated the spread of secular values and the decreasing hegemony of the Church and the DC over the Catholic electorate. Even in the face of political terrorism from the left, which began in 1973-4, the population was no longer convinced by the DC's attempt to link the PCI with the terrorist threat. Social movements of students, workers and women had helped to increase the demand for social reforms and contributed to the shift in partisanship to the left among certain social sectors.¹ These were all factors that increased the PCI's hope for greater governmental power. The PCI, with its strategy of the historic compromise that emphasized political pluralism, the electoral process and democracy, increasingly became the hope for sectors of the population wanting broad economic, social and bureaucratic reform. Its commitment to be "a party of government and of struggle"² seemed to promise representation to the social movements of the period.

By 1976 Italy's economic miracle had foundered;

inflation was quite high and the economic growth rate one of the lowest in Europe. The unions, strengthened by their new political role, would no longer accept economic austerity measures that would adversely affect the working class. The sense of economic crisis was joined by a pervasive sense of political crisis, in which the government was perceived as incapable of adequately addressing the economic problems. In addition, political scandals rocked the DC, contributing to a perception of its inability to govern. In this context, the PCI campaigned as the party of moderation and responsibility. Calling for a government of national unity, it argued for a coalition of all the democratic parties as the only way out of the crisis. At issue in the elections was the PCI's contention that without it, no effective governmental coalition could resolve the fundamental problems facing Italy.

The results of the elections continued the trend towards increasing the share of the left; the PCI consolidated its position, gaining 34.4% of the popular vote, bringing with it an even greater increase in its number of seats in parliament. It also increased its hegemony over the total left vote, as the Socialist party vote declined. The elections forced the DC to improve the PCI's position in parliament; for example, for the first time a PCI deputy was elected President of the Chamber of Deputies, and a number of parliamentary committee chairmanships were given to PCI deputies.³ In addition, the left coalition had won

majorities in six of twenty regions, almost half the provinces and many large cities in the 1975 elections.⁴ This surge of strength by the PCI meant that the DC found it impossible to form a viable coalition government without some participation from the PCI. This was especially true since the PSI insisted it would no longer participate in center left coalitions from which the PCI was excluded.⁵

In the fall of 1976, the PCI left the opposition for the first time since 1947. It agreed to abstain from the parliamentary vote on a new minority DC government, in exchange for being consulted in the determination of the government's program. These concessions reinforced the PCI's legitimacy as a party of governance and demonstrated that the country could not resolve its problems without PCI participation in the government. Under the so-called 'government of the abstentions' which followed, the DC was supposed to embark on a series of economic and social reforms. There were, in fact, some important reforms passed after the 1976 elections, with PCI pressure important to their passage. Rent-control legislation was passed and there was a decentralization of certain powers to local governmental institutions.⁶ Abortion legislation was finally passed in 1978. Yet other major reforms, like the 1977 industrial conversion law and a youth employment law, were regarded as weak, ineffective measures for dealing with the issues of unemployment and the needed reform of state-run industries.⁷ In addition, as Barkan and other authors

show, the PCI's continued stress on its political goal of entering the government and its conviction that the DC had to be its ally in government in order to avoid a polarizing crisis, meant that it "bargained away its reputation as a decisive reform party."⁸ As Hellman also notes:

The PCI had done nothing to suggest a change of style in Italian politics. For a party which has stressed that it is not like the others, and whose credibility depends in large measure on the freshness of its image, it can be most damaging to be identified as part of a process in which politics proceeds as usual. Locked into a difficult situation because of the political balance of power, and forced into an even greater difficulty by its own strategic assumptions, the PCI certainly became aware very early of the erosion of its image.⁹

The PCI was criticized for being too conciliatory towards the DC, with the fear that, like the PSI under the Center-Left, the PCI would be unable to pressure the DC to embark on serious reforms. Moreover, the PCI's own 'medium-term project' of reform priorities and objectives which it announced in 1977, was abstract and dissatisfying to many outside and inside the party.¹⁰

The PCI found itself in difficulty on two fronts in relationship to its commitment as a 'party of struggle'. The first had to do with the new explosion of youth movements. By 1977, with a worsening unemployment problem, a new sort of social movement emerged-- the 'autonomi', or autonomous groups on the left, composed of unemployed young people, student, women and counter-cultural activists.

Protest riots escalated, largely aimed at the PCI and the trade unions, an expression of the unemployment and the frustrated expectations born of the 1975-76 left victories. These protests, as well as the terrorism of the Red Brigades and right-wing attacks, constituted a new form of social conflict that threatened to completely escape the control of the political parties. In July 1977, the six parties cooperating in the DC minority government, including the PCI, came to a 'Programmatic Accord' that included anti-terrorist law and order measures, as well as a law completing the transfer of some central governmental powers to the regions. The PCI thus found itself in the position of allying with the DC on a law-and-order platform.

The PCI's second difficulty was in relationship to the working class movement. During this period, the union leadership, persuaded of the need for the PCI to enter the government in order for serious economic reforms to be enacted, voted on a platform that accepted wage containment and labor mobility between work places in exchange for a national investment program which would create more jobs. The unions also focused on a range of social reforms-- housing, transportation, agriculture, the South-- that would be the price for their contractual concessions. By the mid-1970's, the union leadership, unable to sustain its independent political role in a period economic recession, increased its allegiance and support for the PCI.

In 1978, as negotiations were once more underway to attempt the formation of a government coalition and a changed role for the PCI in the government, the Red Brigades killed Prime Minister Moro, and the ensuing sense of national crisis led to the Parliament voting the PCI into the majority for the first time since 1947. A government of national unity was established, in which the campaign against terrorism took precedence over all other social issues. This formal entry of the PCI into the government produced mounting problems for the party; the incidence of dissatisfaction increased among the union rank and file and the constituencies of the PCI. The number of autonomous unions began to grow, expressing dissatisfaction with the CGIL, CISL and UIL.

In May 1978, the PCI dropped an average of 9% in municipal elections. Six months later, in January 1979, the PCI returned to the opposition withdrawing from the parliamentary majority. In parliamentary elections several months later, the PCI went from its 1976 level of 34.4% to 30.4% of the popular vote. The PCI had clearly lost support, and the gains of the Radical Party (from 1.1 to 3.4%) and the Socialist Party, indicated that a proportion of the younger voters the PCI had won over in 1975-76 had already abandoned them. For the new constituencies, the raised expectations that the PCI's proximity to power would strengthen the representation of their interest, had been disappointed. The decade ended with the PCI weakened and

the labor movement, as well, having lost much of its autonomous power to wield political influence in the implementation of economic and social reform.

The effects of these changes in the political system on the social movements of the 70's varied for the worker's movement, the New Left and the feminist movement. We will first describe the general significance that the political changes had on the social space available to movement activities. Following that description, we will trace the specific outcome of the abortion law and the implementation of the public health centers, both indicators of the impact of the political system on the feminist movement.

There was a wide-spread perception in the years following the 1976 election that the period of broad social mobilization beginning with and symbolized by "1968" had come to a close.¹¹ The possibility of the existence of social movements as autonomous forces to the left of the PCI was diminished; after 1976 movements tended to be either increasingly marginal to the political system or terroristic. Three groups within the New Left had formed a political party under the label of Proletarian Democracy and they ran a common list of candidates which won several seats in the Chamber of Deputies. This new party, however, lasted only one legislature from 1976-79 and never represented an alternative to the left of the PCI.

