The Feminist Movement in Trentino: In Search of a Lost Map

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Introduction

This chapter presents part of the findings from the research project FemMe – Feminism and Memory (The Feminist Movement and Women's Trade Union Struggles in Trentino, 1968–1982).[1] The project's primary objective was to reconstruct the socio-history of the so-called second-wave feminist movement in this province – also referred to as neo-feminism or radical feminism (the feminism of the 1970s).

This local case study was selected for two main reasons. First, feminism in Trentino developed earlier than in the rest of Italy, thanks to the initiative of a group of students from the newly established Faculty of Sociology. In fact, as early as 1969, a pioneering collective was founded in Trento: *Il cerchio spezzato* (»The Broken Circle«), which played a significant role in shaping the subsequent development of the Italian feminist movement. Second, the feminist experience in Trentino is both rich and multifaceted, yet it has largely been overlooked even in feminist historiography. This neglect stems from a metropolitan-dominated »economy of memory«, which has often relegated the vibrant feminist activism of provincial areas to the margins of historical narratives.

To reconstruct the »lost map« of feminism in Trentino, I employed a dual methodological approach. First, I gathered documentary traces left by various groups, primarily from private archives made available by activists, as well as from two public ones: the *Centro di documentazione Mauro Rostagno* (housed within the *Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino*) and the *Archivio delle Donne* (at the Civic Library of Rovereto). In addition to these sources, I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with former activists; these covered almost all the groups for which I had found archival records (around fifteen, spanning the period 1969–1982, across the entire provincial territory). I thus chose to reconstruct events by integrating

1 The research, conducted between 2016 and 2019, was carried out entirely by the author.

documentary sources with the activists' retrospective accounts, thereby weaving together history and memory, written and oral sources, »in a dialectic in which the object of study becomes subject – or rather, subjectivity« (Biagini 2019, pp. 11–12, my translation). The process of excavating memory, in turn, has inevitably undergone stratification over time; this has generated testimonies that are profoundly rich, yet rendered complex by crossing multiple historical and biographical thresholds (for instance, before and after 1968, before and after feminism, before and after the end of the period of mass mobilizations).

The essay focuses on three distinct phases of the local feminist movement, which illustrate key aspects of its trajectory. First, the years 1966–1969 are a necessary premise that laid the groundwork for subsequent developments; this period marks the height of the student movement in Trentino. These were three intense years of mobilization, which I will revisit from the perspective of the young women who participated enthusiastically, while also facing profound contradictions stemming from the persistence of gender roles and hierarchies. The second phase (1969–1971) represents the true emergence of feminism as a proper social movement. The contradictions that had developed during women's participation in the broader movement came to the fore, leading to the formation of a distinct feminist political subject. The third phase (1972–1977) was one of consolidation and expansion. As in the rest of Italy, the women's movement in Trentino grew rapidly, with the proliferation of collectives, groups, and political experiences. These initiatives often – though not exclusively – focused on sexual and reproductive health and thus reflected a politics that was deeply rooted in the body.

The Girls of '68? Between Belonging and Contradictions

To retrace the origins of feminism in Trentino, we must begin with the immediately preceding period. In this silent yet crucial phase, 1966 saw the first occupation of the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze Sociali*, which would become the Faculty of Sociology in June 1966 after the legal recognition of the degree, approved by the Italian parliament. This period ended in 1969, when the first feminist group was founded. All of the founders had previously engaged, to varying degrees, in activism within the student movement – an experience that would prove fundamental in shaping their later feminist trajectory.

Whether from Trentino or other regions, and coming from diverse social backgrounds – mostly petite bourgeoisie, some affluent, and a few working-class – these female students at the newly established *Istituto* shared a transformative experience: freedom. In the rigid culture of social control that characterized Italy at the time (Bellè 2021), the opportunity to move to another city, pursue higher education, and

achieve financial independence through the *presalario* (the scholarship system in place at the time) was a galvanizing experience.

