

# FRONTIERS OF FEMINISM

Movements and Influences in  
Québec and Italy, 1960–80

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# Contents

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Preface and Acknowledgments / ix

Abbreviations / xv

- 1** Contrasting the Québec and Italian Feminist Movements / 3
- 2** Feminist Synergies with the Left / 27
- 3** Wages for Housework: Caught between Refusal to Work and Feminism / 59
- 4** Double Activism and Feminist Separatism / 78
- 5** The Illusion of Unity and Homogeneity: The Emergence of a Fragmented Political Subject / 103
- 6** Angel Makers or Troublemakers? Abortion, Self-Help Politics, and the Management of Feminist Clinics / 133

- 7** Feminist Approaches to Organizing / 162
- 8** Capturing Feminist Transgressions through Cultural Productions / 183
- 9** Who Should Write Our History? / 215
- 10** This History Has No End and Offers No Conclusion / 233
- Notes / 237
- References / 268
- Index / 293

## Preface and Acknowledgments

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During the first phase of my research, I met and interviewed several feminist activists who built the women's health centres movement as well as other networks of women's service groups in Québec City, Montréal, and many other regions outside urban centres. Though the Regroupement des centres de santé des femmes du Québec has ceased to exist, some women's health centres continue to offer a range of services on health issues, including abortion services. Many feminists I met during field research offered me a place to stay and food to share. To them, I would like to reiterate my gratitude. Today, most of these feminists have shifted their careers in order to face other challenges, just as I am moving on with my research to explore new dimensions of feminism as a political movement.

In Québec City, where I was a feminist activist before my doctoral years in Toronto, I became an active member of the socialist feminist journal *Marie-Géographie*. Parts of this book rely on moments from exchanges and debates that occurred among members of the collective when the journal's political activism interacted with the leftist politics in the city. I am deeply indebted to Andrée Bérubé, Lorraine Bérubé, Emilia Castro, Claire Deschênes, Denise Genest, Sylvie Jobin, Marie-Thérèse Lacourse, Georgette Lebel, Marie Leclerc, Nicole McClure, and many other feminist contributors who helped to create and produce a small journal with scarce resources. We were not professionals, but we believed in feminist journalism as a space for debates and strategies, a space to refine ideas and to disseminate feminist

analyses that matter for the political life of the movement. To all self-made feminist journalists unknown to me – those who created alternative and progressive periodicals as well as those who acted inside and outside the official media sphere – I express my deepest acknowledgment: these media activists acted – and continue to act – during a period when having a voice and feminist communication tools mattered. For those who are acting in the present moment, I sincerely hope you will leave valuable archives containing traces of your activist lives for feminist researchers. The reading of feminist periodicals, even those that were short-lived, was particularly important for this research and composed one of the most important primary sources for this book. A particular thanks to Lyne Kurtzman, who lent me her precious collection of *Pluri-elles/Des luttes et des rires*, a Montréal feminist journal whose complete collection has not been re-edited to this day – unlike *Québécoises deboutte!* and *Les têtes de Pioche*, which have been published by Les éditions du remue-ménage. *Pluri-elles/Des luttes et des rires* has been very helpful in reconstituting part of the genealogy of women's groups in Montréal.

During the course of researching and writing this book, many people asked me why I had chosen Italian feminism for comparison rather than French feminism, which would have made sense in terms of similarity of language. The answer is that the angle of vision from which I wanted to reassess my knowledge of the Québec feminist/women's movement required a certain shift. Québécois and Italian feminisms are subaltern feminisms, shaped by their respective, essentially leftist, political trends and actors (which were themselves deeply transformed by feminism) and by two dominant feminist movements in the Western world, namely, French feminism and American feminism, both of which, to varying degrees, needed to be put under the microscope. In choosing Italy, I wanted to contrast its discourses and practices with a movement evolving along the same scale of importance, knowing perfectly well that, despite many similarities, Québec and Italian feminisms have many differences. For instance, the Italian population is much bigger than Québec's; the number of groups – feminist/women's collectives; leftist groups; progressive, alternative, and political journals; and so forth – are far more numerous on the other side of the Atlantic. The present research reflects this difference of size and volume.

I began learning Italian and travelled the Italian peninsula, from north to south, meeting feminists who had witnessed major political events and had something to say about them. I visited feminist/women's archives and met Italian feminists who generously gave me precious testimonies and a lot of valuable documents, some of which cannot be found in institutional archives

and libraries, not even feminist ones. As happened with my previous research on the women's health centres movement, many of these feminists offered me a place to stay and food to share. This book is dedicated to these women and to members of feminist collectives whose genealogy I attempted to retrace. Special thanks go to Paola Melchiori, who was the first to open her personal archives and her address book. She paved the way to fruitful feminist encounters. She also agreed to do a careful reading of the first version of the manuscript and to help me to understand the complexity of Italian feminist politics. Through her, I met Lea Melandri, an author of many books on Italian feminism, and Anita Sonogo, who was the president of the Libera Università delle donne at the time. Like Paola in Treviso, Anita generously offered me a place to stay in Milan. I would also like to thank Francesca Dall'Acqua, who gave me precious contacts in Naples. Many of these contacts led me to others in the Italian South – namely, in Palermo and in Sciacca, a small town in the south of Sicily. Eleonora Cirant, a librarian and feminist activist at the Unione femminile nazionale, demonstrated enormous patience and generosity during my two lengthy visits in Milan. I would also like to thank the Fondazione Elvira Badaracco in Milan, the members of Archivio femminista de la Casa delle donne in Rome, the Centro donna in Naples, and the Associazione nazionale Unione donne Italiane in Palermo, whose members agree to be interviewed twice during my stay in Aspra, in the vicinity of Palermo.

As a member of the Feminist Political Economy Collective (York University) I had the opportunity to present the preliminary findings of what is now becoming a book. Over the many years of my research, I had lengthy exchanges with some the collective's members, like Ann Porter and Wendy McKeen: friendship was deeply embedded in these exchanges and I would like to thank them for all the dinners, including Christmas Eves, trips abroad while attending conferences, and many other leisurely times. I cannot thank Meg Luxton enough for her constant words of encouragement and a careful reading of the manuscript. Her comments were very valuable in improving my analysis of feminism as a political movement.

My research also benefited from the work of very enthusiastic graduate assistants, with whom I enjoyed discussing their findings. During this time Sanjukta Banerjee was doing her master's in translation studies at Glendon (York), conducting extensive research on everything that has been published on Italian feminism, in both French and English and, if possible, Italian as well. There were also graduate students in the Master's in Public and International affairs program at Glendon – namely, the late Marie-Laure Baraud,

with whom I had many lively exchanges concerning our respective knowledge of the Italian South; Saïdo Dialo, who thoroughly researched Québécois leftist and countercultural journals; and Jessica Brousseau, Kevin Ladouceur, and Karina Pogosyan, all of whom participated in their respective capacities.