The mobilizations of the period between '68 and '76 had witnessed direct, mass action protests in which new

political subjects had emerged-- rank and file workers, youth, women-- and in which new spheres of the social system had become the subject of political conflict. Donolo and others have described this double heritage of 1968, attributing their failure to elicit a positive response from the political parties in part to the fact that the:

vanguards of '68 tended to legitimate themselves with respect to the traditional political forces to take on their forms of politics.... The fact that the '68 movements and organizations made a traditional form of politics their own facilitated the relaunching of the historic left and the union, even on the new terrain and with respect to the socio-political actors. Thus, "68" culminated in June 20, 1976.¹²

This was also reflected in the number of New Left militants who joined the PCI after the '79 elections.¹³

Until the 70's, it had been largely the parties of the left that had organized youth and women; after 1968 those groups forced the political system to confront certain themes and issues directly and not through party channels. The PCI, which had initially rejected and neglected the importance of the new social movements had undergone change by 1976. In its campaign, it tried to play the role of mediating between the movements and the political system, purporting to represent the new social movements. In addition, it hoped to gain an electoral advantage with those groups without necessarily granting legitimacy to their specific demands. In their lists for the 1976 elections, for example, the PCI increased the number of independent

candidates from several sectors of Italian society that hadn't been previously identified with the PCI. This included dissident Catholics, prominent non-PCI intellectuals, and a much larger number of women candidates than ever before. In fact, 47 women were elected to parliament on the PCI lists, 31 of them newly elected. Yet none of them were 'representatives' of the feminist movement¹⁴ and as we have seen, the PCI position on the abortion law was fundamentally at odds with that of the movement.

During this period, the political party system moved further away from articulating demands that were arising in civil society and towards the reinforcement of the power of political elites. This process of alienation between social base and party was true across the range of the parties; for example, for the first time in 1979, less than 90% of Italians voted and the number of blank and marked ballots sharply increased. The PCI, which had claimed a monopoly over mobilizations 'from below', was more concerned by the late 1970's in closing off such spontaneous mobilizations and defending law and order measures against them. The electoral gains of the party had not been accompanied by an increase in mass participation within the party, as Fedele points out. Thus the leadership was rejuvenated after 1976 with new, younger cadres but the party increasingly looked to the institutional context for the resolution of social conflicts.¹⁵

We have described above how the increasing focus on negotiating among the parties in the late 1970's contributed, with other factors, to the negation of the movements and their demands, a shrinking of the space occupied by these movements in terms of their political contractuality. But the political system also attempted to defuse the conflict represented by the new social movements by a series of reforms which, to some degree, succeeded in regulating social conflict. Melucci and others have pointed out that the cycle of protests and new collective demands emerging from '68 all shared a double valence: they were simultaneously the expression of a push towards the modernization of institutions and organizations (university, factory, marriage, the family) as well as new, antagonistic demands tied to the quality of life, to anti-authoritarian impulses, as well as to the experience of new forms of solidarity and collective identity.¹⁶ The PCI was, in many ways, the major benefactor of this push towards modernization; it became "its most skilled interpreter and presented itself as the only party able to carry it into effect. The electoral results of '68 and '76 confirmed the fact that the PCI catalyzed the expectations of change and focused the most immediate effects of the student and worker protests."¹⁷ This became, of course, problematic by the end of the '70's as the PCI found it increasingly difficult to present itself as a modernizing party when it was not able to force the DC to implement fundamental economic and social

changes.

That aspect of the new social movements that expressed the demand for modernization did elicit specific reforms that addressed the archaic nature of Italian social institutions. These reforms also attempted the broader task of restoring political legitimacy to government by creating structures that would enlarge the scope of participation to new groups. In the mid to late 1970's, one important example of this was the regional decentralization law, which devolved certain governmental powers to the local level, and resulted in the creation of neighborhood councils. Yet these and other organs of local government established in areas that had been the location of social struggles during the 1970's-- health, education, factories-- were actually given little decisionmaking power and their structure usually discouraged autonomous grassroots participation. (Later, we will examine the case of the health centers as a representative example of this process.) Other examples that could be described as 'modernizing effects' of the social movements of the '70's, some of which we have already mentioned were divorce and abortion legislation, industrial relations, educational reform and various professions and institutions such as psychiatry, health, the criminal justice system, the police and the army. These decentralized institutions also had the effect of dispersing the targets of possible social protest away from the centralized government which had been the focus of most mass

protest.

The Abortion Campaign and Feminist Consultori

By the 1976 elections, therefore, the general climate of political protest had been altered, as the space for autonomous mobilizations of movements diminished. The effects of this on the feminist movement can be seen for both the outcome of the legislation on abortion and the fate of the feminist consultori. The movement had insisted on abortion on demand, paid for by the state, emphasizing women's self-determination in making the decision. The right to have abortions was considered as part of the larger issue of the provision of health care for women that would meet women's needs and would be controlled by them.

After the 1976 election, Parliament continued to work on abortion legislation. The legislative proposals were criticized and attacked by the feminist movement, although the movement had never been able to agree on an alternative legislative proposal of their own. For example, in January 1978, a national meeting on abortion and the consultori was held in Rome with over two thousand feminist participants from a variety of groups. There was, again, little consensus on concrete strategies, notwithstanding the express concern to "present ourselves to the outside world by positive proposals". Some groups emphasized the need to take a stand in terms of either the law or the referendum; others were concerned that emphasis on the abortion

legislation alone would turn attention away from the global project of feminism. They stressed the need to keep abortion linked to the feminist analysis of sexuality, maternity, roles, the family, etc., so that feminists would relate to the outside world not as "the ones who demand abortion but as women who propose a different way of living day-to-day."¹⁸

The Christian Democratic leadership, with much internal dissension, attempted after 1975-76 to relaunch its image as a more progressive party and therefore wanted to avoid repeating the errors of the divorce referendum. Although two years of negotiations elapsed before the bill was finally approved in April 1978, the DC abstained from the final vote on the abortion law, thus assuring its passage. The law that was passed was in many ways among the most progressive abortion laws in Europe. Yet the law fell short of feminist demands in many of its details. The PCI had, in the interest of consolidating its relationship to the DC, made several compromises over the law that were the object of demonstrations by both the feminist movement and the UDI.¹⁹ The law had, in one sense, eliminated the medical commission that had decisionmaking power over the woman's right to abortion, as well as eliminating de facto the criteria by which abortion would be permissible (both these had been demands of the movement). Under Article IV, a woman seeking abortion during the first ninety days of pregnancy could do so whenever she ascertained that there

could be harm to her physical or mental health, due to her economic, social, or family circumstances, a definition broad enough that it was tantamount to abortion on demand. The left parties had insisted on the wording in this final parliamentary debate, so as to avoid restricting the justifiable causes for abortion. The wording was such that women had the guarantee of finding a justifiable cause in their "economic, social or family circumstance" yet by formulating the article in this fashion, the parties essentially denied the principle of women's self-determination. The woman requesting an abortion could go to a family health center, a medical institution recognized by the government or to her doctor. In each case, according to Article V, the parties involved should discuss with the woman and "father of the conceived" (unless the woman objected to this) the circumstances that carried her to request an abortion, her legal rights, other alternatives, etc. In non-urgent situations, the woman was then issued a certificate by the doctor permitting the abortion, after which she had to wait seven days (presumably to think it over) before she could have the abortion performed. In urgent cases, the abortion could be performed with a doctor signing an emergency certificate allowing an immediate abortion.

Thus women were required by the law to go through a fairly complicated certification procedure that had little practical function, in the sense that, ultimately, abortions

were allowable subject to a woman's choice. The complexity of the procedure, the insistence on the role of the medical profession and the encouragement of the "father's" presence emphasized "that the real meaning (was)...the symbolic reaffirmation of the partial character of women's right to self-determination. The process of seeking approval was a yoke to be passed under; it was, especially, a symbolic tribute to patriarchy."²⁰

Other aspects of the law placed obstacles in the way of women obtaining abortions. Article IX provided for medical conscientious objectors to be freed from their requirements of performing abortions, if they were to so declare within a month of the passage of the law. This was a serious problems, for many health institutions in Italy are tied to the Catholic Church. In fact this proved to be a serious impediment as many doctors declared conscientious objector status after the passage of the law. Another article raised the age of minors needing consent from 16 (as the movement had demanded) to 18, although it did specify that in the absence of parental or guardian consent, a juvenile magistrate could decide to allow the abortion to take place.

These obstacles, however, did not actually prevent from making abortion accessible to Italian women. The significance of these articles of the law was to negate the meaning of the feminist movement's mobilization around the abortion issue and to deny recognition to feminism. Although the movement had not produced their own proposal

for an abortion law, they had made the focus of their mobilization the demand for women's self-determination, and for state funding of the abortion's inadequate health structures. Women's self-determination was denied in various articles of the law, primarily in symbolic forms that did not give feminists full recognition of the themes and principles of their abortion mobilization.

