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Early-1970s Transnational Encounters between Italian and French Women: Desires, Legacy, and Contradictions of an Unspeakable Feminist Praxis

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Abstract

During the early 1970s, the Italian feminist movement opened up to foreign militant contexts. The two crucial interplays were with the American and French Women's Liberation Movements. The aim of this article is to analyze from a transnational historical perspective the connection between Milanese activists and the French group *Psychanalyse et politique* led by Antoinette Fouque, which developed through several encounters during a period of a few days. From the French militants, the Milanese women learnt the political practice of unconscious which differed from the more diffuse consciousness-raising technique. From those meetings I reflect on general issues linked to the Italian and French feminist movements of that time: for instance, viewing the women's separatist communal life both as a response to the New Left's refusal to take on the peculiarity of women's oppression and as the positive exemplification of the deconstructive claim that the personal is political. I also consider the contrast between the use of psychoanalysis and consciousness-raising practices, the significance of orality as a feminist means of communication, and the relationship between orality and the later trend of feminist bookshops. The ultimate goal is to understand the political effectiveness and limitations of the transnational feature of those encounters.

In 1968, a wave of protests erupted across Europe, fostering a sense of solidarity among the working class, students, and other anti-authoritarian and marginalized groups who challenged the established order. Protests and demonstrations manifested in social conflicts, some of which escalated into violence.¹ Women, too, were actively engaged in a process of reevaluation of their social position, exposing the previously silent dynamics and the obsolescence of a value system that perpetuated their marginalization. Their objective transcended the mere acquisition of legal rights, encompassing a substantive

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equality within the private sphere alongside economic and cultural liberation. In this context, feminist groups emerged as laboratories of revolutionary political praxis. The following article aims to analyze the relationship between Milanese feminists and the French group *Psychanalyse et politique* (Psych et po), involved in the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF, Women's Liberation Movement).

The exchange between French and Italian women developed through several encounters during a period of a few days. The first meeting organized by MLF was a beach holiday at La Tranche-sur-Mer in Vendée (France), from 24 June to 2 July 1972. A few months later, from 27 October to 1 November, Psych et po arranged a second meeting in Vieux-Villez, in Normandy. These encounters resumed in the summer of 1973, first in Château-Coupigny, in the Ardennes, then in Torretta di Crucoli close to Crotone (Italy) and in Varigotti, near Savona (Italy). This last meeting was planned by the Milanese collective of Via Cherubini (Cherubini Street), a group born in 1972 to reflect on the contradictions between women's individual lives and the left-wing political agenda of that time, which in 1975 moved to Col di Lana Street and founded the *Libreria delle donne di Milano* (the Women's Library of Milan).

From those encounters, wider themes related to the 1970s French and Italian feminist movements emerged. They illustrated a concrete and separatist expression of the slogan “the personal is political,” embodied in a different collective life and innovative sexual and bodily experiences, and echoed the broader tension between consciousness-raising and psychoanalysis within Italian feminism at the time. Furthermore, in their reports, the participants underlined the importance of *orality* as a feminist political practice. Those meetings are important element of the historical shift from orality to the more institutionalized written communication, which occurred in the second half of the decade.²

This article aims to demonstrate the importance of considering those encounters as historical objects of study, arguing that they embodied a certain transnational political strategy in response to the national context of that time, which was dominated by non-feminist political agendas. Moreover, it seeks to comprehend the relationship between that peculiar transnational space and the local dimension in terms of feminist praxis, analyzing both its political efficacy and limitations.

The framework of transnationalism will be considered, encompassing both its historiographical and feminist praxis connotations. Lately the emergence of the transnational critical category has allowed for the investigation of the interdependencies that transcend national state boundaries and has prompted a reevaluation of what constitutes a historical phenomenon. This approach encourages a reconsideration of marginalized processes which have been traditionally overlooked in historical studies. Indeed, traditional research has often failed to address women's peripheral and “eccentric” (Rudan 2011) position, which results from their struggle to become subjects and characterizes the relation between feminist history and politics. The following analysis situates itself within a historical perspective focused on revealing the transnational interconnectedness of people, politics, and social movements (Iriye 2004; Curthoys and Lake 2006; Saunier 2013; Conrad 2016).

Nevertheless, what follows is not simply about lengthening the list of facts considered historical. A transnational analysis of feminisms aims to recognize the “discrepant histories” (Sinha 2000, 79) of women's movements, characterized by “contests, conflicts, and power-play” (Delap 2020, 22). Its purpose is to transcend the geographical and strategical limits of the contexts of institutions or parties and consider unofficial and informal alternative feminist networks, where militants have rethought political

practices and knowledge. Feminist history results from “an overlapping, internally complex set of actions, questions, and demands” (Delap 2020, 3), and develops as “a conversation” with “many registers” (20). It is “a non-linear rhizome root structure, full of unexpected growth points, dead ends, and patterns of influence” (Gleadle 2013, 529).³ Researchers should address the difficulties of *entangled histories* (Bush and Purvis 2016) to comprehend how ideas, people, and texts crossed and recrossed borders, and take into account the tension between the multiplicity of women’s claims, the consequences of identity processes, and the complexity of a transnational perspective. In this way, it becomes possible to recognize the “many beginnings, derivations, autonomous, and parallel developments” (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, X) of women’s movements, breaking “the immobility of the historical time” (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 7), and *decentering history* (Davis 2011). This results in an emphasis on the heterogeneity of feminist praxis and requires the declination of *feminisms* to acknowledge “the plurality of forms, the multiplicity of voices, and gestures” (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, 26) of female political subjectivity. Thus, by assuming a historiographical transnational perspective on women’s history, the present article aims to fill what could be defined as an “historiographical vacuum” (203), simultaneously enhancing the systemic political aspirations of feminist struggles (Jensen and Kuhlman 2010; Wiesner-Hanks 2011; Janz and Schönplflug 2014; Midgley et al. 2016). The idea of transnational feminism encompasses distinct social movement practices that go beyond seeking recognition solely at the local institutional level. Rather, they criticize the governmental approach, defining alternative political spaces beyond national state borders (Shohat 1999; Sanasarian 2007; McLaren 2017).

In a praxis perspective, transnational feminism aspires to build a “noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders” grounded on the idea that “the local” specifies and illuminates “the universal” (Mohanty 2003, 224). The most critical and impactful forms of transnational feminism emerge from the *margins* and focus on engaging with all the contradictions inherent in the intersection of various levels of material and symbolic oppression. Rather than being a homogeneous and unproblematic dimension, a transnational feminist space aims to embrace the unavoidable conflicts of political struggle. Within this critical framework, an attempt will be made to understand the extent to which the encounters between French and Italian women in the early 1970s can be considered as an expression of a transnational political strategy, addressing both their political effectiveness and limitations.

