

More Coffins than Cradles: Low Fertility in
Bologna, Italy

by

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Figure 1. Italian Regional Divisions and their Capitals. From Spencer Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to the Present*. Third ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 2004, 328.

Introduction

[È] nel 1973 che la popolazione del capoluogo emiliano ha toccata il massimo di 493.933 abitanti. L'anno successivo è iniziato un lungo periodo di declino, che è ancora in corso, e che ha portato Bologna a perdere un quinto dei suoi abitanti.

In 1973 the population of the capital of Emilia-Romagna reached its maximum level at 493,933 inhabitants. The following year, a long period of decline began. This decline is still occurring and has caused Bologna to lose one fifth of its inhabitants.

– Marzio Barbagli and Maurizio Pisati¹

Since the beginning of the last century, concerns about the changes in world demographics have gained strength, with two competing discourses emerging. The first warns of the dangers of overpopulation: there are more people in the world than ever before (an estimated 6,555,000,000 in 2006), and the population keeps growing.² If this trend continues, the world will soon run out of resources and fail to support all of its inhabitants. The second, seemingly contradictory claim warns of the extremely low fertility rates in most industrialized countries, where too few babies are born to maintain the population at a stable level. This second issue is the focus of my Thesis, in which I study the problem of low fertility in Bologna, the capital of Emilia-Romagna in the North of Italy.³ Bologna is known primarily as a university town (it is home to the University of Bologna, founded in 1088) and for its strong association with the Italian Communist Party. However, it is also notorious for its extremely low fertility rates and its rapidly aging population. As an exaggerated example of the demographic changes associated with low fertility, Bologna offers a unique case study for my research in this Thesis.

¹ Marzio Barbagli and Maurizio Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995), 12.

² Population Reference Bureau, "2006 World Population Data Sheet," (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2006), 5.

Key Concepts in the Study of Low Fertility

In this Thesis I focus on Bologna's Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which the Population Reference Bureau defines as "the average number of children that would be born alive to a woman (or group of women) during her lifetime if she were to pass through her childbearing years conforming to the age-specific fertility rates of a given year."⁴ Unlike the Birth Rate of a population, which is "the number of live births per 1,000 population in a given year," the TFR is not a measured statistic.⁵ Instead, it is a calculation based on the fertility trends of a given period and the number of women in their childbearing years (generally assumed to span either from 15 to 44 or from 15 to 49).⁶ While the TFR is more accurate than the birth rate for predicting population change and average family size, it is not fool-proof; women in the middle of their childbearing years, for example, may not follow the fertility patterns of the previous generation throughout their reproductive period. The Completed Fertility Rate (CFR), or "the number of children born per woman to a cohort of women by the end of their childbearing years," offers a much more accurate representation of the actual fertility behavior of a population; however it is only available for women who are no longer reproducing, i.e. those born before 1958.⁷ In addition to the TFR and the CFR, the last important term for my research is Replacement-Level Fertility, understood as "the level of fertility at which a couple has only enough children to replace

³ See Map (Figure 1) at the beginning of this Thesis.

⁴ Population Reference Bureau, "Glossary of Population Terms," (Population Reference Bureau, 2006). The Population Reference Bureau is a non-governmental organization that "informs people around the world about population, health, and the environment, and empowers them to use that information to advance the well-being of current and future generations," according to the mission statement available at <http://prb.org/About.aspx>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

themselves” usually defined as a TFR of approximately 2.1.⁸ The Replacement-Level TFR is higher than exactly one child for each parent, because it is adjusted to account for the children that do not reach adulthood. However, in “Low Fertility in Europe: A Report from the 1981 IUSSP Meeting,” Deirdre Wulf cautions that this replacement rate is only applicable to industrialized countries because “in countries of the developing world with high infant and child mortality rates, a TFR of 2.1 would be insufficient to ensure population replacement.”⁹