Passage of the law effected the organized mobilization capacities of the movement, as it is often the case when movements become focused on a single issue. Even before its passage, there had been a decline in the movement's level of mobilization, as indicated in demonstrations and public protest activities.²¹ Yet although direct action had been a major part of the feminist movement's activities, much of the movement's energies had been committed to the creation of the women's health centers. The abortion law and the regional consultori law both transformed the nature of the institutions around which the movement had grown.

The abortion law had specified the nature of health institutions within which abortion certification could be released and abortions performed. These were to be public health institutions and private clinics authorized by regional law and eventually the consultori when local laws were passed. Thus, legalized abortion could take place in certain institutions which did not include feminist consultori. Since part of the movement's demands had been for state health services and since the law provided for

publically-funded abortions, it was impossible to justify the continued provision of abortions in feminist consultori. Both the motivation towards and the real possibility of effectively carrying out clandestine illegal abortions disappeared with the implementation of the new law.

The feminist consultori, besides functioning to perform abortions, had also pushed to condition the nature of the public consultori once they were instituted under the regional law to insure women's control over their functioning. The attempt to guarantee the influence and participation of the feminist movement and of women in the operation of the public consultori proved to be quite problematic.

The passage of Law 405, which called for the institution of family health centers, meant that for the first time private problems such as birth control, the family, and reproduction became the object of a state service. This law was a compromise between different political and social forces and its implementation varied from region to region depending on the particular constellation of forces. The Christian Democrats had primarily seen the centers as a family-oriented service that would strengthen the institution of marriage and the family. The PCI and the PSI had supported the legislation, seeing it as a social service that would "concretely affirm the principle of maternity as a social value, the foundation of women's emancipation and liberation...with the local consultori there will be the

guarantee of true social control which directly involves the users."²² Feminists, as we have seen, perceived the health center as a place where women could gain knowledge and skills relating to health and sexuality and where women could be politicized to demand control over health services.

The 1975 legislation established the consultori as a new, decentralized structure, closely tied to local communities and sustained by the act of participation by the citizenry. The general indications of the national law were subsequently translated into individual laws by each regional government. These health centers were to take over certain functions of existing hospitals and clinics, particularly obstetrics and gynecology services, and were to add others such as counseling and therapy. As one scholar has noted, "Law 405, notwithstanding the multiplicity of interpretations on the meaning and function of health centers, prefigures a public service aimed at carrying new values and themes that have emerged with the modernizing process especially with regard to sexuality and parent-child relations, into a context of institutionalized reference."²³

The law provided for two possible types of consultori--public ones to be created, or for financing to private ones that already existed. Many of the regional laws passed on the heels of the national law specified, as that law had mandated, the forms of participation to be enacted for the consultori so that they would respond to local needs. For

example, the region of Lombardy specified that in its "service for sexual education free and informed procreation, maternity, infancy and child-care" the following would participate in planning, organizing and administering the service: users, union and social organizations, women's movements, organs of city decentralization, factory councils from the area and the service personnel.²⁴

One of the goals of the feminist consultori had been to increase the strength of the demand by women for social services, a goal apparently partially achieved by the institution of family health centers. Yet even on paper the legislation looked quite different than what feminists had created and there were varying reactions to the legislation from the movement. Some feminists saw the autonomy of the feminist health centers as central, and therefore believed energy should be concentrated on developing their own centers given that "the public ones could never become places for the political association for women and spaces where political practice and independent research on women's health could proceed". Others saw the need to retain the feminist health centers but also to help in the development of the public ones, so as to introduce elements of feminism into these institutions, the logic being that many more women could be reached via the public consultori.²⁵ Since the abortion law had mandated that the certificates be released by the consultori and that abortions could be performed there, the feminist health centers lost their

primary function. Thus de facto the second strategy prevailed as many feminists attempted to become involved in the institution of the public consultori.

The direct participation of feminists was possible in two principal ways: through representation on administrative bodies defining and constituting the consultori and as participants in the training of personnel or the preparation of courses for the teams which were to staff the consultori. (For example, there were general courses for health workers who were about to be transferred to the new health centers on the goals and methods of the new institutions.) The actual experience of the consultori made the participation of feminists in the creation and administration of the consultori quite difficult, since as part of the decentralization of these institutions, local bodies had responsibility for defining the manner of participation. This usually meant that the committees planning the centers reflected the political make-up of the local government. For example, in one working class neighborhood studied in a northern industrial city, there was the active interest of two groups of women in the new consultorio--one group of women from the main factory in the area who expressed interest in defining and discussing the consultorio and women's health issues, and women from the neighborhood primarily PCI militants. The committee planning the consultorio eventually represented only those forces who had some party connections, so that only the second group of

women with ties to the PCI elected a representative to the committee. "The experience of 'pre-administration'...was largely swallowed up by the political forces. In fact organized and non-organized groups from the neighborhood were treated in such a way as to control external factors that seemed menacing with respect to the model of consensus that prevailed."²⁶

Participation in the administration of the consultori became limited to institutionalized social forces, with access blocked to grassroots groups. Particularly in the period immediately following the passage of the regional laws, many general meetings and assemblies took place amongst feminist and neighborhood groups to discuss women's health, contraception and abortion. Yet participants in these initiatives rarely found their way into the committees organizing the consultori.

There was perhaps somewhat more feminist content and participation in the courses preparing the personnel for the new institutions. Although the regional governments tended to encourage the participation of 'experts' in these courses, the women's movement in Rome, for example, selected several women with professional qualifications who successfully ran as candidates for the committees planning the courses. Once on that body, these women were able to influence the content of the course, introducing the use of the small group and consciousness-raising and emphasizing themes such as abortion, contraception and sexuality in the

actual teaching of the course. Feminist service workers as well were able to encourage women health consumers in some consultorio to participate directly in the definition of their health needs through meetings held with neighborhood women. Yet as Pizzini describes the experience of such feminist workers, they often had to contend with the local government and the citizen advisory committee of the consultorio who gave little support to the neighborhood women's health services.²⁷

The feminist movement had viewed the consultori not as a service but as the coalescing point for the articulation of demands for health services on the state. Yet their demand could be read in that double sense that we have discussed-- as both responding to the social system's need for modernization and as an expression of the autonomous needs of women. According to studies of the consultori, made after several years of its operation, the law establishing them had expressed the welfare state's tendency to transfer control of the family and the resolution of its problems to public agencies, so that the consultorio had become an agency of secondary socialization.²⁸ The assumption of this analysis, one shared by most writing on the subject, is that women were the object of the social policies of the consultorio. They were its primary users, primary workers and it was their role in the family which was the exclusive object of the functions of the consultorio. Yet because of its institutional framework, feminists had difficulty

injecting moments of self-management into the administration of the consultorio, although they had somewhat better success introducing themes of the movement into women's discussion groups.

The Years of Silence

In the period after passage of the abortion law and the implementation of the public health centers, the coordinating organizations of the movement, with the exception of the MLD and the newly 'feminized' UDI, disappeared and many of the political collectives stopped meeting. A major part of the feminist movement had emerged with a political orientation and had engaged in campaigns that pitted the movement, as an autonomous social protagonist, against political parties and the state. With the decline of the New Left, feminism's main reference point on the left, and with the end of feminist consultori and other groups that had served as recruitment centers for the movement, the feminist movement entered what it called its "years of silence", characterized by its absence from the political scene.

It is difficult to characterize the nature of a movement without those more public, visible protest events and identifying organizations. Much of the activity of feminists in the late 1970's, as different as it was from the mass mobilizations that preceded it, presumed the existence of a feminist culture that had developed-- a body

of ideas and practices that could be carried into a new variety of social spaces.

A major trend in this period was the entry of many feminists into more institutional contexts-- schools, professional associations, unions-- where feminist collectives were formed. The entire world of work and workplace organizing, previously delegated by the movement to the emancipatory ghetto of the UDI, began to be reconsidered as a possible terrain for social change by feminists. An example of this was the participation of women in the 150 Hours courses in the labor unions.