1. The encounters’ transnational separatism

During the early 1970s, Italian militants were mainly oriented toward the “foundational relationships” (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, X) with the feminist movements in the United States and France.⁴ From 1969 to 1971 some Italian women participated in *consciousness-raising* groups overseas. Contact with the American groups was initiated primarily by Teresa Fenoglio and Serena Luce Castaldi. Fenoglio visited Boston in 1971 and then she contributed to the birth of the group *Comune di Via Petrarca* (Commune of Petrarca Street) in Turin (Rebora 2021). Castaldi travelled to New York in 1970 and when she came back to Milan, she helped found a women-only consciousness-raising group called *L’Anabasi* (Ascent). *L’Anabasi* and *Rivolta Femminile* (Women’s Revolt)—created in 1970 in Rome by Carla Accardi, Elvira Banotti, and Carla Lonzi, who had also spent time in the US in 1968—were the main references for the practice of consciousness-raising in Italy. In the years 1970–71, fundamental texts of American

feminism were translated, and exponents of the two groups participated in collective meetings to discuss consciousness-raising (Bracke 2015). Although the Italian women's movement did not entirely identify with this technique, its importance as a "model" (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 37) is undeniable.

Besides their contact with the Americans, the Italian women built another crucial relationship. Since 1972, they had been in touch with the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*, particularly with the group led by Antoinette Fouque, *Psychanalyse et politique*. The encounter between the Italian activists and the French group of *Psych et po* took the form of international gatherings, meaning short periods of cohabitation and complete isolation. The main theme of those meetings was the specificity of European women groups, as Fouque recounted:

I was interested in establishing an original movement, as opposed to America's "women's lib" which was too outwardly oriented, too concerned with winning equality at work and with struggling against discriminatory laws and actions. We needed a European movement that could draw upon the wealth of contemporary ideas, a cultural, civilizational, and intellectual movement that was in touch with the emotions, interiority, and identity of the subject and that was concerned with the personal and private realms. We needed not just to raise consciousness but to discover the unconscious; we needed a *revolution of the symbolic*, to use the expression I employed at the time—I would now speak of a *reinvention of ethics*. (Fouque 2015, 89–90)

These encounters exemplified a desire to explore new feminist praxis. However, the need of those women for distancing did not solely refer to other fringes of the feminist movement, but it could also be seen as an attempt to move beyond the constraints of left-wing organizations.

In Italy, the rise of feminism as a collective movement was intertwined with students' protests and the so-called *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) of 1969–70, a succession of massive strikes in Northern factories. Historically, there has been a strong relationship between the political climate of the late 1960s, the emergence of many new feminist groups, and the legislative achievements of the 1970s in terms of women's rights.⁵ Despite the positive impact of the 1968 protests on the emergence of a feminist movement, the Italian women's need to pursue an alternative transnational space was also a reaction against the male monopoly of political demands on a local and national level. In the early 1970s, the relationship between feminist movements and leftist claims was twofold in terms of influence—or "debt" (Fraire 2002, 23)—and backlash. The interactions between French and Italian women reflected the need to escape the sexist dynamics that raged within national borders in both the conservative and revolutionary contexts. Indeed, women's groups acquired their autonomy when they emancipated themselves not only from the institutionalized order, but also from the *patriarchal limits* of the 1968 turmoil (Bracke 2014). For instance, activists started to recognize the capitalist division of labor that dictated the assignment to women of specific tasks in the revolutionary process as in families: "The very [male] companions in the class struggle are unaware of the extent of women's emancipation and fail to acknowledge the economic and ideological ghetto that they themselves contribute to perpetuating" (Spagnoletti 1977, 71).⁶ Within the context of the New Left, female activists who campaigned in revolutionary groups were stereotypically represented as "angels of the cyclostyle" (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 78) since they were in charge of printing flyers.⁷

Despite sharing a project of reformulation of cultural, social, and political values, women found themselves in peripheral and non-decision-making roles as male comrades argued that “the women’s issue” would have been resolved naturally after the revolution (Hellman 1987). In the second half of the 1970s, this contradiction was exemplified in the concern regarding the “double militancy” between the Communist Party and feminist movements (Tambor 2021). At that time, political imagination and action toward a different and better future were exclusive to male leftist militants (Evans 2009).⁸

Hence, the contradiction between the historical moment of questioning social structures and the separatist politics of women was only apparent. The urgency to escape into a transnational dimension was dictated by the fact that national boundaries were monopolized by male political actors, either subversive or conservative. Some components of the early 1970s feminist movements arose as a response to a “relative deprivation” (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 29), which occurred when women’s emancipationist desires were disillusioned even by progressive drives. They were sharing the *pars destruens* with the 1968 agitations but were excluded from the *pars construens*, and therefore fled into a transnational dimension. Women were “the oppressed of the oppressed” (Tolomelli and Frisone 2017, 179). The dialectical framework—or the “teleological totalization” (Browne 2014, 18)—of the revolutionary conflict was already occupied and it was necessary to find a third space (Hajek 2018). Carla Lonzi wrote: “In order to enter a feminist state of mind young women had to dispel more than a few of the rallying cries, manners, and myths of 1968. It has been despite of and not thanks to 1968 that they managed to do so” (Lonzi 1985, 50).⁹ Fouque recounted something similar. During May 1968, she participated in some of the students’ assemblies at the Sorbonne together with Monique Wittig, and they felt right away the risk of being “overpowered” or “excluded” (Fouque 2015, 16). Later, she lucidly described the patriarchal dynamics in the revolutionary movement: “I never thought the principal enemy was patriarchy, but I have thought and still do think that the main adversary is filiarchy. The coming together of sons and brothers after the parricide to establish democracy excludes women radically and a priori” (Fouque 2015, 29). According to her, the “fratriarchal regime” that rose after 1968 offered inclusion to women at the price of erasing sexual difference (44).

In the light of this, the encounters between French and Italian women might be described as an expression of *transnational separatism*.¹⁰ The political importance of this drastic withdrawal from the national context was also evident in the stories of the protagonists. Some of them explicitly underlined that in La Tranche the situation was unique precisely because of the total absence of men, who had always led women to believe that “only because of them, the fact of being together could take place and have meaning and taste” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 45). They depicted the week in Vendée as fundamental precisely because it was “outside the ‘everyday’ contradiction of the relationship with men” (46). Maria Schiavo—a militant of Fuori! (Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Italiano, the Italian Homosexual United Front)—recounted that for the French group “there was not any possibility of a political dialogue with men,” and thus it was necessary that “women empower themselves separately from them through mutual contacts and exchanges.” To Psych et po, “the impossibility for a woman to exist in a society built by men,” and the consequent “collective trauma” which “history justified” (Schiavo 2000, 72), led women to escape from an oppressive social context to seek other political spaces. Although not made explicit in transnational terms, the protagonists recognized their need to transcend national borders.

Shifting to a transnational dimension had clear consequences in terms of political praxis as these women experienced for the first time being the center of every conversation. The everyday sharing in this *elsewhere space* finally made those activists feel like autonomous subjects. The participants recounted that during their holiday at La Tranche they felt that they were “an active part” of a “collective event of great historical importance.” That extraordinary experience was “one of the most novel situations for a woman, always associated with this or that man” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 43).