This whirlwind discovery of themselves and the world was manifested in multiple dimensions: academic life, work (at least for those from working-class or petite bourgeoisie backgrounds), and the intense relationships formed within the university (Socrate 2013, 2018; Bravo 2008). Regarding this initial phase of self-discovery within the a collective dimension, one particularly significant theme that emerged from the interviews was peer discussion about sexuality:

> »Many of us who would later become part of the feminist movement were all living in the dormitory – we arrived together. Then a girl from Turin came and said, »I went home and discovered that my younger sister doesn't even know what a uterus is.« So, she had bought this book – there was hardly anything available on sex – called *The Modern Marriage*. It was written by a Dutch author and was quite explicit. That's how we started doing collective readings in the nuns' dormitory rooms! […] I don't know, there were about ten of us, perched on the beds, engaging in these collective self-education readings.«
> (Sociology student and feminist activist)

To fully grasp the radical nature of this act of speaking out, one must consider the historical context (Piccone Stella 1993; Giachetti 2015). Italy at the time was a country where a *matrimonio riparatore* (a marriage meant to »compensate« the father of a raped woman) was still legally accepted, along with its corollary, the honour killing [*delitto d'onore*]. Family law upheld the authority of the husband; sexual violence was classified as an offence against public morality rather than a penal crime against the person;[2] and divorce had yet to be legalized.[3] Women were dying from unsafe, clandestine abortions, while contraception was criminalized under Article 553 of the Penal Code (the so-called Rocco Code of 1930), and was listed among the »crimes against the health and integrity of the race«.[4]

Against such an overwhelming system of institutional, legal, and social control, the simple act of openly discussing the body and sexuality in a group was profoundly significant. The power of these conversations lay primarily in the process of mutual

2 It would only become a crime against the person only in 1996, with Law No. 66/1996, the last of the legislative advances that had remained unresolved from that phase of political and legal progress.

3 It became law in 1970 (Law No. 898/1970).

4 Article 553, repealed in 1971, stated: »Anyone who publicly incites practices against procreation or propagates in favor of such practices shall be punished with imprisonment for up to one year or with a fine of up to four hundred thousand lire. These penalties shall be applied concurrently if the act is committed for profit«. Before its legalization, the birth control pill was sold illegally and its packaging listed therapeutic indications other than contraception (such as menstrual and intermenstrual dysmenorrhea).

exchange, which in turn triggered a process of subjectivation that was both individual and collective. This dynamic proved to be intensely generative, as it was deeply rooted in the personal experiences of each participant.

Another major element in the individual and collective subjectivation process of these young women was political participation in the mobilizations. As previously mentioned, Trento came to play an unexpected and radical role in Italy's »long '68« (Boato 2018), due to the establishment of the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze Sociali* – a project advocated by the progressive Christian Democrat Bruno Kessler. In Kessler's vision, the foundation of a modern and experimental university would stimulate a territory that was still poor, isolated and marginal, compared to the broader processes of modernization and post-war economic growth occurring elsewhere (Agostini et al. 2014). Furthermore, Kessler established that access to the Institute would be open to students holding diplomas beyond those from traditional scientific and classical high schools; this boldly defied the rigid Italian university admission system of the time (Bellè 2021).

This decision, combined with the highly experimental nature of the discipline itself – then still marginal within the Italian academic landscape – led the Institute to attract a diverse student body in terms of social class, and one that was also highly motivated both intellectually and socially (sociology being an *engagé* discipline). These factors contributed to giving Trento's student movement its radical, communitarian, and creative character (the sense of a continuous happening), while also endowing it with an intellectually avant-gardist dimension. This, in turn, made the Faculty of Sociology pivotal in both Italian and European mobilizations; it also fostered particularly close, communitarian relationship among students, with an especially egalitarian character also in terms of gender codes (Passerini 1991).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the student mobilization in Trento began before 1968. The first occupation, lasting 18 days, started on 24 January 1966; it was aimed at pressing Parliament to approve the sociology degree title – an arduous process that would ultimately reach a positive conclusion in June of the same year. This occupation, the first of its kind in Italy, was followed by two others. The second, in October 1966, was driven by tensions between the Institute's direction and the student movement, regarding curriculum planning and the scientific direction of the newly established Faculty. The third and longest occupation – also the longest in Italy – took place from 31 January to 7 April 1968. On this occasion, the movement transitioned from a quasi-syndicalist horizon to an explicitly political one. It was in this context that the slogan »student power« (*potere studentesco*) made its first appearance in the movement's documents; this marked the protest's new strategic direction also at the national level (Movimento Studentesco 1968).