English is my second language, and I would have never dared to send segments of this book for review or even to attend conferences without carefully revising various aspects of my research. For revising the entire manuscript twice, for her precious advice, and for helping me to present the manuscript in book form, Jane Springer has been the most careful and diligent reader I have had in all my years of English writing and publishing in academia. I also thank Caroline Kunzle for the final touches, as well as Cate Bester, one of the most enthusiastic undergraduate students I have had the pleasure to teach. Finally, Jennifer Sypo-Smith should be thanked for the early fragmented versions of chapters and conference papers, as should Elena Basile, who edited the first version of the introduction. Clara Chapdeleine-Feliciati occasionally helped with the translation of Italian quotes.

Over the years in which I conducted this research, I shared with the MA graduate students in my Feminist Theory course a few classic Italian texts on the theory of sexual difference as well as texts on Québécois feminism as it came into contact with post/anti-colonial theories. These readings often sparked interesting debates when contrasted with classical North American feminist approaches to similar issues. It is in such encounters that comparative approaches show their potential for shedding new light on important, often taken-for-granted, theoretical paradigms. I must thank these graduate students and many undergraduates for asking me questions about my research and suggesting new ways of looking at feminism. These interactions left me encouraged about the interest such research is generating in feminism as a political and social movement.

At UBC Press, I owe a special thanks to Darcy Cullen (assistant director, acquisitions) who enthusiastically supported the project from the moment I submitted it to the press to its final stage. I would also like to thank Nadine Pedersen (editor) and Ann Macklem (production editor), who followed the manuscript, step by step, to its publication, and Joanne Richardson (copy editor).

I must also thank Glendon College (my home faculty) and York University for their financial support, research grants, and other types of research support. Even though this support never entirely funded the cost of living abroad, it was essential in covering reading materials, transportation, and

the cost of shipping books and documents through the Italian postal service and communicating with people in numerous ways.

I would like to thank friends in my life with whom, in addition to constantly exchanging ideas, I have shared numerous moments of pleasure and many dinners: Elisabeth Abergel, Guillaume Bernardi, Lyse Hebert, Randy Hesp, Franck Jovanovich, Suzanne Langlois, Stephen Lisinski, Marcel Martel, Jean-Michel Montsion, Roberto Perin (who, through his love of Italy, also helped with the translation of Italian quotes), and Richard Van Delft. Finally, my thanks to all members of my family for the efforts they make every year to spend time together and to stay connected, and, most of all, to my daughter Joëlle, whose perseverance in pursuing scholarly research and whose intellectual vivacity gives me strength, support, and comfort.



# 1

## Contrasting the Québec and Italian Feminist Movements

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*Il n'y a pas d'indépendance du Québec sans libération des femmes; il n'y a pas de libération des femmes sans indépendance du Québec.*

– *Front de libération des femmes du Québec*<sup>1</sup>

*There is no revolution without the liberation of women; there is no liberation of women without revolution.*

– *Cerchio Spezzato*<sup>2</sup>

Beyond their apparent similarity, these two quotations, written during approximately the same period in Québec and Italy, respectively, reveal what Manuela Fraire and Biancamaria Frabotta have called the “two souls” of feminism: the first is oriented towards the outside in connection with other political struggles, while the second focuses on the development of a separatist movement, away from any political/ideological interference or contamination by masculine thought (Frabotta 1975, 9; Fraire 2002, 27). These statements also reveal a comprehensive political program for the feminist decade that had just started (Calabrò and Grasso 2004, 38; Cerchio Spezzato 1970; Un groupe de femmes de Montréal 1971; Mills 2004, 2010; O’Leary and Toupin 1982, 27; Péloquin 2007; Seroni 1978, 218).

This book explores the evolution of Italian and Québec feminisms from the mid-1960s until the mid-1980s, focusing on their political activism,

their attempts at creative theorizing, and their relationship with a diversity of struggles stemming from the existing social and political scenes. It focuses first on moments of intense mobilization during the 1970s, then on the fragmentation of the feminist/women's movement into small women's groups and larger feminist collectives, and finally on their diffusion throughout all layers of Italian and Québec society in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> As contemporary feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s became an integral part of the historiography of political struggles, this book also addresses the challenge once raised by British socialist feminist Sheila Rowbotham.

Rowbotham (1996, 13) pointed out the major weakness of feminism – and of political movements in general – which is the tendency to forget important elements of history and the absence of mechanisms to transfer memory from one generation of activists to another. She reminds us that, in the Western world, feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s rejected the project of women's emancipation within modernized capitalism. Instead, feminist activists – mainly radicals and socialists – embraced the project of liberating women through a complete transformation of social relations: the radicals placed gender at the core of their discourses, while the socialists held that race and class were as important as gender.

Other critics have identified the lack of collective memory (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, ix; de Sève 2005; Delphy 1980) and the tendency to rely on restrictive theoretical frames when assessing feminist struggles – its gains and its losses – leading to the marginalization of important analytical factors and issues (de Sève 2005, 90; Michaud 2009, 86; Sangster 2010). Some criticize the appropriation of feminist political struggles by political movements informed by patriarchal logic, which maintain a multiple invisibilization of gender hierarchies within the many spheres of political activism (Fillieule and Roux 2009, 12–13);<sup>4</sup> some highlight the occultation of important feminist theorization in the 1970s and 1980s (Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2007, 125–26, 155); and some, while commenting from outside of feminism, suggest that the lack of memory transfer is the consequence of a generation of political activists who were not interested in leaving any trace of their experience (Warren 2007, 209). Whatever the reason, this period – the political years from the 1960s to the 1980s – is remarkable for the sudden emergence of mass political movements followed by an abrupt descent into disillusion.

Over the last twenty-five years, I have been studying the ways in which feminist discourses and practices are constituted, starting with a doctoral project on the network of women's health centres in Québec, the struggle

for access to abortions, the creation of feminist self-help clinics, and the practices some of these centres put at the core of their political platforms (Michaud 1995, 1996, 1998). Some of the major debates that divided feminist/women's collectives for decades concerned whether or not they should collaborate with state institutions in an attempt to force the adoption of new policies, reforms, and services adapted to women's needs (Andrew 1984; J. Lamoureux 1994; Masson 1998; Michaud 1992, 1997b, 2000). The other important area that generated significant and conflicting discussion concerns the difficulty of integrating issues of sexuality and race into feminist/women's movements. Initially, such polarizing debates were conducted within the much larger ideological context of the capitalist and patriarchal state and were led by a substantive number of feminists who forcefully argued for the need to intervene in the social. Although the preservation of the independence of feminist collectives was the ultimate goal, the most important interlocutor with whom feminist activists talked and litigated was the left – both the old left and the New Left, embodied by a whole range of political and social movements, unions, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties, and political groups (Crispino 1981b, 25; O'Leary and Toupin 1982; Pélouquin 2007; Sangster 2010).<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, the 1970s concluded with a decline in the mass mobilization of political movements, including feminism, but the women's movement did not stop expanding as more and more small groups began to emerge in all regions of Québec society, initiating work within local and regional communities. Then, debates on the need for feminists to intervene in the social alongside other political actors diminished and were contained within the frontiers of the movement: for feminist activists, the potential interlocutor and negotiating partner shifted from the left, in all its diversity, to the state and its multiple layers of public institutions. No contradiction was seen between continuing to criticize the state and accepting public funding for feminist/women's groups who provided services to larger communities of women in need.<sup>6</sup> Feminism as a political movement was gone; the women's movement as a social movement had arrived.