To sum up, back then the emergence of political consciousness among women was related both to their previous activism and the 1968 movement’s inability to address the root causes of the oppression grounded on sexual difference (Hajek 2018, 19). Despite women’s demands—1968’s “missed promises” (Fraire 2002, 23)—that were part of the general climate of protest that broke out at the end of the 1960s, revolutionary groups did not accept and legitimize feminist claims. Because of that, women sought other spaces beyond the dual conflict between the old and the new order, accessing different autonomous dimensions where they could finally consider themselves legitimate political subjects. In this context, the encounters between Italian and French women could be read as exemplifications of transnational separatism, which reflected a reaction of estrangement from both a retrograde past and the progressive claims that did not consider the specificity of women’s oppressed condition.

2. The encounters’ transnational features: “Une vie collective affective entre femmes”

Besides the desires of French and Italian women to distance themselves from both different feminist praxis and the local militant dimension, the political practices emerging from the experience of those days can be interpreted as transnational. The specificity of the situation let unique and unprecedented political dynamics emerge, leading to an original process of identification. What the participants shared was not merely based on the factual recognition of the similarities between their everyday experiences as women, but they recognized themselves politically and emotionally in a deeper way. The physical, transnational, displacement into an atypical space set off a process of identification with the other women based on an exceptional emotional status. One of the participants recounted her experience as follows:

Somehow, I discovered that you can, and you must, fall in love with women; it was the first step, completely new, from the old consciousness of common oppression to the joyful recognition of myself as a woman, to the reconstruction of my identity not only in pain and anger but in enthusiasm and laughter. (Cameli 2014a, 45)

That atmosphere embodied the pragmatic expression of the *deconstructive* idea of “the personal is political.” This slogan summarized a particularly important claim of feminist militants in the 1970s, who finally broke the silence and the separation between public and private spaces. During those encounters, women’s everyday life became a “space to produce innovation” and “a tool to make history” (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, XIII). The idea that “the personal is political” shifted from being a deconstructive claim that could unmask the silent dynamics of oppressed women’s everyday lives, to the starting point of imagining and experiencing a new self-determined personal sphere through the

relationship with other women. The transnational space that women were able to access during those meetings was not only physical but also *symbolic*, which resulted in the experience of “unusual ways of doing politics” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 47). Therefore, the transnational feature of these encounters did not lie only in the physical and political estrangement from the national dimension but also in the detachment from the dominant patriarchal symbolic apparatus, which ruled every aspect of those women’s national social contexts. La Tranche was a moment of “affective and collective life among women” (Dedieu 1982, 17).

The new symbolic transnational space was pragmatically expressed in diverse ways, from the lack of organization to new forms of communication, which involved nudity and dancing. As Fouque explicitly refused to be the organizational point of reference and preferred an improvised and spontaneous collective management, the French group arranged the meetings without following any formalized logic or rules. A French woman recounted:

The emotion was so strong that I had the impression that the house was beating like a stomach. The collective organization was generous, without intricate repressive rules, and I, who knew the difficulties of political groups, found it admirable . . . On the first day’s assembly, two *Féministes Révolutionnaires* gave us a paternalistic hint of what we should have done.¹¹ To them, the subjective words seemed a waste of time. I remember telling them that they reminded me of some leftist lecturers. I was probably being aggressive. . . . It was in Vieux-Villez that I understood that the happiness of being with other women corresponded to a vital need and that it was the source of political strength. That was the great adventure of the MLF. (Fouque et al. 2008, 130)

From the very first moment, the “congressional expectations of productive and organized work” were disappointed, and at first, Italian participants were frustrated because people were talking “as usual.” However, after the initial disorientation, the desire to “listen” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 43) took over. Because there was no detailed plan, women abandoned themselves to spontaneity and an authentic and secure space emerged. Lea Melandri explained that through those meetings “eating, sleeping, and being together among women took on a political meaning which was not there before” (Melandri 2000, 20). Indeed: “Women who came to La Tranche, bringing their experience of traditional political practice, recognized different praxis, which challenged their ordinary way of situating themselves in the discussion” (Dedieu 1982, 17). The intention was to delineate a space for expression as freely as possible, leaving aside any formality to reach the most authentic, ancestral, and truthful dimension of women’s oppression, which lies beyond any structures, preconceptions, and conventional languages. Therefore, this way of being together did not invalidate the political effectiveness of the meetings; on the contrary, it enriched it, making those moments separatist laboratories for experimenting with alternative and feminist ways of living.

The refusal of formalities affected not only the general organization but also its forms of communication. The innovative *symbolic* space was mainly embodied in the dimension of *orality*, which included women’s bodily expression. These new ways of communicating made it possible to overcome the limitations of spoken language and the lack of understanding between people from different countries. The participants’ initial concern about interacting with foreign women disappeared after a few days when

orality, “the greatest and most authentic expression of the women’s movement of the 1970s” (Schiavo 2000, 61), surmounted the language barrier and insinuated itself into bodily and gestural dimensions. It “hovered” among them “like an unknown language” (88). According to Luisa Passerini, the importance of those years is tied to “a less formalized, more diffuse and hidden orality,” which was “connected with a daily practice of life among women” (Passerini 1982, 10). From a historical point of view:

The extraordinarily oral nature of the women’s movement must be emphasized: the practices of capturing words, of overturning the traditional value of chatter, confidences, confessions, and gossip, of retaking, changing, refuting, and putting into a new context women’s previous language; the creation of new forms of expression; the great importance of the body gestures, signs of emotion, facial expressions. (Passerini 1992, 676)

Through these new forms of expression, it was possible to go beyond the power dynamics intrinsic to the patriarchal communicative apparatus. Women discovered innovative ways of disclosing themselves made by improvised and inaccurate translations, confusing gestures, nudity, and dances. In her account in *Sottosopra*, Nappi described her experience related to nudity in this way:

It was a desire to know our bodies, to look at each other and feel being looked at, to get to know ourselves entirely and not only through the discussions we made, and to acquire our point of view, women’s perspective on other women’s nudity, to verify what could justify the erotic mythologizing of certain parts of the body rather than others, the abstraction of these parts from the rest of the body, and the shift to a stereotyped model. (Cameli 2014a, 50)

Indeed, within a few days, women reached a new level of intimacy, which proved to be politically significant:

Our body and person had become indissoluble, precisely because we had not got to know each other separately, but rather considering the two things together had made us know each other strongly. It is impossible to disguise yourself when you are naked. The attitude you have in public, the way you dress, the way you put on your make-up, and your private life are not open to discussion. These are all things that you no longer have when you are all there, and not just for a moment but while you are moving and living and expressing yourself. (Cameli 2014a, 52)

Besides nudity, many women remembered the moments of dancing, a distinctive behavior of the French activists. Their shameless gestures were part of the process of reappropriating their bodies.¹² “The collective dances were a way of meeting each other rather than talking. On the next day, the relationship you could have with women you had danced with was different, you could talk without feeling that you were doing it in an ideological way.” (Cameli 2014a, 74). All these elements embodied the pragmatic translation of the claim “the personal is political”—which in that context showed its positive potential in addition to its deconstructive strength: “the true confrontation took place only among people who witnessed each other living” (Cameli 2014d, 13).