In 1973, workers had won the right to take courses on company time without losing pay, as a way of breaking down the distinction between workers and those with an education. The 150 Hours courses (workers were entitled to 150 hours over a three-year period) were often taught by young New Leftists, especially during the first few years they were instituted. By the late 1970's, ideas of the feminist movement had begun to circulate and be received positively by women workers and unionists, resulting in the formation of women's courses in the 150 Hours program. The subject of the courses included women's history, health care and occupational safety. There was an attempt to introduce themes of feminism and consciousness-raising into the discussions. The enrollment in the courses included workers, but also housewives, women doing piece work at home and feminist intellectuals. The 150 Hours courses found many

women quite receptive to feminist ideas, particularly in terms of the relationship of female subordination in the home and the workplace. The courses succeeded in spreading feminist ideas to new strata of women, especially young women workers.²⁹

Feminists also became active in the union confederations, forming networks that cut across the different industrial and unions divisions, called the women's intercategories. Participation of feminists in the unions had begun in the mid-1970's; with these networks, there was some national coordination. In these groups feminists tried to both organize autonomous groups of women within the unions to meet and discuss themes of 'private life', and to specify changes in working conditions for women that could be part of the union platforms. According to Barkan's description of these feminist activities in the unions, the organizational dilemma that had confronted the feminist movement in general re-emerged for feminist unionists. Some thought that the non-hierarchical, informal structure of the small group should be retained, while others felt that a more formal organizational structure would give women more leverage in carrying their demands to the union leadership.³⁰ There was the additional difficulty of trying to transmit demands to the unions or the factory council delegates that were "not translatable into union terms" because they "had to do not strictly with work but with the global condition of women".³¹

In addition to these attempts at the 'feminization' of institutions, another pervasive trend changed the nature of the feminist movement in this period. Among many feminists, there was a turn away from public, institutional politics to a focus on 'lifestyle politics.'³² As Ergas describes this process:

The themes around which groups of women gathered were decreasingly linked to possible goals of institutional negotiation; these gave way to issues that tended to consolidate a new breadth in feminist identity: sexuality, psychoanalysis and culture constituted, beginning in 1977, the almost exclusive focus of groups that in the past had devoted their energies to issues like divorce, abortion, women's health centers and, in general, the social policy of the state.³³

In particular, groups engaged in aspects of feminist culture proliferated, often establishing explicitly alternative institutions for the first time for the movement.³⁴ Women's studies and research centers were formed in the late 1970's and the number of women's bookstores and publishing efforts increased, with some cultural initiatives utilizing the small group, while others were more entrepreneurial and geared toward a cultural product for the marketplace. In both cases, the increasing production of culture succeeded in extending the area of influence of feminist ideas. For example, the Virginia Woolf Center in Rome, founded in 1979, held classes on the full range of women's studies subjects for a broad strata of women students.

By the late 1970's, the 'area' of the movement had taken on an extremely heterogeneous, differentiated profile, which included both the feminist movement and the women's movement, in which fundamental themes and practices of feminism had been transmitted by this time. As Bianchi and Mormoni point out, aside from the older, organized groups like the UDI and the MLD, "it became practically impossible to refer to an empirical collective actor endowed with a center and structured homogeneously."³⁵ Yet there was a proliferation of collectives functioning either as work groups or cooperatives around specific themes in a variety of social contexts. One theme mentioned above was the production of women's and feminist culture; health and sexuality, as well as women's work also became the basis for the formation of various groups that attempted to wed feminist analyses to concrete service or organizing projects. Women's cooperatives were also created, involving living spaces (housing); recreational spaces (bars, restaurants); and the production of culture and personal services (therapy, professional training). These last required recourse to institutional forces like the UDI or municipalities that had the resources to help organize such projects.

By the late 1970's the movement was transformed from a political protagonist capable of influencing and acting on the party system, to an essentially social force, with a plurality of objectives and activities. Moving away from its

initial primary identification with the New Left, the movement created its own cultural area, in which the newer generation of feminists considered themselves less 'leftists' than simply 'feminists'. The movement had, by 1980, through its production of alternative culture and service institutions, come closer to what we might define as a movement of lifestyle issues, yet it still showed considerable mobilizing capacities in specific instances. In 1981, the DC, the Catholic Church and the anti-abortion Italian Movement for Life fought to repeal the 1978 abortion law; a referendum was voted on and the right to abortion was upheld by 68% of the voters, indicating that feminist attitudes had continued to change social relations even in a moment of decreasing visibility for the movement. Mobilization also accompanied specific issues in the early 1980's; for example, the more organized sectors of the movement proposed a law on sexual violence in 1980, which brought together the heterogeneous groups of the movement in its support.

This mobilizing capacity bears out the recent analysis of those noting that, while many of the previous organizational forms of the movement have dissolved, this does not seem to undermine the sense of collective identity still shared by feminists.³⁶ An additional indication of this is the fact that feminists, in many of their activities, still use the form of the small groups and practice aspects of consciousness-raising.³⁷ This is true of

both alternative institutions and services, as well as the institutional participation of feminists in such areas as the labor unions.

Several fundamental questions are raised by these developments, which we will address in the concluding chapter. With the impossibility of any organizational reference point and relatively few incursions into the public scene, how can the observer confirm the existence of the movement, beyond the cultural production that emerges? The problem of outlining the field of activity of the movement and describing it becomes more difficult as it shifts away from generalizable political goals, raising the issue of what kind of social change now accompanies the movement's activities.

As Pizzorno has pointed out, "alteration in a representative system can be linked to the occurrence of 'new entries', since the phenomenon implies a phase of the formation of new collective identities."³⁸ As a crisis developed in the Italian party system in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and the monopoly of the political parties over the representation and mediation of interests was called into question, women made their entry onto the political scene. Particularly in the years 1975-76, through their mobilizations for new abortion legislation, the feminist movement constituted itself as a political subject able to "impose its issues on the agenda of the institutionalized

political forces, making issues like abortion and contraception, workplace discrimination and the forms of women's representation the object of debate and negotiation."³⁹ The institutional translation of the movement's demands tended to integrate only those aspects that could be answered with modernizing forms of social change. As the PCI, the party of opposition, attempted to mediate for the movement, and as the New Left declined in strength, the feminist movement's ability for autonomous negotiation with the political system decreased, as did its internal cohesion. With its shift to a focus on lifestyle or cultural issues, the feminist movement moved into a new phase, yet continued to explore forms of collective action that could join social and personal change.

Chapter 5- Notes

1. In The Italian Party System, p.99 Farneti points especially to youth in women as exhibiting much greater voting change than that of social classes during this period; numerous analysts have pointed to the importance of the 18-year-old vote in 1975 and 1976; see also Celso Ghini, Il terremoto del 15 giugno (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1976); Giacomo Sani, "The Italian Electorate in the Mid-1970's: Beyond Tradition" in Penniman, Italy at the Polls (1976), pp. 81-122.

2. This was officially announced in 1976 at a Central Committee meeting of the party and is published in Gianni Cervetti, Partito di governo e lotta (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977).

3. See Stephen Hellman, "The Italian CP: Stumbling on the Threshold" in Problems of Communism (Nov.- Dec. 1978), pp. 31-48.

4. For an analysis of the 1975 vote, see Sani, "The Italian Electorate" in Penniman, ed. Italy at the Polls (1976).

5. See Joseph LaPalombara, "Italian Elections as Hobson's Choice" in Penniman, Italy at the Polls 1976, p. 30.

6. Hellman, "The Italian CP", p. 34.

7. See James Ruscoe, On the Threshold of Government: The Italian Communist Party 1976-81 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) p.108, for specifics on these laws.

8. Barkan, Vision of Emancipation, p. 121.

9. Hellman, "The Italian CP", p. 35.

10. Ibid., page 36.

11. The year '68' had become emblematic of these mobilizations and had entered into the Italian vocabulary; an entire generation of militants became known as "68ers".