In line with the historical literature, which describes 1968 as a foundational experience for the identity and biographical trajectory of those who participated (Passerini 1988; Bravo 2008; Flores/Gozzini 2018; Socrate 2018; Bellè 2021), the

women interviewed during the research also confirm the importance of this phase. Partly a permanent assembly, partly a sort of moveable feast, and partly the intellectual vanguard of the entire Italian movement (Boato 2018), the 1968 experience in Trentino is remembered by the interviewees as a decisive biographical and political experience, yet not without conflicts and contradictions.

One initial line of fracture relates to the gendered division of political labour, which, in spite of the communitarian and anti-authoritarian character of students' mobilization of that phase, still saw women relegated to auxiliary, behind-the-scenes roles:

> »It was important to recognize one simple thing: all the work was on our shoulders. Even during the occupations, it was us who provided the food; there was a lot of practical work done by women. And then, we were silenced, we had no voice.«
> (Sociology student and feminist activist)

In addition to the internal distribution of tasks according to a traditional, stereotypical gender order (Socrate 2013), a particularly important aspect in the construction of internal hierarchies involved the main arena of political debate: namely, the assembly.

> »I participated in the assemblies. I was there, sitting, but I realized that something wasn't right: »How come? I didn't come here to be a support for the men! I came here to make a different thing! Why isn't this working? Why aren't the women speaking?« They didn't speak, they didn't decide anything.«
> (Sociology student and feminist activist)

The issue that recurs most frequently in the interviews is the actual right to speak in public. This act carries strong symbolic and historical significance, especially when considering the patriarchal foundations of Western democratic systems (Boccia 2002), as well as the concealment of the sexual contract and the dichotomy between the public and private spheres (Pateman 1988). The public space – symbolic and, to use Goffman's (1959) term, dramaturgical – of the assembly underscores internal hierarchies even among men; this, cements the group of the »dominants« (that is, the leaders and their inner circle), and with them, a specific type of hegemonic masculinity (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005).

It is precisely the construction of the charismatic and erotic body of the leader that becomes an additional point of fracture:

> »We certainly weren't the »darling girls« of the movement, and we didn't even aspire to be, but we realized that the leaders were valued more for how many women they took to bed, and that the women the leaders slept with were viewed in a certain way by the others, and so on. So, what was supposed to be the sexual revolu-

> tion, for me, had some things that didn't quite add up.«
> (Sociology student and feminist activist)

The interviewee stresses, in line with similar recounts collected among the feminist activists, the highly contradictory issue of »free love« and its misunderstood meanings. Almost all the testimonies describe the entanglements between eros and power as being extremely problematic within the movement, in both personal and political terms. The disappointment and frustration over the gap between libertarian proclamations and actual relational practices are inevitable. This gap is particularly measured through intimate relationships with the »comrades«, which challenge the still-solid boundary between the public and private spheres. It is precisely this boundary – theoretical, political, and emotional – that would be soon questioned by these »girls of '68«; thus laying the groundwork for another revolution: the feminist revolution.

Towards Another Revolution: The Birth of Feminism in Trentino (1969–1971)

We will now turn to the analysis of the second political moment of the local movement; this is the truly foundational one, where latent tensions finally found collective expression and political form. The history of this second phase began in 1969, when a study group was formed, consisting of four women – Luisa Abbà, Gabriella Ferri, Elena Medi, Silvia Motta – and one man, Piergiorgio Lazzaretto. The group, which shared an apartment in Trento's historic centre, worked together on a thesis focused on the analysis of the oppression of women. The thesis would be discussed in 1971 and published the following year, under the title *La coscienza di sfruttata* [The Consciousness of the Exploited] – and it soon became one of the reference texts of the Italian movement.

The story of the group embodies and hybridizes several paradigmatic traits of that season. From 1968, it involved the triumph of the collective over the individual, with the fusion of various dimensions of life (the common housing and collective living, friendship, the overlap of intellectual and political work) (Socrate 2013, 2018). The group also drew from the first feminist reflections from the United States, which reached Trento thanks to Giovanni Arrighi, a university professor of economics, who shared with the group some of the early documents produced in Berkeley (Bellè 2023).[5] Last but not least, in this political experience, we find a characteristic element of the Trentino 1968 movement: the strong connection

5 In particular, the interviewees mention *Notes from the Second Year*, a collection of writings by women published in New York in 1970. This was part of an annual publication, with the first issue released in 1968 under the title *Notes from the First Year*, bringing together diverse per-

between intellectual reflection, academic study, and political work, which made this local mobilization one of the most intellectually advanced in Italy (Boato 2018; Bellè 2021).