Typically, fertility rates correspond to the level of economic development of a country. In general, the more developed a country, the lower its fertility rate. The Population Reference Bureau has calculated the average fertility rates for every country in the world, and states that the global average TFR is 2.7.¹⁰ However, the average TFR of all “more developed” countries, which it defines according to the UN classification as “all of Europe and North America, plus Australia, Japan and New Zealand,” is only 1.6.¹¹ Finally, the average TFR of all other countries, which are classified as “less developed,” is 3.4.¹² With a TFR of just 1.3, Italy has one of the lowest fertility rates of all the “more developed” countries, and the fertility decline is even more pronounced in Bologna.¹³ In 1984 the noted demographer Athos Bellettini stated that “se infatti l’Italia costituisce attualmente un caso limite nel contesto europeo, specie per quanto riguarda i livelli della natalità, Bologna a sua volta rappresenta un caso limite nel quadro nazionale” [if in fact Italy presently

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Deirdre Wulf, “Low Fertility in Europe: A Report from the 1981 Iussp Meeting,” *International Family Planning Perspectives* 8, no. 2 (1982): 64.

¹⁰ Population Reference Bureau, “2006 World Population Data Sheet,” 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. This figure excludes China because of its strict policies designed to limit birth rates. When China is included, the average TFR for less-developed countries drops to 2.9.

constitutes an extreme case in the European context, particularly in regard to its birth rates, Bologna in turn represents an extreme case in the national context].¹⁴ He elaborates, stating that “negli anni più recenti la natalità nella popolazione bolognese rappresenta il minimo assoluto fra tutti i comuni italiani [in recent years the birth rate of the Bolognese population represents the absolute lowest of all the Italian municipalities].¹⁵ In fact, as Figure 2 demonstrates, Bologna’s fertility rate reached a

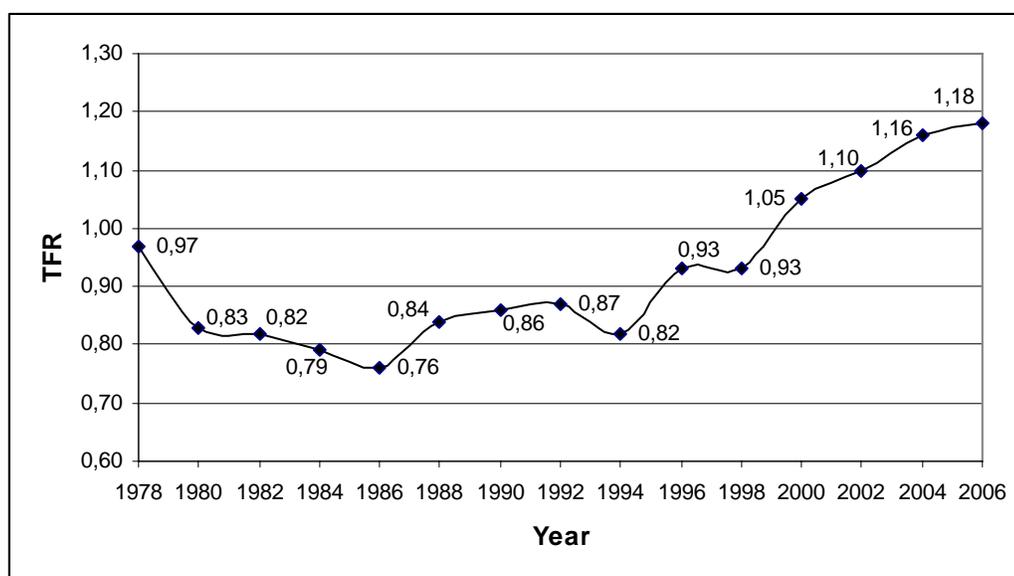


Figure 2: TFR, Bologna 1978-2006¹⁶

low point of 0.76 in 1986. Since that point, Bologna’s TFR has been steadily increasing, although at 1.18 in 2006 it is still far below replacement levels. This increase is most likely due to the high fertility rate of Bologna’s immigrant

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Athos Bellettini, *La città e i gruppi sociali: Bologna fra gli anni cinquanta e settanta*, ed. Franco Tassinari (Bologna: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria Editrice, 1984), 77. All translations in this Thesis are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Ibid., 77-79.