Important distinctions need to be made between these two denominations. First, when I refer to feminism as a political movement, I focus on a particular moment in history when debates and confrontations concerning Marxist theories and leftist practices were particularly intense within all movements, including feminism. These exchanges occurred, among other ways, through writings in different journals and were attempts to create distinctive identities for particular political groups. Feminist collectives tried

to find ways to distinguish themselves, as clearly as possible, from other political movements. It is important to note that feminism was not a movement born out of the left. Nevertheless, feminist activists were in constant synergy with the old left and extra-parliamentary organizations identified as the New Left. Indeed, the number of feminist activists was small, but they were involved in a variety of struggles they shared with leftist activists. As the number of feminist collectives and women's groups grew and expanded outside large urban centres, as the importance of finding immediate solutions to single issues (health, abortion, violence, poverty, women's sense of isolation) occupied the feminist agenda, feminist activists transformed themselves into women's issues experts and began to play an intermediary role between diverse communities of women and public institutions (Ergas 1986, 104).

Second, when I write "feminist/women's groups" I am not using "feminist" or "women" alternatively. There are important distinctions to make between these two words: not all members of a specific women's group claimed their allegiance to feminism even though their practices were informed by feminist consciousness. However, using the slash in writing feminist/women's groups means these distinctions are not clear-cut. I make the same distinction when I refer to the feminist/women's movement, although the shift from being a political movement (feminist) to being a social movement (women's) appears clearer. Despite this qualitative shift being neither defined nor definitive, feminism as a political movement remains at the core of the women's movement. It is still a formidable terrain of political engagement aiming to resolve unfinished struggles led by the feminist/women's movement as well as other struggles happening within political/public spaces shared with other political actors. This is also the main reason I chose not to focus my research on the feminist/women's movement on its relationship with the state or with political parties such as the Québec Liberal Party, the Parti Québécois, or any other parliamentary party. There are already several feminist publications devoted to the subject of "women and the state" or "the women's movement and the state." The list is too long to address here. Furthermore, in Québec in particular, feminist scholarship has paid much less attention to the synergy between feminism and different leftist political schools of thought. Solely studying the feminist/women's movement through its internal dynamics and its contradictory and/or tense relations with public and state institutions is indeed important, but it is too restrictive as it leaves out significant and determining

factors in the making of feminist discourses and practices. This book intends to fill this gap.

Thus, the present study enlarges the scope of analysis to the study of synergies and frictions, dialogues and confrontations, between feminism and the old left as well as the New Left. This enables us to shed a different light on what has contributed to shaping contemporary feminism. With the objective being to retrace and highlight the making of the current trends of a movement and its genealogical intricacies, I began to search for comparable feminist movements I could analyze side by side. I found in the Québec and Italian movements two feminisms that have never before been compared and that could shed new light on the past and present theorizations of issues and modes of organizing.

Although they have many similarities, the Québécois and Italian movements must be compared and contrasted in relation to their own specific political contexts. First, both paid significant attention to the American feminist movement, especially its use of consciousness-raising, and to the French feminist movement. Second, both paid attention to these movements' choice of issues, such as: the quest for personal and organizational autonomy (i.e., the separation of feminism from any masculine political interference); the demand for wages for housework; the call for free abortion and the politics of self-help; the liberation of women's bodies and their sexuality; the theorization of sexual difference and the self; and, finally, the constitution of a new autonomous political subject. Third, there are similarities in the ways in which Italian and Québec feminist activists perceived their respective societies as homogeneous in terms of race and in their representation of whiteness. This being the case, it is important to consider their respective approaches to difference and how their processes of racialization created hierarchies among social categories of women.

This enumeration of similarities does not mean that there were not important differences between Italian and Québécois feminisms. Italian feminists, for instance, went deeper into the theoretical elaboration of sexual difference as well as of the mode of inquiry they named *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising).<sup>7</sup> The place occupied by psychoanalysis – mainly within feminist collectives that resolutely separated their feminist thought and practice from any involvement with male-centred thought and practice – had more depth and resonance in Italy than in Québec. Moreover, the old and the New Left seemed to have a stronger hold on feminist orientations and choices of political strategy in some segments of the Italian movement (Ciuffreda and Frabotta 1975), whereas the demand for

autonomy in Québec was the issue that generated most of the tension and controversy between feminists and leftist groups. Marxism, as a grand narrative, imposed many terms of reference on Italian feminists in the early years, and the same ideological influence existed in Québec. Another grand narrative – nationalism – was less significant in Italy: Québec leftist nationalism, mirroring Third World liberation discourses, had an important influence on political movements, including the feminist/women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. However, Italian feminists developed a narrative that emphasized the importance of *separatism* in relation to masculine thought in much the same way as their Québec counterparts did.

Although I outline the similarities and differences between these two movements, I do not follow a traditional chronological approach. Quite the contrary: I focus on major themes, shedding light on the type of political actors with whom feminists engaged; on feminist theorizations of sexuality and the body; and on the institutional structures they created, such as women-only spaces made up of small groups, larger collectives, and/or networks in all areas of human activities. This thematic approach allows me to show the extent to which feminist theorizing and feminist principles that sustain collective action were very different in the 1960s and 1970s than what had existed within major women's organizations following the Second World War. The genealogical reconstitution proposed here should help to avoid a homogeneous and restrictive interpretation of a period in which, too often, the liberal paradigm is invoked to explain the evolution of feminism up to the present. My approach aims less to analyze women's groups in their intermediary position between communities of women and public institutions than to propose a transversal genealogical analysis; that is, it seeks less to describe the origins of a movement than to highlight relations of proximity, of synergy, and of rupture with other social forces that, like feminism, sought to be at the forefront of political transformations.

Early organizations clearly devoted to feminist issues and feminist/women collectives' action began long before the "'68 years."<sup>8</sup> We have to look back to the end of the Second World War for elements that explain strategies taken by some groups in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> The period ends in the mid-1980s, with the institutionalization of specialized services for women as well as the partial success of women's groups in disseminating feminist principles (Masson 1998; Michaud 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Pravadelli 2010, 61). The 1980s is a period during which women activists focused less on mass mobilization than on putting their limited resources and personal energies into

the development of study groups, documentation centres, and permanent feminist/women's institutions of their own (Calabrò and Grasso 2004).

In the following section, I summarize some of the elements evolving at the frontiers of these two movements. I show how they intermingle in such a way that what seems to be the boundary of one dimension is precisely the point of entry of another.