Indeed, besides physical displacement, the encounters “put into practice” what Fouque called “the symbolic independence of women” (Fouque 2015, 40), enabling them to experience what can be defined as a transnational communicative apparatus. Those militants emancipated themselves from a world built on masculine standards, having the chance to “get to know one another serenely, without being worried to be brilliant, to conquer or being conquered by someone else” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 44). To those women, “emotions were a constitutive element of solidarity and mutual recognition” as well as of any “learning process” (Passerini 2005, 189). Lia Cigarini summarized her experience in Vieux-Villez as “an emotional discovery” (the moments of collective life), “a political discovery” (the breaking of women’s historical invisibility), and “a liberating discovery” (the process of unmasking taboos) (Idels et al. 2018, 153). The political experience recounted in the participants’ reports seems to correspond to all three transnational spaces identified by Levsen and Patel’s analysis: it was together a moment of “belonging and solidarity,” “knowledge circulation,” and “concrete social experience and political action” (Levsen and Patel 2022, 376).

3. From the transnational to the local space

In addition to the revolutionary experience of an affective and collective life among women, the meetings served to disseminate praxis. From the French militants, the Italians learnt *la pratica dello stare insieme fra donne* or *la pratique de relation entre femmes* (the practice of being among women)—linked to the pragmatic experience of the awareness that the personal is political—and *la pratica dell’inconscio* or *la pratique de l’inconscient* (the practice of unconscious)—the result of a feminist appropriation of the patriarchal framework of psychoanalysis.

Those practices were defined within the MLF context during the early 1970s when it spread awareness of the collective dimension as a privileged space to affirm the “political and historical value” of the “analysis of the self and the relationships with others” in view of a “revolution of the whole civilization” (Melandri 2000, 69). The main assumption was an innovative conception of the unconscious, perceived as a determining element to understand the historicity of social relations. In this regard, Fouque criticized the consciousness-raising approach as, to her, it did not reconnect women to the surrounding context after deep introspection. On the contrary, she stressed the importance of new relationships among women, conceived as a “feminine tool to transform the world” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 42): “They [Psych et po] theorized and practiced complex female relationships from which nothing was excluded: body, mind, pleasure, money, power . . . All the possible human aspects of a woman were the object of the most careful consideration.” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 43).

Regarding Fouque’s feminist appropriation of the traditional and patriarchal psychoanalytic framework, her main references were Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray, with whom she undertook two different psychotherapies. She brought the psychoanalytic practice within Psych et po to rediscover what they called *instance matricielle* (the matrix instance, from Latin *matrix-icis*, i.e., mother, uterus), which had been excluded from the symbolic discourse of the *father*. According to her, the exploration of the unconscious triggered a process of signification and the possibility of returning to the *mother*. Through the psychoanalytical approach, those women tried to reveal their hidden feminine dimension, the knot of sexual difference, and the historical role of the unconscious. Psych et po focused on the intertwining between politics and

psychoanalysis, diving into the symbolic dimension of reality and revealing the existence of a *féminin en soi* (the feminine in itself).

After the transnational meetings, the Milanese movement focused on disseminating these new practices, and emancipating themselves from the consciousness-raising technique. In fact, after the early days, when consciousness-raising groups were very popular in Italy, several activists had begun to feel that the potential of that practice had been exhausted (Rus 2005). Like Fouque, they sensed it lacked a clear strategy to deal with the intrinsic contradiction between the female mind and the cultural patriarchal system, which denied women the status of thoughtful human beings (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 40–41). The Milanese women sought to translate these new political strategies—experienced in the transnational dimension—into their local context. They wanted to “build a political space for women” to relocate “their emotional and intellectual energy from the relationship with men to the one with women.” Their need was to “create a ‘social pact’ between women” based on “the authority of the mother” (Melandri 2000, 62).

During the two-year period 1974–75, the innovative practices conceived by Psych et po became the fundamental element of what historiographically has been defined as the Movimento della pratica dell’inconscio (the Unconscious Practice Movement). The two main groups were the Gruppo Analisi and Gruppo pratica dell’inconscio (Analysis Group and Unconscious Practice Group). Whereas the former focused mostly on the theoretical level, following the French model as faithfully as possible (i.e., individual and group analysis), the latter pursued only group analysis. Their two main references were Melandri and Cigarini. Their general attempt was to transfer the tool of psychoanalysis into women’s relationships and thus remove it from the monopoly of the institutionalized masculine perspective. The starting point was the awareness that in every woman’s life “there is an intrinsic element that is not only personal but has to do with the history of civilization” and “the relationship between men and women” (62). The originality of the unconscious practice was the belief that “the only political tool able to disentangle this issue was the psychoanalytic knowledge” as it unmasked “the root of the *historical construction* of the human being and its unconscious foundations” (83). The aim was to engage the individual level through the collective one and vice versa, without getting lost in a purely psychic abstraction of the relationship between sexes.

In addition to their regular meetings, those groups organized three conferences where they discussed how to “go beyond their experiences’ particularism and name what had always been kept secret about individual lives” (88). The first of these conferences took place in Milan in 1975, titled *Sessualità, maternità, procreazione, aborto* (Sexuality, maternity, procreation, abortion). A further two were organized by the group of Via Cherubini in Pinarella di Cervia in November 1974 and 1975. During these conventions, the participants agreed that their “personal needs should have not prevailed over political purposes” (83). The main concern was how to transition from the group psychoanalytical approach to the dimension of political praxis in the long term. The militants struggled to imagine concrete actions that reflected their idea of analysis not only as a group choice but as a “political perspective for the whole movement” (80).

Starting from those meetings, the political limitations of the practices of the unconscious and of being among women emerged. Indeed, a kind of physiological exhaustion of the methods occurred and various contradictions implicit in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships began to manifest (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 40). Even if Melandri and Cigarini aimed to pursue a horizontal space and avoid any hierarchical structure, conflicts around authority still rose. In a crucial document titled *Osando*

finalmente dubitare . . . (Daring at last to doubt), a group of participants recalled that the interpretation of their feelings and behavior was in fact delegated exclusively to Melandri or to a few other people, who were the only ones that had “the overall project” of the practice clear (Cameli 2014d, 9). She was distinctly the “mouthpiece” of the group, and the women were dependent on her (9). The strong need for mutual recognition and the fact that the deep meaning of the group was determined by only a few people were some of the reasons why they “couldn’t transfer the practice of unconscious into the collective” dimension (9). Melandri herself recognized that the unconscious practice was not immune “to the entanglement of affections” (Cameli 2014c, 98), subtly admitting that complicated interpersonal dynamics influenced the groups. Lonzi as well, in her 1972–77 diary, *Taci, anzi parla* (Shut up, or rather speak), harshly criticized the use of psychoanalysis because it distanced many women from political activism. To her, those groups were replicating the same authoritarian tendencies of the patriarchal use of psychoanalysis (Lonzi 1978).