¹⁶ Statistics from 1978-1994 from Barbagli and Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna*, 199. Statistics from 1996-2006 from Comune of Bologna, “Donne a Bologna.” Comune of Bologna, http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/piancont/Genere/index_genere.html.

population. Although the TFR of immigrants in Bologna is not available, in 2005 672 of the 8,429 babies born in Bologna were born to immigrant parents, a full 8%. This is a considerable amount given the fact that only 14,311 of Bologna's 317,217 residents are immigrants (4.5%).¹⁷ Lacking the space for a complete analysis of immigration in Italy, I will briefly address its role on fertility rates in my conclusion.

The problems caused by low fertility rates are manifold. Changing demographic patterns put unequal stress on age-based social structures such as child care, the education system, the job market, and pension plans. This problem grows progressively more acute as the population ages; schools in some areas are closing because there are too few students enrolled, while facilities for the elderly are increasingly overburdened. The discrepancy between the number of workers contributing to the state pension plan and the large number of retirees receiving pension benefits also puts "strains on the financial basis of social security systems which, in turn, could lead to a breakdown in the social contract between the generations."¹⁸ In "Low Fertility and Liberal Democracy in Europe," C. Alison McIntosh succinctly lists three common fears relating to this demographic change: "many political elites fear that an aging society will lose its dynamism and sense of adventure, that it will lack young men to guard its frontiers, and that its empty spaces will fill with persons of alien extraction."¹⁹ Although other developed countries have very low fertility rates, Italy's population is aging extremely rapidly; as of 2006, 19% of its residents are age 65 or older. Only Germany matches this figure, and only

¹⁷ Commune of Bologna, "Donne a Bologna."

¹⁸ Wulf, "Low Fertility in Europe: A Report from the 1981 Iussp Meeting," 63.

¹⁹ C. Alison McIntosh, "Low Fertility and Liberal Democracy in Western Europe," *Population and Development Review* 7, no. 2 (1981): 182.

Monaco (22%) and Japan (20%) surpass it.²⁰ Once again, Bologna represents an extreme example of this trend. While demographic research predicts that the number of Europeans aged 60 or higher will surpass the number of Europeans under age 20 in 2010, Barbagli and Pisati note that “a Bologna esso è avvenuto già molti anni fa, esattamente nel 1977. In quell’anno, i residenti con almeno 60 anni superavano le 108 mila unità, mentre quelli sotto i venti erano 106.503” [in Bologna this already occurred many years ago, precisely in 1977. In that year, there were more than 108 thousand residents aged 60 and older, while there were only 106,503 residents under the age of twenty].²¹

Theorizing Fertility

Declining fertility rates have served as a focus for scholars and politicians since the late nineteenth century, and there have been many attempts to explain the processes that contribute to this demographic change. Susan Greenhalgh’s “Anthropology Theorizes Reproduction: Integrating Practice, Political Economic, and Feminist Perspectives” provides a valuable outline of the major theories of fertility decline. The first attempt to explain low fertility, she shows, was simply a branch of modernization theory. This classic demographic transition theory held that “broad forces of modernization such as urbanization and industrialization [...] altered the economics of childrearing, lowering desired family size” and leading directly to low fertility rates.²² After the European Fertility Project at Princeton University found no

²⁰ Population Reference Bureau, “2006 World Population Data Sheet,” 8-9.

²¹ Barbagli and Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna*, 24.

²² Susan Greenhalgh, “Anthropology Theorizes Reproduction: Integrating Practice, Political Economic, and Feminist Perspectives,” in *Situating Fertility: Anthropology and Demographic Inquiry*, ed. Susan Greenhalgh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