The meetings of this first, small group soon became an opportunity for broader gatherings, as a weekly appointment with an increasing number of women participating. Initially, these were students, but soon after, the first local women who were not attending university joined as well. Piergiorgio Lazzaretto, the only man, eventually left the group. His departure marked the choice of separatism, which occurred in a non-conflictual manner. Here, an interesting but often underexplored aspect of the early days of Italian feminism emerges: namely, the presence – albeit as a minority – of men who contributed to the starting phase (participation was also mixed in Demau, the pioneer group founded in 1965 in Milan) (Passerini 1991).

> »One would listen to what the other was saying and then speak about her own experiences. It was about sharing and bringing things out – it was an entire phase of communal exchange: bringing one's experiences and struggles into that space. The very function of speech, the act of speaking and giving voice to silenced things that boosted your desires and made you imagine new forms of living.«
> (Sociology student and activist from *Il Cerchio Spezzato*)

The group was among the first in Italy to adopt the method then referred to in North American terms as »consciousness raising«. This was an entirely experimental practice, which interviewees still describe today, fifty years later, as a fundamental process of both collective and individual transformation. Through the sharing of personal experiences, all the defining features of second-wave feminism were already present: the personal was claimed as a political issue, rooted in a political praxis that was embodied in lived experience (Bertilotti/Scattigno 2005).

> »Today, we talk about *autocoscienza* [consciousness raising], but back then it wasn't structured. The issue was: […] we are all defined by someone else, so who are we really? We had studied the men who defined us, we had studied texts in philosophy, history, and literature, but we, personally, today – how do we define ourselves? What are the issues at stake? And so, we could only start from ourselves, as it was later said. The process began with an analysis filtered through one's own lived experience, but it was shared in a way that allowed others to engage with it.«
> (Sociology student and activist from *Il Cerchio Spezzato*)

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spectives within the American feminist movement. This approach later inspired the Italian feminist review *Sottosopra* and had a significant influence on the European context.

The group adopted a name, *Il Cerchio Spezzato* (»the broken circle«) and also designed its own symbol, as a graphic representation of its name: a fist breaking the circle of the biological symbol of femininity.

Another decisive step, not only locally but also for the broader history of Italian feminism, was the drafting of the group's political manifesto, titled *Non c'è rivoluzione senza la liberazione della donna* [There is No Revolution Without Women's Liberation].[6] Written and mimeographed in 1970, roughly a year after the first meetings, the document consolidated the practices and ideas developed throughout that first year. The text integrates the Marxist critique of capitalism – shaped within the student movement – with a specific analysis of women's oppression.

The political language of the New Left strongly resonates throughout the manifesto, thus reflecting the broader national context (Stelliferi 2018). Nonetheless, the document primarily articulates a sharp critique of the »common parameters of oppression that women endure even within the student left, concealed beneath a formal equality that merely identifies with the male role« (my translation).

In the document, the initial hopes placed in the movement are explicitly criticized:

> »We had deluded ourselves into believing that the political group, the act of militancy, could serve as a means to end yet another and specific form of discrimination within capitalist society: the oppression of men over women. […] This illusion was refuted by political practice and experience. […] Political workgroups have repeatedly confirmed our systematic subordination: we are ›the woman of such-and-such a comrade‹, the ones whose voices will never be recognized, so constrained that we come to genuinely believe ourselves to be inferior. The analysis of assemblies has led us to see an elite of leaders, a series of intermediate male cadres, and an amorphous mass composed of the remaining men and all the women.«[7]
> (Political manifesto *Non c'è rivoluzione senza la liberazione della donna*, my translation)

A feminist political subject is born, emerging from the recognition of oneself as a woman – not as inferior, but as exploited. The conclusion is resolute and foreshadows what is to come:

6 Trento, *Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino*, Archivio Movimento Studentesco, Elena Medi collection, file 1.. The complete version of the document can be found in Spagnoletti, 1972.

7 Trento, Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino, Archive of the Students Movement, Elena Medi Collection, file 1.