12. Donolo, Mutamento o Transizione, p. 14.

13. See Melucci, L'invenzione del presente, p. 126.

14. See Gianfranco Pasquino, "The Italian Socialist Party" in Penniman, Italy at the Polls: 1976, p. 194.

15. See Marcello Fedele, Classi e partiti, p. 171.
16. Melucci, L'invenzione del presente, p. 106.
17. Ibid., p. 106.
18. See "Dallo stasi alla lotta; mai pui delegare", in Effe V (February 1978), pp. 3-4.
19. See Barkan, Visions of Emancipation, p. 134.
20. Ergas, "1968-79", p. 272.
21. See "La posizione del CRAC", in Effe V, (March 1977), p. 20.
22. I. Caricchi, G. Mereu, L. Viviani. Il consultorio: la donna protagonista (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1976) p. 7.
23. Pierpaolo Donati, Consultorio familiare e bisogni sociali (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 1980), p. 49.
24. Franca M. Olivetti, Il consultorio difficile (Bari: De Donato, 1980), p. 54.
25. See "Val la pena di partecipare", in Effe V (June 1977).
26. Olivetti, Il consultorio difficile, p. 75.
27. Franca Pizzini, "The Experience of a Family Health Center in Milan", paper delivered at the Conference on Italian and American Feminism, NYU, Spring 1981.
28. See Donati, "Il ruolo del consultorio familiare nel quadro della politica sociale in Italia" in G. Ghio, ed. I consultori familiari (Bologna: Patron, 1978).
29. Barkan, in Visions of Emancipation reports on her interviews with women workers in the early 1980's. She found that, although few were active feminists, many considered themselves feminists.
30. Ibid., pp. 144-5.
31. Nappi and Regalia, La pratica politica delle donne, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1978), pp. 117-18.
32. Garner and Zald discuss the focus of new social movements on lifestyle issues in Social Movement Sectors, p. 19.

33. Ergas, "Biografie femministe: La militanza fra cultura e politica negli anni '70 in Italia" in Memoria 4 (June 1982), p. 97.

34. It is interesting to note that Garner and Zald, in Social Movement Sectors, predicted the increasing 'Americanization' of the whole Italian movement sector; that is, the decreasing politicization of its movements and an increasing focus on lifestyle issues.

35. Bianchi and Mormoni, "Militanti", p. 131.

36. Ergas in "Biografie femministe" notes that the decline in total, full-time militance in the feminist movement in the late 1970's for many individuals did not signal the waning of the movement, but rather "the necessary condition for the survival of that collective identity, ensuring that the tensions between individual and collective ways of being don't produce irrevocable separations"; see p. 98.

37. See Bianchi and Mormoni's study, described in "Militanti". They focused their research on Milanese feminism; it is therefore unclear if this is a pervasive national phenomenon.

38. See Pizzorno, "Identita e interesse", p. 145.

39. Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", p. 561.

Chapter 6: Changing Paradigms

In the opening chapter, we described an analytic model of social movement formation and development, which combined aspects of both the resource mobilization approach pervasive in U.S. studies, and some refinements to this model introduced by Tarrow, which focus on the political opportunity structure constituting the environment of social movements. This concluding chapter will evaluate the 'fit' of that model to the Italian feminist movement, and, more broadly, to the sort of new social movement phenomena that the feminist movement exemplifies. In tracing some of the questions that this model leaves unanswered, or only inadequately addresses, we will introduce another paradigm, that of collective identity formation, an approach which characterizes much Western European work done on contemporary social movements.¹ There are shared characteristics among several of the new social movements which have indicated to many observers that feminist, ecological, anti-nuclear and other movements emerging in the 1970's are examples of a unique, new type of collective formation. These common traits have favored the search for an explanatory paradigm which accounts for the specific meaning of these phenomena within contemporary societies. The motivation behind the development of what might be

called a 'collective identity approach in the work of European scholars such as Alberto Melucci, Claus Offe, Alessandro Pizzorno, and Alain Touraine, has been that the current models, particularly resource mobilization theories, have been able to explain how a movement forms, but not why it does so.² Part of the explanation for this lies in the absence of attention, in American empirical studies, to the 'project' for social change embodied in the actions and articulated in the ideology of particular social movements. As Freeman asserts, in the introduction to her anthology on Social Movements of the 60's and 70's, "the belief systems of most movements in the sixties and seventies were extensions of basic liberal concepts that dominate our public philosophy. Contemporary analysts have simply not seen their motivating force as requiring an explanation."³ As we have seen, the resource mobilization perspective, operating within the framework of Olson's model, sees the motivation of collective social action consisting of the rational calculation of costs and benefits; thus, the only question that arises is the nature of those incentives in a specific empirical case. In addition, the different contexts of American and European social movements offer a partial explanation of the approaches. Resource mobilization theories were formulated in the context of non-class oriented movements that did not usually refer to or locate themselves on the political spectrum; the collective identity paradigm was formed in post-68 Western Europe with

a tradition of highly politicized social movements.

Yet many of the same movements of the 60's and 70's emerged simultaneously in both the United States and Western Europe, so it would seem that an explanatory model should be able to accurately assess movements in both contexts. This chapter will examine the alternative models in light of the history we have recounted of the movement, and will ultimately answer the question of which model, or perhaps which aspects of each, can explain the development of the Italian feminist movement and its common emergence with other social movements. We will then briefly examine two recent empirical studies of the Italian feminist movement, as evidence to support our interpretation of recent developments within the movement.

Italian Feminism and the Political Opportunity Structure

Let us apply the categories of the political opportunity structure model to our empirical case. The concept of the political opportunity structure, proposed by Tarrow and others, as the environment that structures and conditions political protest, was composed of three constituent elements: the openness of the political system to emergent social groups; the system's electoral stability; and the availability of support groups to those engaged in protest. These three factors were seen as conditioning the policy outcome of the movement, which was a measure of 'movement success' or 'movement failure'. The major components of

success were seen as the achievement of desired policy goals (the attainment of its program) and the degree of acceptance of the movement as a legitimate spokesperson for a given constituency or set of interests (establishing power relations favorable to the movement). Additionally, the 'internal' resources of the movement, ie. leadership, organization, and mobilizational capacity, were seen as important variables in predicting the outcome of a social movement.

In applying this model to the feminist movement throughout this work, we have been able to see certain areas in which its explanatory value was evident, both in terms of the increased opportunity for feminist protest to emerge and for its outcome. The general political context that increased the possibility (and probability) of movements developing in the late 1960's argues for the validity of this model. There was the electoral instability of the Italian political system, with the consequent positive response of the PSI to the new social movements. A crisis in governance and the withdrawal of delegation from those in power meant that "political alliances among the parties and between them and diverse social actors, including the unions, were disrupted and the search for new relations between the parties and political institutions and society initiated,"⁴ giving new political actors increased access to the political system. Because of its position within the opposition, the PCI helped to keep open spaces "within which

non-institutional forces could interact with the political system."⁵ Thus the existence of political allies was also important to the feminist movement's ability to have issues it considered important the focus of political negotiation.

Electoral instability, the increasing openness of political institutions to new groups, and the crucial role of political allies on the left, all help to explain why feminist (and other forms of) protest increased in the late 60's in Italy. The model is also useful in assessing the policy outcomes or success of the feminist movement both in attainment of its goals and in institutional access to participation. The height of the general protest cycle occurred between 1968-72, and significant reforms were passed toward the beginning of that cycle, extending legitimate access to new groups, including women.⁶ The acme of the feminist movement's mobilizations occurred somewhat after the general cycle, when the growth of the PCI threatened to dampen, rather than encourage, continued protest. The specific gains that the movement achieved were substantive reforms that bestowed new advantages or benefits to women, such as the abortion law (and later the law prohibiting discrimination against women in the workplace). The reforms that enlarged participation were less the specific achievement of the feminist movement, and more the result of the movements that preceded it. The reforms that conferred specific benefits to women were more narrowly the results of the movement's mobilizations.

Tarrow raises the issue of whether reforms that institutionalize protest co-opt protestors or provide for the legal guarantees that enable further protest to succeed. He suggests that the "demobilization" of feminist activities after passage of the abortion law could be attributable to the possible cooptation of the movement through "allocation of new benefits."⁷ We would add that the reforms that extended institutional access to women did not co-opt feminists partly because they bestowed only a formal access, as we have seen, and were severally limited in their encouragement of broader feminist participation, and women's participation in general.⁸

Therefore a general period favoring protest actions enabled the feminist movement to emerge and expand, whereas the nature of the reforms enacted by political elites in response to both the earlier mobilizations and the later feminist mobilizations then affected the declining leverage of the latter. The feminist movement's demobilization was also conditioned by the changing role of the New Left and the PCI in this period. Among its political allies, the New Left went into a crisis from which it did not emerge, and only the PCI had significant political influence; this meant that the PCI could begin to mediate directly for the feminist movement on the national level, reducing the space for any autonomous political activities by the movement after 1976, while on the local level it imposed its control over the decentralized governing bodies established.