consistent correlation between the processes of modernization and the beginning of fertility decline, classic transition theory was largely abandoned and three main branches of theory appeared in its place.²³ First, John Knodel and Etienne van de Walle proposed the cultural or diffusion interpretation of fertility decline (1979), which purports that fertility change is strongly linked with ideas about birth control; as the use of and knowledge about contraception becomes more culturally acceptable, fertility rates will decline.²⁴ Second, Geoffrey McNicoll (1975) proposed that “the pattern of reproductive change is shaped by the institutional endowments each society has inherited from its past – the community structures, family systems, sex roles, and so forth,” and by the ongoing negotiation between individual actors and these institutions.²⁵ Third, Gary Becker and the Chicago School (1960s) viewed fertility as a branch of the economic theory of consumer choice. According to this model, individuals act in completely rational ways and “households decided on the optimal number of offspring given their costs, household income, and the household’s relative preferences for children and other goods.”²⁶ While these three branches of theory all made some mention of gender, Karen Mason proposed the first specifically gender-based theory in the 1980s, connecting “female status” with fertility. Mason believed that “among the most important aspects of women’s position for fertility [...] are women’s education and their position in the family and household. These affect

²³ Ibid., 6. Greenhalgh explains that this European Fertility Project began in 1963 and was a “massive two-decade-long endeavor [...] designed to test transition theory with historical data from roughly 700 provincial-level units throughout Europe.”

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵ Ibid., 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

women's autonomy from male control, economic dependency, and social status, which in turn influence child supply, child demand, and child cost."²⁷

All of these theories inform my Thesis. However, none of these theories is sufficient on its own. Greenhalgh critiques all of these theories for their "narrowness of scope and [the] lingering influence of the Eurocentric theory of modernization developed at mid-century."²⁸ In their place, she proposes that scholars pursue a "political-economic demography," explaining that this approach "directs attention to the embeddedness of community institutions shaping fertility in structures and processes operating at regional, national, and global levels, and to the historical roots of those macro-micro linkages."²⁹ Her approach incorporates aspects of each of these major theories to create an interdisciplinary approach to fertility change. Greenhalgh asserts that feminism is an important part of this political-economic demography, explaining that:

Gender analysis is central to reproductive research, and feminist approaches, which take gender as their organizing concept, occupy a special place in our analytic repertoire. By stressing women's agency in constructing their own reproductive outcomes, the complex and contradictory character of change in gender relations, and the pervasiveness of gender in all of social life, feminist approaches allow us to broaden the intellectual agenda beyond that offered by the conventional women's status approach to gender and fertility.³⁰

In this Thesis I will use Greenhalgh's suggestions to study Bologna, expanding on her work by using a case study to explore how various historical, social, economic, and gendered processes have shaped the particular context of Bologna's fertility decline.

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Ibid., 14.

My research on low fertility has been facilitated by the work of previous scholars. First, Paul Ginsborg's two books, the 2001 *Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001*, and the 1996 *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, provide a comprehensive social history of Italy since the end of the Second World War, with a particular focus on the role of the family in Italy. Victoria De Grazia's 1992 *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* explores the role of women in Italy during Fascism and is also very useful for establishing the historical context in Italy.

Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp compiled the first English-language anthology of Italian feminism entitled *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (1991). Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum published an extremely useful history of Italian feminism through the Wesleyan University Press entitled *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy* (1986). In many ways, her work precedes mine as an American study of feminist issues in Italy.

Marzio Barbagli, a professor at the University of Bologna, is a key figure in the study of the Italian family with numerous works on the subject. Two of these works have proven particularly useful for my study. Most importantly, the 1995 *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna [A report on the social situation in Bologna]*, published with Maurizio Pisati, provides an exhaustive analysis of various demographic trends in Bologna. In addition, the 1997 *Stato delle famiglie in Italia [The State of Families in Italy]* provides in-depth analyses of various aspects of the role and status of the Italian family. This book was co-edited by Chiara Saraceno, who has also published extensively about family politics in Italy

The first major study of low fertility in Italy was Massimo Livi-Bacci's *A History of Italian Fertility during the Last Two Centuries*, which was published in 1977. Livi-Bacci's quantitative analyses provide extensive statistics for various demographic trends in Italy. In addition, Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna has written about low fertility and the role of familism in Italy, both on his own with "The Banquet of Aeolus: A Familistic Interpretation of Italy's Lowest Low Fertility" (2001), and with collaborators in numerous articles.