»We will decide for ourselves the political positions and practical actions to take. We will develop the theory and carry out the practice. We will determine the measures, tools, and programmes necessary for our liberation.«
(Political manifesto *Non c'è rivoluzione senza la liberazione della donna*, my translation)

Consolidation and Expansion, 1972–1977

The Zorzi Case: A Forgotten Story

The expansive phase of feminism in Trentino took its cue from the end of the *Cerchio Spezzato* experience, while inheriting its legacy. Reconstructing the final phase of the group's life is difficult: it seems to have dissolved after 1971, mainly due to the departure of several activists who had graduated, and the exhaustion of the group's internal momentum; however, there is no certain date of dissolution.

The formation that emerged immediately after is the *Collettivo Femminista Trento* [Feminist Collective of Trento]. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the activists of this group, so I did not gather oral testimonies in this regard. From the available documentary evidence, it appears that the group was active from around 1971 to 1974, and was mainly composed of university students, some of whom had already been part of the *Cerchio Spezzato* experience. The discovered documents testify to the Collective's strong involvement in the so-called Zorzi case, which represents another significant yet forgotten chapter of feminism – not only locally, but also at the Italian and European levels.

Trento was the stage for Italy's largest collective trial for abortion. This started in November 1972, indeed when a young woman from a small town in a Trentino valley was urgently hospitalized in Trento. She was later transferred to Vienna, where she died from septicaemia, uterine perforation, and peritonitis. The doctor Renzo Zorzi, a surgeon and gynaecologist, was investigated in connection with her death. In one of the city's main streets, Dr Zorzi had a well-equipped practice with a surgical room, X-ray room, and three beds for patient recovery. The cost of an abortion, performed through dilation and curettage, was high, at around 200,000 lire (approximately 1,200-1,500 euros today).

Within two years, multiple complaints and arrest warrants were issued, and Zorzi was imprisoned in 1973. More than 600 medical records were seized from his office. The judiciary indicted 263 women alongside the doctor: as with contraception, abortion was then punished under the already mentioned Rocco Code, classified as a crime against public health and the integrity of the lineage. The news quickly became a national story, appearing in *Paese Sera* – a newspaper close to the

left wing, which deplored the violation of professional secrecy caused by the seizure of the medical records, and read an anti-divorce plot in the judiciary's investigation. At that time, the conservative front, mainly composed of the Christian Democracy party and the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, was consolidating. This front would later promote the referendum to repeal the divorce law, which took place in May 1974.

Statements in support of the women involved came from many left-wing groups, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, as well as from individuals and collectives. The *Movimento per la Liberazione della Donna* [Women's Liberation Movement] in Rome, close to the Radical Party, offered free legal assistance to the accused. The Feminist Collective of Trento highlighted another suspicious »coincidence« in the timing of the investigation: the case erupted just as the bill proposal to legalize abortion, introduced by the Socialist Party (on 11 February 1973, with Loris Fortuna as the primary signatory), was presented in Parliament.

The local movement found itself grappling with a genuine judicial, political, and media bombshell. The Collective committed fully to the case, first and foremost making its political stance clear: »The slogan with which we faced this situation is no to this and every trial for abortion« reads the mimeographed document, dated November 1974, titled *La posizione del Collettivo Femminista di Trento sul caso Zorzi* (»The Position of the Feminist Collective of Trento on the Zorzi Case«).[8]

The Trento case, unprecedented in terms of the number of women involved, unfolded in a highly charged legal atmosphere. Two abortion trials had sparked public debate in both France and Italy just prior to this: the one held in Bobigny, a suburb of Paris, in 1972, against Marie-Claire Chevalier, a minor who had been raped; and in Padua in 1973, against Gigliola Pierobon, also a minor at the time of the events (1967), who was convicted with the sentence commuted to »judicial pardon« (she was thus judged guilty nonetheless). These trials were preceded and followed by the practice of self-reporting, which was becoming increasingly widespread: in France, on 5 April 1971, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published the *Manifeste des 343* [Manifesto of the 343], in which 343 prominent French women declared they had undergone an abortion (Perini 2014). Soon after, the German weekly *Stern* would feature a similar declaration, and many self-reports, were recorded in Italy as well.