This structuring of feminist protest by the political system should not cause us, however, to ignore the role of the 'internal 'resources of the movement, as these are essential to understanding how the movement constituted itself and acquired resources to pursue its goals. Without analysis of how the feminist movement formed and maintained itself (the chosen province of resource mobilization theories), we would be left with a notion that macro-political processes determined the history of Italian feminism. The picture that emerged from our description of the movement's organization, leadership and mobilizing potential was a complex one, particularly as regards assessing movement outcomes. The ideological heritage of the New Left (participatory, egalitarian) was adopted and then transformed by the feminist movement, with an organizational form that attempted to breach the separation between women's everyday lives and political realities. The small, consciousness-raising group and the collectives corresponded to Gerlach's model: segmented (composed of a broad range of groups), decentralized (with a proliferation of leaders) and reticulate (overlapping networks with joint activities and sharing of goals).⁹ The attempt to counteract the social domination experienced by women historically by avoiding leadership within the groups of the movement, while not universally achieved, was nonetheless an operative goal of the movement. In the height of the movement's activities around the abortion issue, national organizations did

develop to coordinate the demonstrations, direct actions and the activities of the women's health centers.

As Gerlach has pointed out, the mobilizational advantage of this kind of movement organization is its ease of 'multipenetration', facilitating entry into a wide variety of social niches. In fact, as we described the history of the movement, feminists had considerable success transposing the small group from the original feminist groups to other social locations in working class neighborhoods and unions, for example. This structure is also considered to be highly adaptive, particularly in situations of rapid social change surrounding a movement.

We have also traced, in Chapter 5, some of the consequences of these organizational strategies of the feminist movement, particularly the difficulty, for the heterogeneous groups of the movement, in reaching consensus about how best to pursue abortion legislation goals, a difficulty which reached even to the formulation of goals themselves. The critical stance of the movement toward political negotiation also affected its willingness to actively seek alliances, even amongst the traditional women's organizations like the UDI. We have seen how the creation and re-creation of the movement's ideology (in the face of attempts to redefine the movement's 'definition of the issues') provided themes and resources which were essential elements of internal solidarity¹⁰ that may have counteracted the divisive effects of differential protest

strategies among diverse groups within the movement.¹¹

As we noted in Chapter 1, the model we have utilized should give us strong indications of movement success or failure in achieving policy goals and increased access to participation. How might we attempt, then, to evaluate the success of the Italian feminist movement? It appears to have succeeded in the period of its most intense mobilizing strength in becoming recognized as the spokesperson for women's interests, in pressuring the parties of the left to change their positions on abortion legislation, and thus, indirectly, on the outcome of the legislation. Other substantive goals achieved under the pressure of feminist mobilizations were the establishment of women's health centers, the legalization of contraception, and the 1977 law prohibiting discrimination against women in hiring and job conditions. The movement also contributed to enlarging the scope of 'allowable' political claims, following the pattern outlined by Peattie and Rein, so that the granting of initial claims in new areas (ie. divorce) supported the mobilization of the movement, and strengthened the channels for making additional claims in areas previously considered outside the structure of claims.¹² In terms of increased access to participation, there was the creation of the consulte femminili during this period, as well as the institutionalized access of women to the managing bodies of the consultori. Within the PCI and the PSI, women's leadership role was not significantly altered as a result of

feminist mobilizations.

These then were the formal achievements of the feminist movement. After 1976, the negotiating leverage of the movement declined, its coordinating bodies disbanded and a period of demobilization occurred. With the passage of abortion legislation, and with the institutionalization of one of the movement's primary aggregating structures, the consultorio, the movement foundered. Increasing institutional access proved unachievable, as the better organized groups predominated in the new participatory bodies. Partial success was reached in substantive reforms leading to demobilization; little success in legitimating new power relations favorable to the movement, with this too leading to demobilization.

The problem is that this model only succeeds in explaining partial aspects of the history we have traced. It tends to equate the feminist movement with its policy goals and, moreover, reads those goals as being purely instrumental in nature, thereby reducing the meaning of the public actions of the movement.¹³ When there is no longer protest or pressure visible by the movement on the political system, it is assumed that the movement has ebbed or died.

One major reason for this, as Ferree and Miller have pointed out, is the overemphasis by most resource mobilization writers on coercion as the dynamic of social change, resulting in an underestimation of the role of ideology in social movements. Therefore, acquiring resources

to exercise control over governmental apparatuses is seen as central to the actions of social movements. As they argue, "Because power per se is the issue, the overt content of the movement's ideology is seen as irrelevant. Movements such as religious or radical feminist groups that do not aim at seizing control of government functions are inconvenient for the theory and are ignored."¹⁴

Our model has, with some modification, confirmed our original hypotheses, that movement success is explained primarily with reference to the political opportunity structure and the internal resources of the movement, but we have, in the course of tracing the path of the feminist movement, to some degree produced a tautology. Conflictual aspects of the movement that achieved political results are explained by the political opportunity structure, but to echo Melucci's critique of resource mobilization theory, our model has not explained other conflictual aspects of the movement that transcend immediate political goals and (perhaps) express broader, systemic conflicts and contradictions. Several elements in the description we have given of the movement lend credence to his critique. When we discussed the content of the abortion legislation, we noted that the symbolic content of the demands made by feminists, diverged significantly from the parties' legislative proposals and the final legislation passed, yet the political opportunity model offers us few clues about how to interpret these differences. The primary form of the

movement, the small group, can only be seen in the light of resource mobilization approaches, as an unfortunate consequence of inferior organizational resources, doomed to create political impotence. This approach does not provide us with many tools for understanding other functions that this organizational form may have for the movement. Likewise, using the criteria of the political opportunity approach, we would have to assume a defunct movement in the late 1970's, until another mass mobilization or the creation of visible organizations might alert us to a resuscitated or reborn movement. But we have seen that several observers and participants in the feminist movement consider the movement to persist despite the absence of continuous manifest protest. We will now turn to a consideration of an alternative model which does not deny the importance of political mobilizations, but looks to both the visible and latent forms of struggle within a movement in order to decipher the relationship of that movement to its broader social structure.¹⁵

Movements and Collective Identity

Several European theorists, writing on the social movements of the 70's, attempt to ground their analysis in the structural changes occurring in contemporary social systems. Alain Touraine, Claus Offe and Alberto Melucci all point to forms of collective action that are historically new in two major ways: in the form and content of their

actions; and in the social areas in which they emerge. In terms of what Touraine sees as the new social system of post-industrial society,¹⁶ social movements struggle for the control of the direction of a social system, so that movements become the conflictual producers of the fundamental orientations of society. Social movements, in his view, do not aim at the state as the direct object of their struggle, but represent alternative ways to interpret norms and cultural models. Movements have shifted their terrain from the factory and the political system into new areas of social life previously untouched by social conflict, as groups struggle to defend themselves against the system's crushing imperative to integrate individuals through informational and symbolic systems. These new social movements are focused on issues having to do with "the body, desire, nature and identity. The cultural definition of these new needs emerges as the symbolic representation of that which can evade this pervasive power. It is a sort of 'non-social' that is opposed to the increasing homogenization of the social that has invaded everywhere."¹⁷

The new paradigm of social movements that emerges from these writers does not view them merely as the result of systemic contradictions in post-industrial society. Melucci has defined a social movement as "a form of collective action (a)based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, (c)breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs."¹⁸ It is not a product of systemic dysfunctions, but

is a social construction with both structures (the focus of resource mobilization work) and unifying aims, beliefs and a shared collective identity. This latter element, largely ignored by political process and resource mobilization theories, is perhaps the major contribution of the European paradigm. It is the notion of collective identity which is central to the work of Melucci, for example. For a social movement to be present, there must be both a conflict and solidarity, and the actors are linked together in a mutually created definition of themselves and their social environment.