### **Exploring the Frontiers of Feminist Discourses and Social Practices**

Many feminist activists worked with terms of reference that were not their own before rejecting most, but not necessarily all, of them. Marxist ideology and class struggle analysis, nationalism and Third World liberation discourses, counterculture and the desire to break with old ways of doing politics – all of these political discursive trends shaped feminism and its political orientations. This is why the question of political and ideological influences from the left as well as the impact of Italian and Québec feminisms on leftist organizations and political parties is central to this study. Both feminisms were shaped by this type of synergy.<sup>10</sup> A genealogy of political effervescence from the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s should highlight the dialogical dynamic that existed among movements – a dynamic characterized as much by alliances and solidarities as by conflicts and ruptures over old political discourses and ideologies (Dupuis-Déri 2008, 259; Michaud 2010). In this book, the concept of “synergy” is used to highlight the moments of interaction among political movements. This concept also allows us to conceptualize feminism as an independent movement that is not born out of the left (Winter 2000, 107): it existed earlier and is not derivative. However, there are always segments of feminism and moments of its history that interact with the left.<sup>11</sup> Women, LGBTQ people, intersex people, Indigenous people, people who are racialized, people who are living with different ability and capability are not acting in the margins of political struggles: they are in it, bringing complexity to the internal/external relations of any given movement. They are at the crossroads of any debates between specific conditions and their perversions (Rossi-Doria 1978, 14–15).

Returning to the 1960s with this in mind, both feminism and the New Left shared a similar quest for autonomy and experienced divisive debates around its meaning. This quest emerged out of disagreements over how the old left intended to maintain its control over emerging political movements as well as over the expression of new subjectivities and desires (Balestrini and Moroni 2008; Warren 2008).<sup>12</sup> In Italy, as in Québec, the late 1960s

witnessed the political outburst of student movements and working-class youth opposed to paternalism and authoritarianism in the family and the education system as well as in unionism and traditional leftist politics (Balestrini and Moroni 2008; Berardi 2007; Donolo 1968; Reid 2009; Warren 2008).

In spite of the originality of these political movements, they were haunted by dominant narratives. While in Québec many actors of the New Left seemed to ambiguously adhere to some sort of nationalism, in Italy the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) was incontestably the point of reference as well as of confrontation in the movement's efforts to overturn the capitalist state (Annunziata 2007; Fortin 1993, 211; Warren 2008, 2007).<sup>13</sup>

New Leftist activists – who were sometimes friends or companions with whom feminists shared their lives (Fraire 2002, 24; Raymond 1980, 10) – were often the same people who disagreed with the ways in which women talked about their oppression and their sexuality. On many occasions, they made their opposition known with harsh words and even used physical violence to make their point (L. Capobianco and Minneci 1981; Fraire 2002; D. Lamoureux 1986; Michaud 2010; Miles 1992). Paradoxically, for the separatist segment of Italian feminism, the notion of autonomy is as suspect as is the notion of emancipation itself. For this segment, the fight for autonomy remains associated with attempts to create spaces where women's issues can be discussed both inside and outside the structures of the left, while remaining closely connected to the struggles dominated by male leftist leaders.

Obviously, the distinction between autonomy and separatism is articulated differently in Québec than it is in Italy because the meaning attached to separatism is related to the independence of Québec from the rest of Canada. The word has a negative connotation when appropriated by opponents of the independence project. There are some exceptions, however, such as the *Manifeste des femmes Québécoises* (Manifesto of Québécois women) (1971), where the word "séparatiste" is used with the same meaning as it has in Italian feminism, though only once (Un groupe de femmes de Montréal 1971, 57). Political activists from the left (Vallières 1994 [1968]) rarely used notions such as "separatist" or "separatism": Québec nationalists prefer terms such as "independence" or "sovereignty." Most Québécois feminists used the term "autonomy" to identify the distance their movement should assume vis-à-vis the left.

In the Italian context, the notion of autonomy takes on different connotations when characterizing feminist groups that claim their independence from the PCI and traditional union organizing. Within Italian feminism,



invoking autonomy signified invoking freedom of speech and freedom of action for women within the leftist structures of the old and New Left without demanding a complete separation from social struggles, which was the case when feminist separatism was invoked. Within such confrontational contexts, feminist autonomy covers two strategies of self-determination that were sought simultaneously: (1) the autonomy of feminist organizations from any political interference from external forces and (2) personal autonomy for women as political subjects. For a significant portion of the feminist movement (DEMAU 1966a, 1966b; Fraire 2002, 57–65; D. Lamoureux 1986; O’Leary and Toupin 1982), the struggle for autonomy stands against the idea that women should integrate into the masculine sphere to achieve necessary political, social, and cultural transformations; it stands against any attempt to compromise with organizations and/or institutions dominated by masculine thought.

The feminist theorization of the notion of and quest for autonomy ensured that notions such as “the personal is political” overrode the type of autonomy the New Left was willing to give (Fraire 2002).<sup>14</sup> Reading analytical accounts by those who witnessed the political struggles of the 1970s and the ways in which they were confronted with the “woman question,” it is obvious that a new generation of feminists rejected any reformist demands. Their goals threw the old as much as the New Left into a profound ideological and theoretical crisis (Bianchi and Caminiti 2004; Lamontagne 1978; Warren 2007). In Italy, however, separatists within feminism were not satisfied by the mere demand for autonomy, and they refused to collaborate with any struggle if there was even the slightest chance that it was informed by masculinist thinking. This separatist segment of feminism was always suspicious of the autonomy segment, which it perceived as too willing to collaborate with the current social order instead of being engaged in its radical transformation, in creating a world informed by an entirely feminine system of thought.

The conflict between the autonomous and the separatist sides, which divide feminism into two souls – or two axes – did not come to pass without personal dramas in women’s lives (V. Boccia 1987). Many Italian feminist activists who contributed to the foundation of autonomous women’s collectives came from the PCI and the ranks of the *Unione donne Italiane* (UDI), which operated under the control of the Communist Party.<sup>15</sup> Since the end of the Second World War, the UDI had made demands for day care, labour rights, and pensions for housewives and was the model for women’s emancipation. The associations went into a deep crisis over the nature of

these emancipatory demands, caught between the authoritarian hold of the socially conservative PCI and the strength of the new feminist collectives. These collectives in fact proposed a radical model for complete liberation from the traditional ways of doing politics and from the existing models of theorizing oppression. The term *doppia militanza* (double activism or double militancy), coined by Italian feminists, best characterizes what Laura Lilli and Chiara Valentini (1979) call the “schizophrenia” of working inside and outside the old and the New Left as well as inside and outside autonomous feminist collectives along with new generations of activists.<sup>16</sup>

On top of provoking tensions and crises within the left, a new generation of Italian feminist activists continually challenged and destabilized traditional and well-structured women’s organizations like UDI. Nonetheless, the tradition of Marxism as a theory and as a practice was not easily discarded. This was especially true in the theorizing of relations of production and reproduction as well as the relations between the North and the South in Italy (Guerra 2005, 50; Keucheyan 2010, 33). For activists and theoreticians like Lea Melandri (1977), it was impossible to separate women’s sexuality from economy, politics, and culture. Even those who forcefully contested the Marxist tradition had to spend time critiquing the fallacies of the orthodox Marxist emancipation project with regard to women. Italian feminist thinkers like Carla Lonzi, who wrote a groundbreaking text, *Sputiamo su Hegel (Let’s Spit on Hegel)* (1970), argued that Marxist analysis must be rejected not only as masculine thought useless for the understanding of women’s oppression but also as a practice that contributed to perpetuating such thought.