However, the activists of the Trento Collective did not choose this path; instead, they emphasized the issue of the trial as further institutional violence, and therefore favoured a political strategy based primarily on identification with the accused women, and on the contextual reading. These women, in most cases, were not particularly politicized and often came from small towns. Despite the sociopolitical fer-

8 Trento, *Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino,* Archive of the Students Movement, Gabriella Moavero Collection, file 2.

ment, local society remained deeply influenced by Catholic conservatism and the social control of »deviant« behaviour, especially in small communities.

The group's position, consistent with the feminist approach, was one of solidarity and sisterhood towards the women involved. A phone number was provided to offer advice and contacts with a defence committee, which would assist about thirty of the women under investigation. The group's commitment to the issue culminated in the organization of a national protest march against the trial and for the right to abortion, held in Trento on 15 February 1975. Thousands of women from all over Italy participated in the march.

The legal process would then experience delays and would never reach its conclusion, due to the changing political and judicial landscape, as in the meantime the political perspective of legalization became more consolidated. This long and difficult process began in 1973 with the first proposed law, and culminated in the approval of Law No. 194 of 1978; this resulted from a compromise between libertarian positions, focused on decriminalization (radicals, socialists, and the feminist movement), and more conservative positions (the Italian Communist Party and the progressive wing of the Christian Democracy Party) (Gissi/Stelliferi 2023).

Despite its unresolved conclusion, the Zorzi case remains one of the most extraordinary yet largely forgotten chapters in the history of the local, as well as the Italian, feminist movement, during that phase of intense mobilization for the right to self-determination that led to the legalization of abortion. Thus, a story that placed Trento at the heart of national news and debate – much like the events of 1968 – seems to have faded from public memory, even within the local context.

The Body as a Political Issue: Self-Organization and Self-Help

> »It was the hardest thing for me, to accompany women to have an abortion: taking them to London, to Reggio Emilia, to Bologna. Through the AIED [Italian Association for Demographic Education],[9] through the entire network of women. We were in close contact with those from Bologna and Reggio Emilia. […] There were situations that were truly disastrous, even violent, or involving women in difficult economic conditions, or who were sick.«
> (Interview with an activist from the Basso Sarca Feminist Collective)

The issue of abortion was addressed not only through public demonstrations and campaigns, but also through the creation of self-organization networks aimed at ensuring that illegal abortion could be performed safely. Illegal abortions indeed exposed women to conditions of extreme vulnerability and blackmail: doctors who exploited desperation by charging high fees; procedures carried out in dangerously

unhygienic conditions; solitude; fear of being discovered; and the social sanction of a hostile and stigmatizing silence.

The feminist networks were organized specifically to counter this isolation, starting from a feminist approach: specifically, grounding political action in experience, and constructing a collective horizon of action from individual stories. As evidenced in the excerpt above, the first and most immediate type of response remained fairly informal. The commitment in this area was common to all groups of the time (and also involved women who were not directly engaged in feminist groups). In this case, the testimony comes from an activist of the Basso Sarca Feminist Collective (an area in the southern part of the Trentino), an important and very dynamic feminist group founded in 1973, which remained active for about ten years. These networks, while revolving around specific groups, did not exactly align with them, nor with a physical location. They offered support, provided information, connected women with doctors, accompanied them to procedures, and sometimes even cared for them post-intervention, by making private homes available for recovery.

There was also a second type of response, intertwined with the previous one but with specific and more structured features; this gave rise to innovative and experimental experiences that could be defined as self-managed counselling centres (*consultori*). These were self-organized and self-financed entities, where, on one hand, gynaecological visits, information on sexual health and contraception, and support for abortion were guaranteed; and on the other hand, counter-information, debate, and political action were organized.

> »We thought about organizing it along the lines of what the AIED centres were like. In Bolzano, there was one that worked very well … and some of the women who later frequented the Medical Centre had gone to Bolzano and talked about it. There were two doctors who had made themselves available … One was particularly focused on what would now be called »alternative medicine«, you know, homeopathy etc. … and one who later became a gynaecologist at the local health authority, he was very young, just graduated. Then there were public initiatives, we participated, there were debates […].«
> (Interview with an activist from the Medical-Social Information Centre of Rovereto)

> »In '76, I got pregnant and had an abortion. I found this doctor in Veneto and had an abortion, in a … inhuman way. And that's when I understood that things shouldn't be like this. I talked about it with some friends, and we decided there had to be an organization. […] We took this apartment, kept it open every day, and women started coming who needed to have an abortion. […] When word spread that we were doing this, they came from all over the world.«