Finally, two of Gosta Esping-Andersen's works, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) and *The Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999) provide extremely valuable information about welfare states. Franca Bimbi has published many works about gender and the Italian welfare state, of which the chapter "Gender, 'Gift Relationship,' and Welfare State Cultures in Italy" (1993) is most useful.

A Very Brief History of Italy

My project focuses primarily on modern-day Bologna. However, the current situation did not develop in a vacuum, but rather is the result of a series of historical processes that have shaped people's lives. Here, I will simply give a brief outline of the history of Italy since Unification. In the following chapters I will elaborate further on this history to highlight the events that have most impacted fertility.

Prior to Unification on March 17, 1861, the Italian peninsula was controlled by a number of small kingdoms, each marked by different cultural traditions and languages. During this period, Bologna was part of the Papal States under the direct control of the Catholic Church in Rome. After the official Unification of Italy many

of these cultural divisions remained, most notably the linguistic differences between regions and in the strong divide between the North and the South of the country. The Italians worked to overcome these problems through the beginning of World War I in 1914. Italy suffered heavy losses during the First World War, and the popular resentment toward the war provided fertile ground for the revolutionary Fascist party to gain control of the country.³¹

Under Benito Mussolini, the Fascists controlled Italy from 1922-1943. The Fascist period is particularly important for my project for two main reasons. First, the Fascist government enacted a series of pronatalist policies in an attempt to increase Italy's military strength. These policies outlawed abortion and contraception and codified the normative gender hierarchies already present in Italian society. Second, even after the fall of Fascism many of its laws remained in effect, governing the Italian population through the 1970s. Third, the Fascist period provides many examples of the ways in which citizens can resist the dictates of the State. Bologna was a hotbed of the organized Resistance during this period. In *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* Luisa Passerini explains that this opposition to the Fascists was also manifested in women's refusal to obey the pronatalist policies.³² This type of resistance was also particularly prevalent in Emilia-Romagna; Victoria De Grazia explains that by 1928, "in Bologna, the first

³¹ Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to the Present*, 224.

³² Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). In particular, see pages 150-182 for a discussion of popular forms of resistance to pronatalist policies.

city to be rebuked by Mussolini [for its extremely low fertility rates], there were ‘more coffins than cradles.’”³³

Following World War II the Italians elected an Assembly to draft a new Constitution, which took effect on January 1, 1948.³⁴ The country struggled to rebuild after the war, and many people emigrated to the United States and Northern Europe. However, Paul Ginsborg explains that “the years 1958-1963 saw the beginning of a social revolution which was to turn the world [...] upside down. In less than two decades Italy ceased to be a peasant country and became one of the major industrial nations of the West.”³⁵ This period was characterized by massive internal migration, and the Italian state struggled to provide adequate social services to the population. As the showcase city of the Italian Communist Party, Bologna benefited from a series of governmental reforms and quickly became a leader in providing social services to its citizens.

In 1968, “a most extraordinary period of social ferment, the high season of collective action in the history of the Republic,” unrest swept the nation. This turmoil started with the revolt of students in the universities and spread first into the factories, and then into society as a whole.³⁶ Like Fascism, this period represented an exaggeration of the prevalent trends in Italian society the culmination of social unrest that had been growing since the end of World War II. This is another extremely important historical period for my research because Second Wave Feminism developed out of the student and labor movements at this time. Many feminists

³³ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 46.

³⁴ Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to the Present*, 307.

³⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: The Penguin Group, 1996), 212.

worked to overturn the conservative laws regarding abortion, the structure of the family, and women's participation in the paid workforce. From the very beginning, groups such as Demau in Milan, Rivolta Femminile [Feminine Revolt] in Rome, and Lotta Femminista [Feminist Fight] in Padua were extremely politicized. Through protests and consciousness-raising sessions these groups addressed various issues relating to women's rights. In Bologna, an association of women named Orlando, after the book by Virginia Woolf, created a library and archive devoted to women's issues that is still active. A number of non-feminist women's groups also formed during this time, many of which were affiliated with the Catholic Church or the Christian Democratic Party. However, in this Thesis I focus only on the Italian groups that identified themselves as feminists, as these were the groups that most actively contested the cultural norms that placed women in a subordinate position to men.