The fact that the authority to interpret women’s experience was held by a few individuals resulted in a profound “scission” when most of the participants recognized that their intimate life often remained “separated from the social discourse” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 89). The Milanese women were aware of the difficulty of effectively connecting “two equally significant situations”: the activist level and “the personal relationships with other women” (89). Some of them expressed the need to have “a concrete impact on reality,” retying to a “broader political project,” going beyond “the confines” of their practice (Cameli 2014d, 8). Even if the practice of unconscious initiated some sort of “modification,” it remained an experience limited to those groups, hard to “transmit it to the political” level (10). Thus, closely related to hierarchical dynamics was the impossibility of bridging the gap between the individual and collective dimensions.

Another element that affected the effectiveness of those practices was the impossible “total separation from the man’s world” (Cameli 2014d, 16). To those women, a separatist scenario was both an attractive “fantasy” and a “repulsion” because of the “conflict” that it created with respect to their “daily life, children, work” (16). The desire to escape completely from the male reality ended up being perceived by some women as “a more comfortable choice” that excluded “struggle and confrontation” (16). Indeed, what “were meant to be transformative practices” often “tended to become sterile interpretation or commentary” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 56–57) of women’s everyday lives.

The compulsive focus on the analysis of “the lived experience” made women lose sight of the “political purpose of the movement,” and resulted in a “fall of the political tension” (Cameli 2014d, 15). The revolutionary idea that women’s psychic lives were a fundamental “patrimony that belongs to culture and history” and not only to “the intimate sphere” (Melandri 2000, 70) did not avoid the risk of subjugating the political to the personal.

How was one to reconcile those two dimensions in an effective feminist militancy? Was *la psychanalyse* or *la politique* first? In 1976, during the third national feminist convention organized in Paestum there was an extensive discussion on the risk of “deep digging” into the “roots” of sexuality and body. The main question those women tried to answer was how to maintain a broader perspective on history and social context without getting lost in the labyrinth of the unconscious. For the majority of them, the primary focus was to establish a “nexus” between their “personal transformation” and “the implementation of this change into collective practice” (Cameli 2014d, 8). According to

Melandri, the unconscious and activist dimensions should have not been crystallized or polarized in any way but rather kept as they are, i.e., “fused and confused” (Melandri 1977, 18). In fact, “the unconscious depth without history” was in danger of sinking into an “elsewhere dimension” (Melandri 2000, 69), losing its political effectiveness. Her idea was to keep reflecting on “how to consider psychoanalysis as a political practice without unbalancing either in the personal or political dimensions” (Melandri 1977, 18). Despite these theoretical reflections, it proved to be exceedingly difficult. The Paestum convention was later recalled as a “memorable failure” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 117), which reflected a broader tendency of lack of participation in political and social actions by many women involved in consciousness-raising or unconscious groups.

The constraints inherent in the practices of unconscious and the experience of being among women could serve as a starting point for reflecting on the contradictions of the symbolic dimension and the transnational separatism of the encounters between French and Italian women as, in a sense, they exemplified the exacerbation of those practices within a circumscribed moment and space. For instance, the arduous transition from the individual to the collective level, as well as from the unconscious to the pragmatic realm, reflects the limitations, ineffectiveness, and instability often experienced when it comes to connecting the transnational space to the local one (Wiesner-Hanks 2011; Bush and Purvis 2016). The total immersion in an elsewhere proved hardly translatable into the national borders where multiple complications impeded that peculiar and detached emotional status.

Women’s focus on their personal transformation, the rise of spaces that enabled them to feel better, and the separation from the male-dominated world, carried the risk of becoming a “dangerous illusion” and being wrongly perceived as “the ultimate political goal of the movement,” rather than as progressive “stages” towards liberation (Cameli 2014d, 8). Surely, “everyday life prevented any ideological misrepresentation” (9) of women’s experiences, however at what cost in terms of political effectiveness? For some militants, it was as if, “by allowing individual desires to take precedence,” the collective dimension disappeared (24). These reflections, which were presented in the pages of *Sottosopra* in relation to the practice of the unconscious, also shed light on the limitations of the transnational separatist space. Just as there existed a painful contradiction between the unconscious and more pragmatic and conventional political actions, a similar antithesis arose between the transnational symbolic space and the local context. Indeed, those encounters were one of those experiences that were “not identifiable with that of any other women” (25), and therefore proved to be somewhat incommunicable and untranslatable in effective political actions. The question that surfaced among those women was whether the political dimension was solely confined to “the process of reclaiming reality” (25) through the emotional experiences of the practice of unconscious (and of those encounters), or if there was something more beyond that. How to shift from “affections, dinners, flowers, and dances” to “money, duties, work, power” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 94)? How to find a way to “take into account two levels”—the personal and the political—and go beyond the sterile “pulling together of different lived experiences”?

Women’s perspectives on the deficiencies of the practice of the unconscious and the practice of being among women’s in terms of concrete transformation of reality inform a reflection on the political effectiveness of the transnational encounters between French and Italians, as the meetings, considered as intensive political laboratories of those two practices, presented similar limitations in relation to their integration into an effective, long-term political strategy focused towards social and civil rights. The immersion

within that symbolic space appeared to be a somewhat isolated, incommunicable, and ineffective experience. The transition between the transnational and the local posed a challenge for the Milanese feminist movement as it entailed navigating the shift from the realm of the unconscious to the political dimension.

Furthermore, in Paestum, several militants expressed impatience towards the core of those groups because of their elitism (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 75). The fact that only a few individuals held the authority to interpret the practice correctly also reflected their privileged social background. It looked like having access to the deep meaning of the practice of the unconscious and the possibility of a profound self-knowledge—as well as the opportunity to afford a seaside holiday—presupposed a certain educational and social status. The focus on the unconscious and inner experiences of women hindered taking charge of the material dimension of their lives. Crucial conflicts that are key to understanding female oppression, such as class struggle, were set aside and were challenging to address directly because of the intrinsic nature of the practice, as well as the power dynamics within the group.

This omission also occurred in the direct reports of the encounters. Rooted in the “mutual recognition” among women and exceptional emotional status, the process of identification within the transnational symbolic space entailed a tendency to foster correspondence among the participants, while disregarding the social dimension of their lives. Although the profound reciprocal acknowledgment happened under anomalous and significant circumstances, it occurred at the expense of disguising material discrepancies among those women, upholding a temporary sense of symbolic homogeneity. This inherent conflict was mostly overlooked in the women’s accounts of that experience in which political strategies did not emerge to address differences and inequalities among women. It looks like the focus on the inner dimension overshadowed the consideration of materiality and its political significance both during those meetings and afterwards.