(Interview with an activist from the Women's Counter-Information Centre of Trento)

The first experience developed in Trentino was the »Medical-Social Information Centre of Rovereto« (*Centro di informazione medico-sociale*); this was established in 1974 by feminist activists and women active in the New Left, particularly from Lotta continua, and represents an interesting hybridization between the extra-parliamentary left and the women's movement. The medical centre was based in a rented apartment and had a varied political life: political assemblies were held on feminist issues, self-consciousness practices were carried out, two gynaecologists were regularly present, and public actions were organized concerning sexual and reproductive health and the right to abortion. The experience came to an end around 1978, mainly due to difficulties in management and covering expenses. Many of the group members would continue to be active in the feminist movement, New Left, and trade unions.

Another important experience is that of the »Women's Counter-Information Centre« of Trento (*Centro di controinformazione donna*). Established in late 1976 by a small group of friends, it initially occupied an apartment near the city centre. Its activities primarily focused on the issue of abortion, both in terms of public advocacy and providing help and support to women. However, in the final period before dissolution, the Centre became significantly involved in other issues. One of these was the Tesino trial, a violent case of gang rape that occurred in October 1978: nine men kidnapped and held a twenty-four-year-old woman with mental disabilities for four days. The incident took place in a mountain village, and due to the small scale of the community, the trial sparked a heated public debate, which caused strong polarization within the local civil society. During this time, the Centre became a legal entity; it organized itself as an association to file as a civil party in the trial and made significant efforts to bring the feminist voice into public discourse and media coverage. This was not only a political commitment but also a legal and civic one, with tangible consequences: some activists, especially those who were publicly involved, faced reprisals, including anonymous phone threats from individuals sympathetic to the perpetrators. This reaction illustrates the difficult political and cultural climate, through shedding light on the complexity of the sociopolitical changes of the 1970s and their non-linear nature.

Concluding Remarks: A Polycentric Network

Our journey into Trentino's feminism ends here, for reasons of space and narrative coherence. We have observed the unfolding of three distinct phases: the first, which preceded and enabled the creation of an initial feminist political subjectiv-

ity (1966–1968), incorporated the mobilization of '68 and the first reflections of the working group for the thesis. Next, we explored the nascent phase (1969–1971), with the formation of the first feminist collective, *Il Cerchio Spezzato*. Finally, we examined the third phase, that of consolidation and expansion (1972–1977), which primarily focused on issues of sexual and reproductive health, as well as those of violence. However, it must be made clear that the local story certainly does not conclude in 1977. In the following years, another phase would emerge, related to political processes of (partial) institutionalization of some of the movement's demands. I refer to the legalization of abortion (Law No. 194/1978), as well as the establishment of family planning centres through the national framework law (Law No. 405/1975) and its subsequent provincial implementation (Provincial Law No. 405/1977). This marks the beginning of another story, that of a dual struggle. On one side were those who fought for the effective implementation of these laws (Bellè 2021; Barone 2023). Occupation of hospitals, investigations into the operation of family planning centres, legal actions – these are just some of the many initiatives the Trentino movement would engage in, with the aim of turning normative frameworks into enforceable rights. On the other side, as soon as the Italian legislative framework incorporated part of the feminists' demands, the so-called counter-mobilization began to organize. This was a front led by conservative Catholic associations and the political right, which aimed to enter family planning centres and empty »from the inside« Law 194 through conscientious objection (goals that, more than forty years later, can be considered largely achieved). Thus began a struggle that would see the feminist movement steadfastly engaged in defending spaces of freedom that had been arduously won.

Additionally, in this new phase, the development of so-called trade union feminism solidified; this marked the intersection of the women's movement with the labour world. One of the most innovative and least known pages of Italian feminism (Rossi-Doria 2009), it helped to transform the working conditions of women, as well as the trade union culture of Trentino and Italy.

In all these areas of activism, local feminism would be present and active; this led to the creation of a network that was broad – fifteen groups have been documented in archives that developed during the researched period (1966–1985) – and, most importantly, polycentric (for a detailed illustration, see Bellè 2021). In addition to the groups already mentioned throughout this discussion, others have been active in smaller towns in the province or in rural and suburban areas. These reflect a feminist network with strong interconnections, which was able to disrupt the hierarchy between centre and periphery, by inventing a political geography of its own.

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