Melucci has pointed to several shared characteristics of these contemporary social movements: the shift of social conflict expressed by the movements to formerly private areas of social life, so that the separation of private and public realms breaks down; their goal of solidarity and group identity, characterized by ascriptive definitions of membership; direct participation and the rejection of representation; and a tendency away from a focus on the political system. The very organizational form of new movement has called into question for Melucci the concept of the movement, causing him to define as movement networks or movement areas "the network of groups and individuals sharing a conflictual culture and a collective identity, which includes both 'formal' organizations but also the network of 'informal' relationships 'connecting core individuals to a broader area of participation and 'users'

of services and cultural goods produced by the movement."¹⁹ The use of such a concept, for Melucci, reflects the fact that the organizational forms of collective action are becoming distinct from traditional political organizations, and operate on a submerged or latent level, to appear on the visible level only when confronting a political authority on a specific issue. Movements increasingly take the form of segmented, decentralized, reticulate networks "submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practicing cultural innovation."²⁰ The latent aspect of new social movements ensures that solidarity will persist within the collectivity and provides the general shared cultural framework, while visibility allows expansion of the movement area to new groups and militants. This description should clarify why, according to this model, "the organizational form of contemporary movements is not just 'instrumental' for their goals. It is a goal in itself."²¹

Reconsidering the definition Melucci gives of social movements, such a conceptual framework addresses the presence of solidarity among movement participants but does it provide for social change as well? In other words, what form of conflict does the new social movement represent, that could alter the fundamental direction of society? Melucci's answer is that such movements act as prophetic media, announcing to society that alternative cultural models are possible. While the movement participants

practice the change they desire in the present, they also present society with troubling questions about the logic of its development, questions that challenge the dominant cultural codes, while demonstrating that there are alternative ways of understanding and directing individual and collective action. It is in this way that the new social movements can constitute a conflictual presence in society, rather than through their direct challenge to the political system.

The general framework of this collective identity model has been used by researchers to examine the Italian feminist movement in Milan at the beginning of the 1980's. Although Bianchi and Mormoni conducted their research in 1981-2, their findings are relevant to the entire development of the feminist movement as well.²² They found that the feminist movement, notwithstanding a decline in the intensity of public mobilizations, continued to exist in a myriad of initiatives and groups. The essential organizational structure of the movement had remained the small group, because of the continued importance of its network of relationships for feminists. Whereas the small groups were involved in a heterogeneous range of activities, the mobilizations (and extension of the movement to new groups) occurred primarily through general issues with the political system as their reference point; these issues created temporary unity and coherence within the movement in the confrontation with political authorities. The leadership of

the movement consisted of professional women in the media able to maintain a network of information between the different sectors of the movement, but outside the area of feminist magazines, bookstores, etc., there were few visible 'leaders'.

The specific collective that the researchers studied had formed in 1980 with the project of consciousness-raising and analysis of the feminist movement's demobilization in the late 70's. The main concern of the group was the nature of the group's interactions. Although there were many collectives in Milan oriented toward service projects, cultural production and other more instrumental projects, the researchers found common themes expressed by both sorts of groups. The analytic model that, for them, linked a plurality of feminist groups, was the small group seen as the privileged forum for the recomposition of individual and collective identity. The group does not represent, for its members, a partial experience in addition to their everyday life, but that which allows them to integrate aspects of their daily life into a coherent whole. In this model, the group has an identity-constituting function. The affirmation of individual and collective identity is the project of each group that underlies all other activities; for each individual the attempt at collective self-definition represents the recomposition of a socially fragmented existence. The groups, while engaged in the active structuring of collective identity, experienced a tension

between the internal and external dimensions of the group, resolved in a variety of ways; ranging from groups whose only production was internal to the group (pure consciousness-raising or study groups) to those producing information, services and culture for the movement, to those creating a service or product for a market external to the movement area. At each stage of the movement, the nature of these three levels can be analyzed, as the movement constantly renegotiates and reconstructs its relationship with both women and institutions 'external' to it. For example, they find that for Milanese feminism (and this could be applied to other geographical areas of the movement) there have been stages in which separatism and the rejection of any relationship with institutions was coupled with demands made on the political system; in other stages, the production of services predominates for the movement. In this latter phase (contemporary with their research) the absence of political struggle does not indicate the absence of the movement to them, nor has the movement ceased therefore to provide a conflictual social presence. Instead, in the feminist groups, "models of 'new social rationality' are developed and advanced. The antagonism exists, but it concerns cultural codes and not necessarily an encounter or clash with the political system and state apparatuses."²³

In her study of feminist militants, conducted in 1978, Ergas reached similar conclusions about the phases of the Italian movement.²⁴ Pointing to the inadequacy of socio-

political models that have previously interpreted politics as merely a "rational activity (mobilization-conflict-mediation-administration) oriented toward a goal (power-the state),"²⁵ she sees the feminist movement now consisting of a plurality of initiatives that range from single-issue confrontations with institutions to more informal networks focused on themes of female identity. With the eclipse of a certain kind of full-time activism in the movement, the feminist militant has changed as well. In her analysis, a crisis of militancy followed on the heels of the crisis of the New Left, and the responses of the political system to the fundamental issues of the movement. Some full-time feminist militants retired from politics altogether, while many embraced new forms of collective activity that contributed to the continuance of an adversary subculture. Feminist militance now "assumes different styles, refers to a plurality of projects... and can recognize transformations that are more complex than those measurable in terms of more or less presence, commitment or struggle."²⁶ Such an analysis permits one to understand how the feminist movement's pressure on institutions might diminish, but its militants still identify with a shared collective project.

A Synthesis

The paradigm of the formation of collective identity in contemporary social movements, as we have briefly outlined it, can help us to analyze central phenomena which were at

best problematic in the light of the previous model. The mobilizations that gave rise to the Italian feminist movement followed a logic that was not that of the calculation of individual or collective advantage, so much as that of the formation of collective identity. Although inserted into a series of institutional and political demands, the non-negotiable demand underlying all others was the affirmation of collective identity. The reluctance to negotiate was thus not a sign of either 'revolutionary purity' or 'political immaturity', but signalled that the "central concern was of such high priority that no part of it can be meaningfully sacrificed ... without negating the concern itself."²⁷

The significance of the organizational structures of the movement also become more understandable using this model. The persistence of the small group can be seen as the response to the need of the movement's participants to continually create and re-create the bonds of solidarity and 'recomposition of collective identity' that informs the meaning of all other movement activities, be they cultural or political. In common with what Gerlach argued, we can see that the segmented, decentralized, reticulate networks have operated for the feminist movement as an organizational form exceedingly adaptable to changes in the political and social environment.

The ambivalence of the feminist movement toward their participation in institutional politics can be understood as

part of their historical location between the older form of social movement, focused on objectives in the political marketplace, and what Offe calls the new space of non-institutional politics,²⁸ where claims are made on issues neither fully private or public. This non-institutional politics is not part of the practices and doctrines of liberal democracy and the welfare state, Offe argues, clarifying how the issues of the feminist movement became 'flattened' and distorted in the process of institutional negotiation.

One of the major achievements of the collective identity approach is the conceptualization of the antagonistic content of particular social movements. Although attention is given, in resource mobilization theories, to the 'active' role of movement participants in aggregating resources, there is virtually no consideration of the role of movements in redirecting the orientation of society, so powerfully described by Touraine. Without this perspective, the visible goals of the Italian feminist movement could only have been those functional to the needs of institutional renewal and modernization, those that "facilitate the adaptation of complex systems to the transformation of the environment and to the accelerated pace of internal changes they are exposed to."²⁹

With this perspective, the demands of the movement for the recognition of its collective identity can be read as fundamentally antagonistic to the social system. The

interpretations of the movement's orientation may range from a "critical relationship with culture" (Ergas), the development of "models of new social rationality" (Bianchi and Mormoni) or the transmission of "other codes" (Melucci). In all cases, we preserve a notion of the feminist movement that transcends its institutional translation, and helps explain the continued resistance of the movement to such translation.