The history of the dominance of the Communist Party of Canada over affiliated women’s associations had similar political resonance in Québec, seen in countless testimonies of female communist activists before and during the Second World War (Lévesque 1973, 1984, 1999). In the 1960s – a period strangely named *Révolution tranquille* (Quiet revolution), when the state introduced economic and social policies that seemingly differed from those of the past – events involving political violence were punctuated by brutal capitalist practices and harsh police repression of independentist groups as well as emerging Marxist organizations inspired by Third World liberation movements. Third Worldism, socialism, nationalism, and counterculturalism were all ideological discourses disseminated by Québec publications such as *Parti pris*, the most influential leftist periodical of the decade (Beaudry 1990; Fortin 1993; Horguelin 2010; Reid 2009).

The problem of double activism faced by so many Italian feminists had its counterpart within the political lives of many Québec feminists. The Front de libération des femmes du Québec (FLFQ), for example, presented a type of activism torn between its allegiances to women's liberation on the one hand, and to the socialist and anti-colonial struggle on the other (Cardon and Granjon 2010, 32–33; Kinsman and Gentile 2010; Lessard 1989; Péloquin 2007; Reid 2009; Warren 2007). Such tension is indicative of the synergy between feminism and the New Left, influenced by the works of Frantz Fanon and Albert Nemmi, among others, which had commenced in the early 1960s with the student movement (Vallières 1994 [1968]; Warren 2008, 70).

In both Italy and Quebec, the fact that many segments of feminism look towards dominant narratives, either to support or to negate their influence over their respective organizations, is nothing new; but perhaps what is less known – or in need of being reassessed – are the personal dilemmas of women who were caught between two loyalties and who were sometimes ostracized for it. Women quit leftist organizations in great numbers, at times provoking the dissolution of political groups like Lotta Continua in Italy (Balestrini and Moroni 2008, 371–72, 488–89) and En Lutte! in Québec (Cleveland 1983; Lessard 1989; Warren 2007). Many of them continued to advocate the importance of remaining connected with political struggles and other social issues. The concept of double activism refers to this dilemma lived by those who remained members of gender-mixed political groups while, at the same time, helping to create women-only autonomous feminist collectives devoted to the practice of consciousness-raising (Balestrini and Moroni 2008, 496–97; Fraire 2002, 117–50; Lilli and Valentini 1979).

American and French feminisms represent the second political influence on Québécois and Italian feminisms. These influences are interrelated and interdependent: American and French feminisms enrich and further complicate the multifaceted representations of women as political subjects distinct from their male counterparts. Nonetheless, American and French systems of feminist thought remained relatively foreign to one another and never fully reconciled important and significant differences. The difficulties associated with mediation and/or translation get in the way of our understanding of fundamental issues,<sup>17</sup> such as the role of class struggle within feminist social practices; the integration of race and other differences among social categories of women; the meaning of the *personal and the political* and the theorization of sexual difference; the practice of consciousness-raising/autocoscienza and the impact of psychoanalysis within the movement;

and gender relations and relations with public/political institutions (Fraire 2002; O'Leary and Toupin 1982; Péroquin 2007).

With American feminism, the issue of race entered the Québécois and Italian movements through the back door. The problem can be summarized in two ways: (1) the way in which feminists in Québec and in Italy acknowledged the presence of or absence of the integration of race in their midst, and (2) the extent to which they compared women's oppression with other oppression, such as the oppression of Blacks in the United States. Feminist/women's movements based their social practices and their political discourses on the perception that their respective societies were deeply divided by social class but were homogeneous in terms of race difference. Most if not all feminist activists in Québec and Italy thought that the problem of race emerged as an issue solely in the 1980s, oblivious to the fact that Black women, women of colour, and Indigenous women operated organizations parallel to theirs both before and during the period under study. Only occasionally did these activists respond to a call for solidarity, as in the case of Indigenous women contesting their loss of status due to section 12 (1) (b) of the Canadian Indian Act (Ricci 2017, 2018).<sup>18</sup>

The terrain of political activism surrounding the issue of race oppression gets more complex when feminist analyses of the social and economic conditions of working-class women are mixed with anti-colonialist discourse from Third World liberation movements. This additional porous frontier of feminism needs an intersectional and transnational analysis to decipher the ways in which Québec and Italian feminist activists thought of and developed their representations of women's movements elsewhere in the world. Although they more or less acknowledged that important feminist issues were being addressed outside the Western world, their representations of women from the Third World were restrictive, and the way they described their oppression militated against the possibility of Third World feminist thought contributing to the understanding of the condition of Western women (Bertilotti and Scattigno 2005, xiv; Michaud 2008).

Sophisticated feminist analyses abound in which the *foreign woman* is represented as a victim rather than as an agent in her own history, or as a simple object of study rather than as a subject participating in the emergence of new forms of politics. American feminism brought to the Italian and Québec feminist movements the possibility of comparing women's condition with other forms of oppression, such as that of African Americans, but it did this mainly through a type of representation that marginalized

Black feminist thought and Black women's experiences even further (Cerchio Spezzato 1970; Ergas 1986, 19; Fraire 2002, 53; Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013; O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 25; Scott 2011; Spagnoletti 1971; Vallières [1968] 1994; Warren 2008, 70). Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016, 110) remind us that: "During the 1960s and 1970s, black women criticized their erasure from multiple social movements, an exclusion that catalyzed black feminism. Yet this analogical thinking that categorizes people as being only one thing continually resurfaces."<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the question of race – when intersecting with class categories – must be problematized not only because it is more or less part of formal political discourses of the left and of feminism but also because it remains outside the national fabric and is, in some cases, essentialized in biological terms.<sup>20</sup> The process of comparing women's condition with that of African Americans was highly reductive and not without peril, as Fanon (1952, 170–71) recalls in *Peau noire masques blancs*, where he states: "les nègres sont comparaison."<sup>21</sup> Feminists in Québec, as in Italy, made this type of comparison with African Americans – rather than with women and men living on the African continent – fascinated by the strength and visibility of the Black political protest in the United States. This not only allowed them to favourably self-evaluate but also made them wonder who was the most oppressed and which movement represented the most legitimate claim for redress.

Taking into consideration race and class brings us to the operative meaning of the concepts "subaltern" and "subaltern woman." Gramsci (1975, 5–14, 323–43), in *Quaderni del Carcere*, conceived the subaltern as a position preserving the potential for marginalized or oppressed groups to be agents of their own political consciousness.<sup>22</sup> It should be no surprise, then, that many feminist activists, especially those from the Italian South, use this term not as a descriptor of women's condition but as a research and analytical tool in pretty much the same way as does the subaltern studies group within the totally different context of India (Chakrabarty 2002; Guha 2000). That is to say, they research women's history not from the position of those who are members of movements and institutional structures but from where women are located within their daily lives (Libraro, Mercogliano, and Tommaselli 1981). To be reminded of the trajectory of the subaltern as a concept is also to be reminded that the subaltern woman is as much characterized by class as by race: these two positions cannot erase one another.