In this sense, it is noteworthy that women involved in the unconscious movement strongly criticized what they referred to as “ideological feminism,” which belonged to traditional left-wing organizations, representing a more conventional approach to political engagement through mass demonstrations and an emphasis on traditional social struggles. According to them, it failed to acknowledge “the differences among women” and overlooked “reality’s contradictions” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 96). Even if the historical relationship of these two feminist approaches was far more complex, it is striking that those who professed to value differences among women surrounded themselves with individuals who shared similar social backgrounds and levels of education.

The fact that these practices had limitations in relation to fundamental social conflicts emerged also from Fouque’s attitude towards universalization. She affirmed of the women’s movement: “It’s a transnational rather than an international movement—it raises specific issues in each country, but the principles are universal and general. Women’s political choices are thus registered at the planetary level” (Fouque 2015, 32). This kind of belief mirrors what post-colonial contributions have identified as the Eurocentric feminist’s tendency to present an analysis of sexual difference based on “a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy” (Mohanty 2003, 19) and a “homogenization and systematization” (20) of the oppression of “women as a group” (22). The idea of a “universal sisterhood” which assumed “a commonality of gender experience across race and national lines” (193) initiated instead mechanisms of erasure of the complexities of women’s condition. Given that the transnational encounters

exhibited a certain level of privilege and homogeneity, it can be inferred that these spaces may have perpetuated those kinds of dynamics in some way.

Starting from these considerations, it is possible to critically problematize the feature of transnationalism that has been attributed in this text to the encounters between French and Italian women and understand its contradictions. Indeed, the transnationalism ascribed to those meetings appeared to embody precisely what Chandra Talpade Mohanty defined as the fallacious idea of the “universality of oppression” which is grounded on the “invisibility of class and race” (2003, 117) over gender, harshly criticized by more marginal feminist perspectives. The transnational space that emerged from those encounters turned out to be a privileged one based on a symbolic homogeneity, able to leave out the crucial conflicts of the social dimension of women’s lives.

A passage printed in *Sottosopra* confirmed these kinds of tendency within the Milanese groups as some militants admitted the existence of various “neglected aspects” such as “culture, class, work” within the Col di Lana collective, and underlined the potential significance of these personal elements in shaping relationships among women (Cameli 2014d, 27). Extending these concerns to the transnational encounters unmasks potential class clashes beyond the symbolic homogeneity. The elsewhere dimension that those women took up was untainted and separate also because it excluded crucial material elements of women’s oppression.

Therefore, this article’s designation of those encounters as expression of a transnational political strategy aims to describe what that anomalous experience signified for the participants, rather than a feminist praxis that should be reproduced and adopted, able to address the complexities of women’s existence. Even though the encounters framed a separated space from the national contexts which could be ascribed to the idea of transnationalism, it is crucial to recognize that the geographical and material borders that those women overcame were not so rigid or radical. On the contrary, it was precisely due to the underlying privileged homogeneity shared by the participants that a dimension so strongly detached from their national contexts could emerge and be classified as transnational, without indeed ignoring all its political limitations.

4. Further political and historiographical challenges then and now

After Paestum, the Milanese militants shifted toward new praxis to attempt to solve the contradiction they felt between the private modification and the political collective one, and the originality of the experiences of the early decade was in some way dispersed. On the one hand, spontaneity, collective sharing, and the focus on unconscious lost centrality; on the other hand, feminist discourse took over traditional and institutionalized tools of legitimization and dissemination, which made it more accessible to the public. In the second part of the decade, the symbolic and communicative customs of the early 1970s were replaced by others. Feminist groups shifted from orality, built through the experience of collective life, to the so-called *pratica del fare*, the practice of doing, considered as a “specification” or a “more complex derivation” of the practice of being together among women. Women no longer focused on “consciousness-raising” but on “the simultaneous transformation of both the female body and the social body” in order to “build female social places” and “transform reality” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 93).

With those principles in mind, the Milanese militants tried to establish new kind of situations in which the relationship between women could not only be “spoken” or “lived,” but also shared through other “mixed forms of communication,” including “the exchange of words, objects, labor, and sexuality” (Cameli 2014d, 23). To break the confines of the often self-referential space of the unconscious groups, the group of Via Cherubini opened a new and bigger space in Via Col di Lana where almost 200 women started to meet regularly.

However, the Milanese activists still aimed to distance themselves from any forms of “reformism” or “gradualism” and the ideological feminism’s tendency to “the isolation of a specific goal” within the movement, to operate instead “a global questioning of the system and women’s roles” (Cameli 2014c, 97).¹³ According to them, female oppression and liberation were not purely ascribable to “the economic level” of reality and, to overcome women’s “concrete contradictions”, they needed to be articulated on various dimensions—such as “the biological, the sexual, the unconscious, and the ideological” ones (95). Taking into account all the different aspects that characterized women’s oppression did not mean to deep dive into “intimism or irrationality” but on the contrary “anchoring” the political praxis to the peculiarity of women’s “material oppression,” which tend to be ignored (94). That is why, in their view, the women’s movement was not to be considered as “an ethical or cultural opinion movement” (94). To address all those layers of complexities that characterized the patriarchal oppression and overcome “the separation between private and political” spaces, the Milanese women tried to disseminate concrete practices rather than “ostentatious demonstrations” (94). Any ideology was perceived as an “imposed morality” (Cameli 2014d, 10), whereas personal modification was possible only when it came “directly” from women’s “desires” (10).

In distancing themselves from what they described as “a unity among women that engulf in an affective sludge,” Col di Lana’s women attempted to define new ways of being in a collectivity that did not require a homogeneous “suspension of desire” (Cameli 2014c, 103). Through this different way of gathering together, they were no longer alone but, at the same time, not suffocated by the feeling of “not being able to be different” because it would have disrupted the so-called “maternal unity” (5). The aim was to move beyond the notion of a “unique” and “solidaristic” political group and instead embrace inherent conflicts (Cameli 2014d, 25). Nevertheless, several women expressed their doubts: “If you don’t refer to the given social conditions—if you don’t provide family counselling or social services, if you don’t organise mass demonstration—what do you do? What do you refer to?” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 101). One of the feelings was that the Col di Lana collective fostered “the phenomenon of passivity of the many towards the few” and replicated authority dynamics on a larger scale (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 111).¹⁴

Apart from that, the practice of doing was exemplified also by the birth of many women’s bookshops to go beyond “the verbal paralysis” or the sterile “repetition of the lived experience” (Cameli 2014d, 24). In 1972, Psych et po founded the publishing house Éditions des Femmes and, almost at the same time, the Parisian Librairie des Femmes was born. The bookshop opened to the public in 1974 and in the following years expanded around France, to Marseille and Lyon. In 1980, it moved from 68 Rue des Saints-Pères to 74 Rue de Seine and became an exhibition space, Librairie-Galerie des Femmes. In 1975, in Milan, the Cherubini collective founded the Libreria delle donne.¹⁵

Fouque described the foundation of the publishing house as the expression of women’s need to “build, bring into existence, trace positive paths” (Fouque 2015, 208),

stressing the *materiality* of the practice of writing and the relationship with the established symbolic apparatus: “We are aware that we are particularly oppressed in our relationship to reading, writing, books, and everything to do with the culture and knowledge that has always been monopolized by men” (Pavard 2021, 345). They desired to make their voice heard in terms of cultural production and break the boundaries of the patriarchal canon. Fouque distinguished their project of a publishing house from what she referred to as negative fights (*lutttes négatives*), i.e., the political struggles *against* oppression, which used to give her ambivalent and partial satisfaction. She specified that underlying the initiative there was not an editorial desire but a political one to promote women’s liberation, fight the systemic censorship of their works, and publish female writers rejected by mainstream publishing houses. Since its foundation, the publishing house claimed an international vocation, aiming to pursue solidarity publications (*publications de solidarité*) to publicize the struggles of women around the world (Éditions des femmes-Antoinette Fouque 2022).