Finally, we are better able to consider the historic development of the feminist movement in a meaningful context. There are several possible ways to interpret the phases of the movement, without falling into the trap of 'movement failure' traced by the the first model. Melucci discusses the fact that "a movement in formation always speaks the language of the struggles that preceded it. Still incapable of defining itself through its own identity, the new collective actor utilizes the symbols, organizational experience and forms of action of the movements that came before."³⁰ The Italian feminist movement, in its first phase, could be seen as a movement in formation, still linked to Marxism and the language of the left, while introducing new organizational elements and forms of action unknown to the historic left. The more recent period of the movement would then be increasingly characterized by its own feminist language and identity. This is borne out by the fact that, as we have seen, the frame of reference of the movement is decreasingly the left, after the elections of

1976 and the crisis of the New Left, and increasingly self-referential. Its 'politics' is less concerned with totalizing conceptions of revolutionary change, and more involved in a plurality of partial projects embedded in a diversity of social niches.

Another possible reading of the movement's history is in terms of cycles of development. In this view, the small group persists, with its central conversion experience so important to the 'nascent state' of the feminist movement. The movement never fully institutionalizes the experience, so that there are periodic waves in which the nascent state is stronger, particularly for new recruits and new generations of recruits, followed by phases of relative institutionalization. The mid to late 1970's was one such period of greater structure, but by the 1980's, as collectives re-formed and the small group was resuscitated, another phase ensued. This view would not preclude the simultaneous presence at a given period of both institutionalized realities and the nascent state.

Conclusion

We have seen that, on an analytic level, this model allows us to address a number of issues that were invisible with earlier models. Empirically it is, of course, difficult to measure its accuracy, for much of its primary reference point is the meaning that we, as observers, can attribute to the actions of a particular movement. Therein lies its

principal difficulty. How can we know that what Melucci, or Bianchi and Mormoni attribute to the recent history of the feminist movement, really describe its fundamental characteristics? How can we truly measure and evaluate a concept such as antagonistic content?

We, of course, cannot. It is easier to measure the policy outcome of the feminist movement, and to chart the role of structured organizations. It is perhaps only when the movement emerges into visible action that we can once more ascertain its latent existence. In between such mobilizations it is difficult to know the true extent of the 'submerged networks' or to decipher the symbolic messages they announce.

The significance of a social movement cannot be measured by its political success or failure, but nonetheless, movements are also social organizations that at times emerge to confront political systems in public mobilizations. All of those writing on the new social movements recognize that without some form of political representation, given the fragmentary nature of these movements, they cannot survive for long without atomization or recourse to violence. The central dilemma for the feminist movement, as for other movements, becomes the difficulty in finding a political translation for their issues and demands which does not negate their autonomy and submerge their cultural innovations.³¹ The solution to the relationship of movement and political institutions does not

offer grounds for optimism, particularly in light of our account of the Italian feminist movement. The political system, unable initially even to hear the voices of feminists, eventually introduced innovations without really opening channels of participation within the political system. If the collective identity paradigm does prove to have predictive power, the orientation of the feminist movement will increasingly shift toward submerged, dispersed networks. In that situation, the continued existence and autonomy of the movement will depend on the political system's ability to hear these "disenchanted prophets" and to create spaces for the expression of their demands, as well as the movement's capacity to articulate its demands in a form that permits some sort of political mediation.

Chapter 6: Notes

1. Scholars working within this perspective include Alberto Melucci, Claus Offe, Alessandro Pizzorno and Alain Touraine. See, for Melucci, the already cited Sistema Politico, L'invenzione del presente and Altri Codici, as well as: "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach", Social Science Information 19, pp. 199-226; "Ten Hypotheses for the Analysis of New Movements", in Contemporary Italian Sociology: A Reader, ed. D. Pinto, (1981), pp. 173-194; and "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements" in Social Research 52, Winter 85. For Offe, see the already cited Contradictions of the Welfare State, especially pp. 160-76 and 292-65, as well as "Challenging the Boundaries". For Pizzorno, see the previously cited "Le due logiche", "Identita e interesse", as well as "Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict", C. Crouch and A. Pizzorno, eds. The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968 Vol II (London: Macmillan), pp. 277-298. For Touraine: The May Movement: Revolt and Reform, trans. by L.F.X. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971); "Les nouveaux conflits sociaux" in Sociologie du Travail 1975; The Voice and the Eye (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

2. Of these writers, Melucci has done the most exhaustive analysis and critique of resource mobilization theories. See in particular his Altri Codici, pp. 15-22, 417-28.

3. Jo Freeman, ed., Social Movements of the 60's and 70's (New York/London: Longman, 1983).

4. See Peter Lange and Maurizio Vanicelli, "Strategy under Stress: the Italian Trade Union Movement and the Italian Crisis in Developmental Perspective", unpublished paper, Harvard University Center for European Studies, as cited in Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 49.

5. Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", p. 567.

6. See Tarrow, Struggling to Reform, p. 52.

7. Ibid., p.53.

8. The same may not be true of other social actors granted greater access to institutional participation in this period, for example, the working class factory councils.

9. See Luther Gerlach. "Movements of Revolutionary Change", American Behavioral Scientist 14, July-August 1971.

10. Tarrow argues that this is an "intuitively persuasive variable in predicting outcomes" for a movement's mobilizational potential. See Struggling to Reform, p. 22.

11. Ergas cites the example of the April, 1976 demonstration held after the DC-MSI vote re-criminalizing abortion, in which the UDI and other groups accepted the feminist movement's definition of the abortion campaign by agreeing to the separatism of the demonstration; see Ergas, "Femminismo e crisi di sistema", p. 561-2.

12. See Peattie and Rein, Women's Claims, although they also note that in specific cases, "success in establishing claims within the existing claims framework may make it more difficult for a movement to extend the categories and the institutions of claiming,"; see pp. 102-126.

13. Examples of this abound. For the Italian case, Garner and Zald, in Social Movement Sector completely ignore the feminist movement when they consider the Italian 'women's movement', since they are only interested in its organized forms; see p. 20. Tarrow, in Struggling to Reform, only discusses the policy aims of the movement. Analogously, Freeman's treatment of the women's liberation branch of the U.S. feminist movement attributes their political ineffectiveness to the predominance of solidary incentives that favor consummatory rather than instrumental action. See her The Politics of Women's Liberation and "A Model for Analyzing the Strategic Options" in Social Movements of the 60's and 70's, pp. 193-210.

14. See Ferree and Miller, "Mobilization and Meaning", p. 42.

15. These terms were developed by Melucci to describe the particular nature of new social movements as they oscillate between moments of public mobilization and then disperse into submerged networks; see in particular L'invenzione del presente, pp. 189-91.

16. The salient characteristics of such a society are the extension of control over the productive system from the economy into consumption, social services and social. Goods are produced and consumed through manipulation of complex economic and political systems which need to control information and symbols, increasingly intervening in the relations that connect individuals. The role of science and information systems becomes primary in such social systems,

as the capacity of the system to dominate its natural and social environment increases. All these authors are in general agreement on the nature of contemporary society; there is less consensus on whether it should be called post-industrial, late capitalist, complex or post-materialist.

17. Melucci, Sistema politico, p. 152.

18. Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge", p. 795.

19. This concept has been utilized by Melucci and his colleagues in their 1980 study of various social movements in Italy, Altri Codici. The specific movements studied were youth, ecology, women's and religious groups.

20. Ibid., pg. 800.

21. Ibid., pg. 801.

22. Both Bianchi and Mormoni and the other researchers contributing to Altri Codici use a research method influenced by ethnomethodology, game simulations, symbolic interactionism and interventionist sociology. A specific group was chosen for each movement area; for the feminist movement it consisted of both younger feminists and those with a long history of involvement in the movement. In addition, the researchers examined broader aspects of both the current Milanese movement, as well as the historical development of the movement nationally.

23. Bianchi and Mormoni, "Militanti", p. 167. Sciolla, too, notes that the new social movements are oriented toward "redefining the criteria in which interests and preferences acquire meaning rather than acting based on a criteria of 'formal' rationality". See Sciolla, Identita, p. 12.

24. Ergas, "Biografie femministe", pp. 88-100.

25. Ibid., pg. 89.

26. Ibid., pg. 90.

27. Claus Offe. "Challenging the Boundaries", p. 831.

28. Ibid., pg. 826.

29. Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge", p. 810.

30. Melucci, L'invenzione del presente, p.195.
31. Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge", p. 814.

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