Marxism then is not exclusively linked to Italian feminism, just as nationalism is not exclusively linked to Québec feminism. Separating these two dominant narratives in order to distinguish between Italy and Québec leaves

aside the nationalist narratives entrenched within discourses on the *woman self*. Analytical and theoretical connections between feminism and nationalism have produced a rich body of feminist scholarship in diverse contexts (Bannerji 2000; Dhruvarajan and Vickers 2002; Green 2009; Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem 1999; D. Lamoureux 1987, 1989; Moallem 2005; Stasiulis 1999). Nationalist discourse intersects with the political and methodological practices of starting from one's own experience within small consciousness-raising/autocoscienza groups, of creating women-only-spaces, of exploring personal experiences leading to the emergence of a new political subject. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said (1993, 214–18), while discussing liberation movements and imperialism, characterizes the women's movement as being central to the liberation process, pointing to women's resistance to male practices within emergent forms of nationalist movements. Said's characterization of cultures as seeking to liberate themselves from imperialism and colonization points specifically to contemporary feminism when describing nationalist consciousness. The theorization of sexual difference – like the discovery of one's own history, language, and culture – is aimed at producing an unprecedented liberation of women at the personal level as well as at the collective level, which, in turn, will lead to a radical transformation of society.

Acknowledging the influence of dominant narratives is one thing, but attributing to them a determining influence in shaping feminism and political events is another. The strength and the novelty of Québec nationalism – for instance, the fact that this society was exploring a modern as well as a leftist conception of nationalist liberation – cannot be explained without smaller narratives. It would make no sense to study Québec during this period without taking Third World liberation movements and countercultural discourses into account. This is because it was not solely a desire for the independence of Québec that animated Québec nationalism but also the desire to transform the way people lived, the education system, the role of the family, the ways in which people went to work and/or to the market. For women within this movement, the desire was to do all that and much more – to put an end to patriarchal relations in their lives, to change the way in which they expressed their sexuality and controlled their reproduction, even to change their relationships among themselves.

This is where the notion of “frontiers of feminism” takes on its meaning. I revisit the most important feminist struggles of a period that witnessed the emergence of innovative feminist social practices, structures, and institutions. I explore several types of articulations: between youth and women's

movements, which were at the core of the explosion that led to the sudden political visibility of the '68 years; between feminism and politics as a result of the tension caused by feminist separatism; between politics and culture, which resulted in sites of cultural expression such as the films, plays, and publishing houses that proliferated and became major laboratories for theorization, thus contributing to the creation of a large sphere in which various ideas could be circulated and exchanged; between Marxism and psychoanalysis, which gave space to explore the inner self, the subconscious, and the strengths and limits of relationships among women; and, finally, between the individual and the collective, revealing the constant and laborious practice of *partire da sé* (starting from oneself) and the tension the collective caused the self that was seeking recognition.

### The Multifaceted Soul of Feminism

The Italian feminist literature refers to the two souls – or axes – of feminism to characterize two opposite trends: one that connects the movement to political struggles within the larger social sphere and one that confines feminism within its own frontiers. The tension caused by this divide cuts across Western feminist movements with greater or lesser intensity. In Italy, for instance, the divide within the movement was intensely lived among protagonists and provoked irreconcilable fractures within small groups and larger collectives. In Québec, the debates were no less intense, but they never partitioned the movement. Such polarization did not mean that discourses and social practices within feminism were limited to a few points of contention. Each soul/axis of the movement was multifaceted. Each soul/axis had to deal with the multiple meanings and interpretations attributed to “sexual difference” and “women’s liberation.” Each soul created and managed its own structures and institutions within various layers of society: school and university, arts and science, work and family. The inside/outside schizophrenia, to use the concept coined by Lilli and Valentini (1979), enabled a multiplicity of situations, and this precluded a simple, linear understanding of feminism.

A transversal genealogical inquiry, such as is proposed here, takes into account the richness and sophistication of social practices and discourses adopted by many Italian and Québec feminist collectives, their level of theorization, and their strategies for change. Thus, the origin of feminism – the reasons and conditions of its emergence – becomes less important than its development and its ramification for every level of society (Rossi-Doria 2005, 3). Often deeply involved in political parties, unions, and extra-parliamentary



movements, a generation of activists created genuine organizational structures and became political actors in their own mass political movement along with other feminists/women activists who did not have a similar double engagement. A diversity of political trajectories and several ideological influences, coming as much from the outside as from the inside of a feminist movement in the making, ran through multiple solidarities and/or conflicts within feminist structures and collectives. Internal fractures over the issue of separating the movement from the social led to complex choices that still affect present-day feminism.

Almost unanimously, feminist activists dreamt of being liberated from the exploitation and colonization of their minds and bodies, rejecting every reformist path towards emancipation promised by the left (Rossi-Doria 1981, 92; Rowbotham 1996, 13). Nevertheless, the inside/outside fracture is also the story of harsh criticisms directed at feminist individuals as well as groups and collectives suspected of looking at short-term solutions and quick gains. Strategies of action designed to intervene in the public/political sphere were denounced by those in favour of separatism because they believed that these measures did not truly liberate women from the roots of their oppression. Such criticisms run through almost every struggle and caught traditional women's organizations, like the UDI in Italy, off guard. Indeed, the emergence on the political scene of a new generation of feminists armed with a rich and sophisticated set of theories pertaining to the body, sexuality, abortion, family, work, politics, and culture not only sidelined such organizations but also introduced crises into the practising of traditional politics, even in areas that were attempting to renew political activism.

Internally, feminist collectives worked on individual private lives and experiences, believing that such work would raise feminist consciousness: a new political subject was supposed to emerge out of the structural, cultural, and social conditions of gender relations. All the feminist theoretical work of exploring the self, of analyzing women's relationships with men, with their mothers, and with other women, and all political attempts to break women's isolation, were aimed at empowering them to see themselves as political subjects and agents of history (Fraire 2002, 76–77; D. Lamoureux 1986; Libreria delle donne 2005b [1987]; O'Leary and Toupin 1982). In Québec, women's groups explored the self and used consciousness-raising to help express differences in terms of class and sexual practices – but not of race – as opposed to different visions of the world or political affinities (Dùchaine 1986–87; O'Leary and Toupin 1982; Ricci 2017, 2018; Ship 1991).



Many Italian activists consider the feminist work on the self to be one of the great discoveries of feminism (Melandri quoted in Fraire 2002, 78). However, in theorizing differences among women through looking at disparities of knowledge and experience, the Libreria delle donne of Milan carved out a unique position for itself within Italian feminism. It is a position that will appear surprising, even shocking, to readers accustomed to analyzing differences in relation to other categories. The Libreria delle donne aimed to establish a renewed social contract not between women and men but between *women who want* and *women who know*. This way of theorizing sexual difference became the hub of the inside/outside divide within Italian feminism as well as of the liberation/emancipation debates. The Libreria's theorization of sexual difference and of difference among women dominated important segments of Italian feminism and made it unique in the Western world, but it also divided Italian feminism profoundly.