Finally, Italy's more recent history has been marked by the negotiation of its role with the European Union. Ginsborg suggests that:

The positive values of the Union – its firm commitment to democracy and economic stability, its encouragement of competition within clearly defined rules, its single market, its insistence on certain standards of equal opportunity and environmental protection, its social programme and regional funds – all these wrought slow but inexorable change upon its largest southern member. Italy constrained by Europe was Italy improved.³⁷

Membership in the European Union has pushed Italy to modernize some of its social policies, particularly those that regard women's participation in the paid workforce.

³⁶ Ibid., 298.

My Project

In this Thesis I study low fertility in Bologna from an interdisciplinary perspective, using historical, sociological, and economic perspectives to comprehensively explore this topic. While cultural expressions such as films, novels, and plays can provide insight into the motivations guiding behavior, these articulations are not my focus. Greater time and space would, perhaps, allow for a fuller exploration of these expressions and provide a greater understanding of Italian's views towards this fertility decline. However, I will draw extensively from feminist scholarship, which I believe is particularly informative to a study of demographic change. Greenhalgh clearly explains that:

Reproduction is a deeply gendered process. Physiologically, only women can give birth, but men are required to produce the life force. Socially, women are usually assigned the 'reproductive work' of raising the next generation. As a result of these biological and social facts, reproduction has come to be enwrapped in gender relations, relations of difference and inequality in beliefs, resources and power.³⁸

I am interested in how these gendered processes manifest themselves in the particular context of Bologna, and how they contribute to the fertility decline there, throughout Italy, and throughout Europe.

In this Thesis I focus primarily on middle-class, native Italian women, most of whom have received a university education. I believe that these women are most clearly affected by the contradictions inherent in Italian society, particularly in regard to their participation in the workforce. In addition, higher educated women represent an exaggeration of many of the demographic trends that I examine in this paper.

³⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001* (London: The Penguin Press, 2001), xii.

They marry later, divorce more frequently, and have fewer children than their counterparts in other social classes.³⁹

My Thesis is organized in three chapters, conceptualized by the three spaces where fertility trends are most clearly manifested: the body, the home, and the workplace. In Chapter One, which focuses on women's bodies, I investigate the means by which Italian women are literally able to control their fertility, including contraception, abortion and Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). In particular, I explore the changes in the laws that regulate reproductive control, and attempt to understand if the growing acceptance and availability of modern Birth Control has affected this fertility decline. In Chapter Two, I focus on the role of the family within the home. I begin with adoption, divorce, and family law in Italy, and I explore the demographic changes related to changing marriage patterns such as the rising age at marriage. I also study the continued role of familism in Italy, which has profound repercussions for fertility behavior because it influences the costs and benefits of children and because it contributes to later marriage. Finally, in Chapter Three I examine how women's workplace participation interacts with the trends described in the first two chapters. I begin with a history of feminism in the workplace, particularly women's position within the trade unions. I then study maternity and parental leave policies and the childcare policies of the Italian welfare state.

In the end, I conclude that Bologna's extremely low fertility is caused by a number of interrelated factors. Instead, they are the result of a continual, dynamic renegotiation of various social trends that are evident in each of these three spaces.

³⁸ Greenhalgh, "Anthropology Theorizes Reproduction," 14.

³⁹ Marzio Barbagli, Maria Castiglioni, and Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, *Fare famiglia in Italia: un secolo di cambiamenti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 259-61.

While there is no single, clear solution to the problem, I offer some suggestions for further research that may shed light on some possible responses and provide an even fuller understanding of the issue.

My work in this Thesis has been profoundly influenced by my particular position as an American student of both feminism and Italian studies. On a practical level, my ability to read and speak Italian has allowed me to access material that is not available in English. More importantly, my training in feminist theory has shaped the ways in which I approach this topic. I begin with the basic assumption that men and women should have equal power in all spheres of society. I also come to this project with a distinctly postmodern viewpoint, informed by the idea that identities, social positions, and power are fluid, intersecting, and constantly shifting. However, throughout this project I am careful not to assume these same beliefs on the part of my Italian subjects. Instead, I attempt to understand the views of a small subset of these women by examining the work of the Italian feminists who have theorized about the body, the family, and the workplace.