In the Italian context, the idea of writing initially took place in specific and individual groups still tied to the early 1970s practices. The first step was *transcribing* as “an attempt to report the internal language” and recount “a collective history” and a “common heritage” from which women could draw a “shared knowledge and consciousness” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 102). A flyer distributed in 1974 prior to the opening of the Milan’s bookshop conveyed that the project was connected “to the past and to the present” (102). To the past, because “part of our struggle was the act of speaking out” (102) through texts that needed to be published. To the present, because they aimed to find “the *time* and the *tools*” (102) to let women express themselves. Back then, bookshops and archives were proper “places of feminist intellectuality” (Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 10).

Without claiming to draw clear-cut continuities, from an historiographical point of view, this shift can be considered as the emergence of new needs and strategies within the movement compared to the first part of the decade. In the early 1970s, the Milanese women’s urgencies were internal, related to a search of mutual legitimization and ways to speak up. This process of self-questioning fitted into the emergence of alternative and unspoiled political spaces, such as the transnational one. There, their expression took the form of orality, embodied in intimate conversations, gestures, and bodies. Women managed to emancipate themselves from the structure of a patriarchal society that relegated them to the private sphere and delegitimized their demands. Their intimate dimension unwound into the collective conversation, finally gaining the dignity of being told and lived. From the interstices of a world conceived and constructed by men, gathering in other spaces, women inhabited a margin of autonomy and specificity where they could finally express their desires. At stake was the struggle to achieve the status of a political actors. Their deep “need of recognition” was crucial to help them overcoming “a total historical negation” (Cameli 2014d, 10). The transnational encounters, together with the unconscious groups, were the expression of these urgencies.

The second moment consisted of a return to the institutionalized dimension and the appropriation of traditional means of dissemination, such as writing, intending to seek an external legitimization and formalization of discourses, different from the previous volatile intimacy. With the birth of publishing houses and bookshops, they shifted from their in-depth language—as a moment of experimentation and elaboration of the self—to a more accessible writing technique (Bürgi and Schulz 2021). The priority was no longer on the primacy of *collective* moments, focused *internally*, but on the *individual* gesture of writing, focused *externally*. From the strategically self-referred transnational

space, they moved to the already disciplined public one. This required compromises, such as the mediation of the mode of writing or the difficulty of reconciling profit with their political needs in their “activist business” (Pavard 2021, 344).

To conclude, the main purpose of this article has been to analyze from a transnational perspective—both in relation to history and feminist praxis—the relationship between Italian and French women that took place through several encounters over a period of a few days in the early 1970s. I sought to demonstrate that those meetings are significant historical objects of study and that they embodied a separatist transnational feminist strategy. Accordingly, I have reflected on how these meetings exemplified fundamental issues related to the feminist movements of that time: the pragmatic experience of the slogan “the personal is political” through innovative ways of being together among women; the relationship between consciousness-raising and psychoanalysis; and the importance of *orality* as a feminist method of communication. Finally, I have located those encounters in a more general framework in relation to the rise of feminist bookshops as exemplification of the innovative practice of doing in the second half of the decade. This marked the attempt of the Milanese feminist movement to overcome the lack of concrete impact in terms of political praxis resulting from the practice of the unconscious.

Besides the historical reconstruction, the article intended to understand those encounters’ political effectiveness and limitations within the framework of a transnational feminist praxis perspective, drawing parallels to the constraints of the practice of unconscious discussed by certain women in *Sottosopra*. On the one hand, the meetings framed a separated time and space, away from the male-dominated turmoil of 1968, where women could experience a collective and affective life exclusively amongst themselves. They initiated a process of recognition that was based on an exceptional emotional state and a new political and symbolic framework. This framework consisted of a spontaneous collective management and novel forms of communication, such as nudity and dancing. The separated collective life created an environment where women’s discovery of their inner and unconscious dimension could not be ideologically instrumentalized.

On the other hand, the feminist transnational strategy exemplified by the separatism of those encounters presented many limitations in terms of political effectiveness. Similar to the challenges faced by unconscious practice groups in transitioning to a collective dimension, the shift from the transnational context to the local one proved to be difficult. The space of the meetings resulted to be isolated, incommunicable, and hard to translate into effective praxis. Furthermore, while the emphasis on women’s inner experience and mutual recognition among participants contributed to cultivating a deep emotional connection, it also resulted in the neglect of other crucial social conflicts that hold significant importance in a critical feminist perspective.

By examining the political effectiveness and limitations of these meetings, it became possible to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of their transnational feature. Indeed, ascribing transnationalism to them entailed acknowledging the unique emotional experience of the women involved, as they were fully immersed in a separate space and time. However, it did not mean to claim that these meetings represented a critical transnational feminist praxis that aimed to encompass the complexity and intersection of all layers of social conflicts in its global understanding of women’s oppressions. On the contrary, it is precisely due to the encounters’ limitations—separation, homogeneity, shared privilege—that peculiar detachment from the national context occurred.

It appears that the common thread that ties together many of the feminist praxis discussed is their inherent unspeakableness, which calls into question the very purpose of this article. Indeed, despite women's efforts to make the experience of being together more accessible through new modes of communication in the second part of the decade, the ineffability of their inner dimension remained. This issue was exemplified on *Sottosopra* by the image of the “mute woman,” considered as the more efficient “objection” (Cameli 2014d, 5) to canonical ways of conceiving politics. According to those women, it was important to ultimately accept that “the ‘non-political’ digs tunnels that we must not fill with soil” (5). They recounted that the collective political dimension “violently denied” their “mute part” which “neither could nor wished to talk” and acknowledged that there would always be a side of them that “refuses to be described, portrayed, or defended by anyone,” including “the Collective, therapists, or the part of [them] that does talk” (5).