The representation of women as political subjects and the theorization of women's condition within the private sphere emphasized the importance of women-only-spaces within the movement. Such spaces were seen as necessary for women to rebuild the links between the personal and the political, especially since feminists were frequently confronted with the impossibility of bringing women's issues to the fore in male-dominated organizations. Paying attention to the processes leading to the creation of women-only-spaces also allows us to evaluate the evolution of feminism and its expansion into all areas of Italian and Québec societies up to the present day.

There are many ways of assessing the importance of women-only-spaces in the development of feminism, specifically when taking into account inside/outside tensions and conflicts. There is, first, the process of creation itself, the setting up of small feminist/women's groups and/or larger collectives according to women's needs. For instance, in Italy, those structures were supposed to create the necessary conditions for the practice of *autocoscienza*. Most segments of the movement put this practice at the heart of their inquiry and mode of action. At least at first, both feminists who separated their theorizing from any interference from masculine thought and those who remained involved in wider social and political struggles – especially on specific issues such as abortion, health, violence, work, the production and reproduction of family life – refer to *autocoscienza* as their point of departure. But even though the vast majority of groups and collectives claimed to base their theorizations and practices on *autocoscienza*, it was practically impossible to create a consensus regarding the multiplicity of definitions surrounding women's liberation.

A second way of assessing the impact of creating women-only-spaces is to look at the adoption and the application of feminist principles in several layers of society as well as at the conditions of their implementation within women's groups and collectives. These are, among other things, the anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical, and consensus-based principles governing the movement's decision making. These principles contain factors that can help us understand the shift from feminism – as a political movement – to the women's movement as a social movement, and from feminism as a political discourse to feminist principles of gender equality being disseminated through multiple layers of society (Calabrò and Grasso, 2004; Epstein 2001).

The third mode of evaluation concerns the role that national and international conferences,<sup>23</sup> workshops, and small encounters played in the sharing of ideas and practices. On many occasions, Italian and Québec feminists attempted to give some cohesion to their respective movements: the rapidity with which small groups and collectives spread through their national territories, under the impetus of a genuine mass political movement, brought with it the need to verify and to test theories and political orientations with other activists. Both the Italian and the Québec feminist movements organized and hosted events that had an impact on them. For instance, in 1973 anglophone feminists in Montréal hosted an important conference on the issue of wages for housework, which sparked debates within francophone feminist/women's collectives where the demand had been rejected. Italy was the site of many similar "international" events. Two of these were organized in conjunction with the French group *Psychanalyse et politique* and had a major impact on the orientation of the separatist branch of the Italian movement (Schiavo 2002).

The fourth mode of assessment pertains to the space occupied by feminist periodicals, feminist documentation centres, feminist publishing houses, women's bookstores, and other cultural sites for the dissemination and preservation of feminist history. These sites of knowledge production are particularly interesting as they constitute specific locations from which feminist activists communicated among themselves. They were open spaces as well as laboratories for debates around major ideas, new theories, and innovative practices. Feminist journals, for instance, were public sites through which collectives communicated with one another (Fortin 1993; Godard 2002; Michaud 2010; Paoli 2010, 2011).

Finally, there is the evaluation of how porous the frontiers of these spaces were and how much women's groups borrowed or shared their resources with other private and public institutions in society. This takes us back to

the question of participation/non-participation in wider social movements and structures. The issue pertains not only to the amount of feminist influence on the adoption of policies, social programs, and legislation such as abortion, health, and violence (M.L. Boccia 1983; Michaud 1992, 1997a, 1997b; Tozzi 1987) but also to the presence within formal institutions of women and feminists who could implement change (J. Lamoureux 1994). The tension between participation and non-participation affects not only areas such as health and social services, state institutions and public services, but also relations with private institutions in the areas of culture and cultural production. It affects the academic sphere as well as the press and public information at large. Critics differ in their assessment of the Italian women's movement in terms of the degree of its academic institutionalization (Magaraggia and Leone 2010; Pravadelli 2010, 61, quoting Bono and Kemp 1991). The Québec women's movement, on the other hand, was keen to engage in projects in partnership with government (Guberman et al. 2004; Masson 1998) as well as in some areas of academic research.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Organization of the Book**

This book relies mainly on information gathered from feminist journals and periodicals as well as group documents – some of them with handwritten comments in the margins – found in feminist archives and documentation centres in Québec and Italian cities. Some documents were obtained from the personal collections of feminist informants. These primary sources have allowed me to retrieve important moments and events that shaped and continue to shape Québec and Italian feminisms. This kind of information is not easily found in secondary sources such as monographs, peer-reviewed articles, and other scholarly documents published years after the fact. During my doctoral research in Québec, I interviewed representatives of six women's health centres, including centres that had terminated their activities a few years earlier. I also interviewed representatives of larger women's health networks (e.g., the Regroupement des centres de santé des femmes du Québec) as well as representatives of three major women's services groups: L'R des centres des femmes, the Regroupement des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale, and the Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel. Finally, I interviewed two civil servants from the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux (as it was called back then) because of the regular contact they had with community organizations, including group networks of women's services. In total, I recorded twenty-two

interviews with twenty-five women. In Italy, I interviewed representatives of major feminist collectives in Milan, such as *Libera università delle donne* and the *Libreria delle donne* of Milan. In Naples, I interviewed feminist activists who were involved in different feminist collectives from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, such as the *Nemisiache/Tre Ghinee* and the *Unione donne Italiane*. Some women were, at the time of the interviews, very active in the *Donne in nero* group. I had the chance to meet the group members during one of their meetings. I also conducted interviews with members of the *Partito comunista Italiano*. In Sicilia, I met UDI's representatives twice as well as a feminist activist from the small town of Siacca in southern Sicily. She gave me documents to prove that feminist activism was not only taking place in major cities in the north but also in the south. In total, fifteen women agreed to be interviewed. I also informally met former activists and informants in the capital of Rome as well as in major cities such as Milan, Naples, and Padua.<sup>25</sup>

This introductory chapter aims to map out the major areas of discourse and struggle of Québécois and Italian feminisms during one of the most crucial periods for political movements following the Second World War. [Chapter 2](#) focuses on the political and cultural context within which there occurred a specific synergy between feminism and other political movements. Women and youth entered the political arena in the 1960s as political actors, introducing an unprecedented range of desires, needs, and struggles to public/political spheres and highlighting the authoritarian aspects of institutions such as the education system and the family. I follow these protagonists as they give rise to different segments of the New Left, particularly the extra-parliamentary left, and interact with traditional political actors such as parties and unions. I discuss women and youth as political actors within the context of increasing violence, including organizations committed to armed struggle and the growing police repression directed towards anyone who opposed the state and its institutions.

[Chapter 3](#) builds on the preceding chapter by exploring two political discourses originating from the same Marxist paradigm: the refusal to work discourse and the wages for housework discourse. The latter provides one of the most comprehensive critiques of the left's refusal to work discourse. It reveals how demanding to work less in exchange for a better salary negatively affects several other categories of unpaid and underpaid workers, including housewives, who do not receive a salary for their work. Part of the wages for housework movement against the leftist discourse takes into consideration racialized workers and workers from Third World countries, and

it contains conditions of possibility for an intersectional analysis of race, class, and sexuality. It also highlights interlocking connections among many sectors of society, such as the community, the market (where goods are sold and/or exchanged), and schools. The wages for housework movement was caught between the extra-parliamentary left, from which it originally emerged, and vast segments of its own feminist movement, who were quick to demonize the demand out of fear that it would crystallize women's identity as housewives rather than seeing the role of housewife as a terrain for feminist struggles.

**Chapter 4** enters into the subjective territory of double activism. It looks at activists who were crossing back and forth, bringing the terrain of social struggles to feminism and articulating feminist demands and principles within the political movements of the left. The chapter begins with an attempt to define double activism. There is no doubt that the double activist's consciousness is split by being in two sometimes multiple, different worlds of activism at once. The constant pressure and criticism from feminist separatism exacerbate the difficulty of being a double activist. The pressure, however, requires that the articulation between feminism and politics be revisited from the point of view of the double activist who is determined to locate her politics inside feminism and not outside it. Studying the political thought of the double activist helps to shed light on the implications of feminist separatism.

With **Chapter 5**, the focus turns towards influential forces located outside national boundaries to see how American and French feminisms shaped the emerging political subject of women in the Italian and Québécois feminist movements. This influence came about in several ways, including through Québec and Italian feminists visiting the United States and France and bringing home theories and strategies of action; through the translation of books, articles, and other related documents; and through cross-border meetings between feminist activists. The unavoidable hurdles constituted by issues of difference punctuated these moments. The translation of American documents in particular, received with mixed feelings among francophone feminists in Québec, shaped the tendency to compare women's oppression to the oppression of Blacks, thus erasing Black feminist thought and the theorizing of women of colour in the United States and elsewhere. Although the seed of a theory of sexual difference had taken root in Italy prior to the encounter with the *Psychanalyse et politique* group, French feminism strengthened this trend in northern Italy and, to some extent, in other major cities in the Italian South. Similar encounters with

Québécois feminism never materialized, despite the fact that feminists had spent time in France, where many of them became aware of the theory of sexual difference.

The creation of a complete infrastructure of women's health centres (*consultori*) when abortion was still part of the criminal code in both countries is the theme of [Chapter 6](#). Revisiting this emblematic feminist struggle shows that it was never just about abortion but, rather, includes a whole range of theorizations about the body and sexuality. Most activists' energies were oriented towards creating spaces and developing feminist expertise on reproduction. In Québec, as in Italy, some feminist practitioners in health centres believed that abortion was the most important struggle. Many others, however, were convinced that the decriminalization of abortion was insufficient, and they demanded the democratization of medical practices as well as the transformation of women's and men's sexuality so that the need to have abortions would be eliminated. Women's health centres/*consultori* that tried to bridge the gap between these opposing visions of women's reproductive health experienced difficulties in reconciling the struggle for abortion (seen as more immediate and more rewarding) with the feminist vision of self-help (seen as slow to bring positive changes).

Apart from the small group practising consciousness-raising/*autocoscienza*, Québécois and Italian movements did not write much about their experience of collectives. [Chapter 7](#) attempts to capture different modes of feminist organizing through documents that show how women's groups' ways of doing politics differed from those of unions and political parties. The chapter also studies the evolution and transformation of these movements at the turn of the 1980s. Diverse phases of feminism intersect and shift from being political movements to becoming social movements. Such ruptures are difficult to capture as they are never definitive and are not the same for the Québécois and Italian women's movements. While the Québécois women's movement increasingly fragmented into specialized groups that serviced women's needs and that began dialoguing/negotiating with state institutions, the Italian women's movement persisted in creating women-only-spaces with no institutional links and remained focused on the internal dynamic of the small group experience.

[Chapter 8](#) explores the multifaceted spaces of feminist cultural production, highlighting how political art and culture were still a terrain for feminist struggles towards the end of the 1970s. It exposes two overlapping tensions within the life of political movements at the time: one concerns the power dynamic between politics and culture, which gave birth to numerous

countercultural manifestations; the other concerns the political context, which devalued political artistic productions. It looks at the role played by periodicals and journals: how they built an identity of their own based on the theory they espoused; how they created laboratories for debating and exchanging ideas; and how different journals responded to one another with regard to theoretical issues and points of contention. Finally, the chapter presents two subaltern voices in cultural production and theatre performances. The first voice comes from Québécois feminist writer and playwright Jovette Marchessault, highlighting her Indigenous feminist thought – an aspect often forgotten in her work – making visible the invisible in all living beings. For Marchessault, searching for the origins means recovering a world that existed before Christianity, colonialism, and capitalism. The second subaltern voice is that of the theatre group and cultural production cooperative known as the Nemesiache/Tre Ghinee, a collective of women artists working in the city of Naples. The Nemesiache/Tre Ghinee offers a different representation of the theory of sexual difference through its social and political engagements in local and regional politics.

**Chapter 9** highlights how early feminist activists realized the importance of researching and documenting the history of their movement. As feminist mass mobilizations waned, many felt an urgent need to make sense of what had happened during these intense moments in their lives and to control the narrative of what would be told about their experience. Several archives and documentation centres were set up in major Italian and Québécois cities to bring together individual and collective memories. In and out of academic circles, a specific feminist historiography emerged through books, anthologies of classical texts, articles, and research projects. Literary production and documentation centres were designed both to correct distorted accounts of feminism and to address feminist activists and women's groups, facilitating exchanges among them while making sure that the past was not lost to a younger generation of activists. These two approaches towards doing feminist historiography mainly addressed the feminist/women's movements and feminism's fellow travellers.

**Chapter 10** concludes the book by looking at some emerging issues for the contemporary feminist/women's movement. Returning to the individual and collective lives of the young women – the students, the activists, the companions, and the fellow travellers of the left who were convinced they could change the world in the 1960s and 1970s – this chapter looks at feminist gains, taking into consideration the perspective of a new generation of activists. Feminism continues to disrupt the left but it also continues to

learn from it. Feminist analysis, struggles, strategies, and projects constantly oscillate between the *in* and the *out* of the movement; between the need to remain in synergy with other political actors and the refusal to transgress the security of the stand-alone theories of liberation. Within feminism, this wavering reveals as much ambiguity about the direction to take as it provides opportunities for the renewal of feminist narratives and strategies for action. Feminism may not be the comprehensive paradigm some feminists had hoped for – a movement able to provide theories and strategies for human activities worldwide. Yet its overwhelming diversity offers the promise of renewal through the constant challenge from its margins, which are, without a doubt, the dynamic spaces from which feminism secures its most significant gains.



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