The problem of the unspeakableness of women's inner experiences not only affects the dimension of feminist praxis but also extends to the struggle of historiographical work, such as this article, to report intimate experiences between women. Elda Guerra has described this issue as a real *problem of narrativity*, referring to such feminist practices as the result of “a practical knowledge that cannot be translated on paper and thus cannot become *traditional*” (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, 49). Because praxis such as consciousness-raising and psychoanalysis aimed to reach the dimension of what was “mostly uncommunicable,” their “historical restitution” clashed with “an opacity” (49), difficult to penetrate. In this regard, Passerini focused on “historicizing” the “category of experience”—crucial for the 1970s feminist movements—to go beyond “paths of memories and genealogies” strictly related to “feminist political militancy” (Passerini 2005, 186). In any case, the challenge to find the words to recount what Melandri calls women's “unspeakable viscosity” (Melandri 2000, 72) is still open. It is in this complex interweaving of feminist research and praxis that this work intends to locate itself.

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Notes

1 For surveys on European social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, see Fillieule and Accornero 2016; Andry 2022.

2 Regarding direct sources from the Italian viewpoint, the main reference was the feminist magazine *Sottosopra* (Upside-down). *Sottosopra* was founded in Milan and circulated without a fixed periodicity from 1973 to 1976, and again from 1983 onwards. The three articles on the encounters were titled “La Tranche: un incontro internazionale” (La Tranche: an international meeting), “Nudità” (Nudity)—both signed by Una compagna di Milano (a comrade from Milan)—and “Dalla registrazione di una discussione collettiva” (From the recording of a collective discussion), a list of testimonies of the encounter in Vieux-Villez, signed by several women. The second of these was subsequently republished in the magazine *L'erba voglio*, here under the name Antonella Nappi. The magazine *L'erba voglio* (an expression that figuratively means “you can't always get what you want”) was born after two conventions dedicated to non-authoritative experiences at school held in 1970. In 1971, those contributions were collected in a volume titled *L'erba voglio: Pratica non autoritaria nella scuola* (non-authoritarian practices at school). On the French side, the principal direct source was the magazine *Le Torchon Brûlé*, published by MLF from 1971 to 1973. The contributions were titled *Quelques unes en parlent* (some people are talking about); *Etre ensemble, travailler ensemble: qui*

organise quoi? (Réflexion personnelle après le bilan collectif) (Being together, working together: who organises what? (Personal reflection after the collective assessment)); *Hoho_hétéro; Un mlf à la tranche; Toulouse Tranche* signed by “un groupe de filles de Toulouse” (a group of women from Toulouse). These publications provided a platform for many women to share their thoughts about feminist practices during those years, reflecting the fervent dialogue that was taking place.

3 A transnational approach on feminisms might also be seen as a way of moving beyond the historiographic paradigm of the waves, which affirms a linear and progressive image of women’s history. On this debate, Hewitt 2012; Browne 2014; Baritono 2018.

4 Besides the connections with the Americans and the French, the Italian feminist movement was open to other foreign militant contexts, for instance, those in Britain and Scandinavia. These interactions occurred through travel, translations, and conventions (Travagliati 2017). On the relationship with the British movement, see the collaboration between Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James who, together with other important feminist figures, started the International Wages for Housework Campaign in 1972 (Dalla Costa and James 1972; Bracke 2013; Picchio and Pincelli 2019). Regarding the relationship with Scandinavian women, a crucial moment was the 1973 camp held in Femø, Denmark. On the important issue of feminist translation, see Von Flotow 1991; Spivak 1993; Passerini 2005; Castro and Ergun 2017.

5 That is, the abrogation of the felony of adultery in 1968; the Italian divorce referendum in 1974 (confirmation of the law of 1970); the family law reform to affirm equality between spouses in 1974; the institution of family counseling centers in 1975; the abortion law in 1978; the repeal of the law on honor killing and shotgun marriage in 1981.

6 Translated in Hajek 2018.

7 On the attempts to reconcile the instances of gender and class in Italy during the 1970s, see Tolomelli and Frisone 2017.

8 A significant episode occurred on 6th December 1975 when the communist extraparliamentary group Lotta Continua (Continuous Struggle) participated in a demonstration to support the legalization of abortion. At a certain point, some female militants decided to separate from the group’s banner, claiming their autonomy, but were obstructed by Lotta Continua’s stewards. This event led to the eventual dissolution of the group the following year (Voli 2006). On the relationship between feminist groups and social and political movements in Italy in the 1970s, see Sarasini 2015; Petricola 2010.

9 Translated in Hajek 2018.

10 Discussing the evolution of the Milanese feminist movement in the 1970s, Anna Rita Calabrò schematically distinguishes two types of groups: *gruppi di riflessione* (reflection groups) and *gruppi di pratica nel sociale* (social practice groups). The former adopted the consciousness-raising and psychoanalytic techniques and are the main focus of this work. The latter aimed to have structural impacts not only in the subjective sphere. That is why they engaged in confrontations with the economic, political, and social institutions of that time. For them, the relationship with the political context of those years was different and cannot be explained simply by a separatist will. See Calabrò and Grasso 1985, 31.

11 MLF was a collection of heterogeneous groups and *Féministes Révolutionnaires* was one of them. Their main reference was Simone de Beauvoir’s universalism and egalitarianism, in opposition to the *feminism of difference* of Fouque and Irigaray. Besides the theoretical level, divergences within the movement also emerged regarding political praxis. Among other occasions, they demonstrated during the celebration of the unknown soldier’s wife in Paris in August 1970 and when the *Manifeste des 343*—which led to the abortion legislation in France—was published in April 1971. On both occasions, Fouque harshly criticized the “media strategy” (Fouque 2015, 21) approach of other leaders of the MLF. On the French feminist movements of the 1970s, see Duchen 1986; Greenwald 2019.

12 For the French group, the aim to reappropriate their own bodies was translated also into the practice of “political homosexuality,” not “a theoretical content but an affective, sexual life of the whole group” (Libreria delle donne di Milano 1987, 44). On the relationship between lesbianism and MLF, see Eloit 2020. About the Italian lesbian movement in the 1970s and 1980s, see Biagini 2018.

13 As far as the Italian context is concerned, the two more institutionalized references are the mass organizations that were born after WWII: Unione Donne Italiane (UDI, Union of Italian Women) and Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF, Italian Female Centre). The former referred to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the latter to Christian Democracy (DC). See Beckwith 1985.

14 An attempt to confront power dynamics within feminist groups is exemplified by what Cigarini referred to as *la pratica dell’affidamento*, the practice of entrusting. This approach acknowledges “the disparity

among women” as “a transformative force within the social realm,” acting as a “sexual mediation” that activates “the female source of social authority” (Cigarini 2022, 85). The practice aims to strengthen the desire of the woman who entrusts herself.

15 During those years, the experience of feminist publishing houses and bookshops was a feature of other militant contexts as well, for example, those in Britain and Switzerland (Delap 2015; Bürgi and Schulz 2021). Concerning the rise of new spaces, it is worth mentioning the Italian experience of *la casa delle donne* (women’s house), a self-managed place where women aimed to find a balance between public and private. Nowadays, women’s houses are shelters or refuges to support women escaping domestic violence of all forms.

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