Chapter One: The Body

Il rapporto sessuale è stato tradizionalmente concepito per la donna in funzione esclusiva della maternità [...] Ora, nel momento in cui la donna prende coscienza di sé come persona, essa avanza l'esigenza di distinguere il diritto alla sessualità dal diritto alla maternità, pur rivendicandoli entrambi.

The sexual relationship for women has traditionally been conceived exclusively in terms of maternity [...] Now, in the moment in which the woman becomes aware of herself as a person, she continues to distinguish the right to sexuality from the right to maternity, even reclaiming both of them.

- The women of UDI¹

Middle-class women in Italy have not always exercised legal and social control over their own bodies. Women's sexuality was particularly restricted, and sexual relationships were only allowed within marriage for the purpose of reproduction. A woman's body was considered the property of her husband or other male relatives. Laws that codified men's power over women's bodies remained on the books through the early 1980s. For example, the law provided harsher sentences for adulterous women than for their male counterparts and allowed for reparatory marriages in which a man is not punished for a rape if he marries his victim. In addition, "crimes of honor," in which men commit murder to revenge the sexual violation of their wives, daughters, or sisters, enforced the idea that a woman's sexuality belonged to her male relatives. However, in the 1970s women began to agitate for greater control of their own bodies, primarily in the form of greater control over their own reproductive capacities. In this chapter, I examine the prenatal methods that are used for family planning, including contraception, abortion, and

¹ Fausta Cecchini et al., eds., *Sesso amaro: trentamila donne rispondono su maternità sessualità aborto* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1977), 163.

Assisted Reproductive Technology.² Many of these techniques give women both literal and symbolic control over their own reproductive capabilities.

Diffusion Theory suggests that there is a direct correlation between the prevalence of birth control and low fertility, and on a practical level the low fertility rates in Italy would not be possible if people did not have some way to control the number and spacing of their children. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the historical context of contraception and abortion in Italy. Both the Catholic Church and the policies of the Fascist State (1922-1943) have influenced the availability and use of birth control in Italy, through the Church's official teachings against birth control and the Fascist State's strong pronatalist campaigns in the 1930s. However, Italians have not always heeded these official policies, and in fact began to limit the size of their families as early as the mid-1800s. The contradictory situation of intense propaganda against the use of contraception, on one hand, and the widespread use of such methods, on the other, created a fertile environment for a feminist critique of sex and reproduction in the 1970s, leading to the legalization of abortion in 1978. However, the debates about reproductive rights did not stop at this point. The continued negotiation of the control of women's reproductive capabilities has most recently manifested itself in the debates about assisted fertility treatments, which were strongly restricted in March of 2004. Ultimately, I show that though new technologies and laws since the 1960s have given women more control over their reproductive patterns, the fact remains that couples will have children when they

² The Population Reference Bureau recognizes two main categories of contraception: "traditional methods," which include periodic abstinence, the rhythm method, and withdrawal, and "modern methods," which include both hormonal methods such as the birth control pill and barrier methods such as the condom. Artificial reproductive technology includes artificial insemination and *in vitro* fertilization.

want to do so and use birth control when they do not, regardless of the legally available reproductive technologies. The study of birth control can offer only a partial explanation of low fertility in Bologna.

Historicizing Birth Control in Italy

In their discussion of low fertility rates in Italy, Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, Alessandra De Rose and Filomena Racioppi state that “the great drop in fertility in Italy began in the final years of the nineteenth century and leveled out during the 1960s.”³ This decline occurred despite strong pressure from the Catholic Church to limit the use of “artificial” contraception, including barrier methods such as the condom and hormonal methods such as the birth control pill. Although these scholars warn that the “causal links between Catholicism and the slow diffusion of contraception are not easy to establish,” the Catholic Church certainly tried to stop the spread of information about and the use of contraception.⁴ These attempts to restrict the spread of contraception often took the form of papal encyclicals, which are formal letters sent to Catholic bishops by the Pope to explain in detail some aspect of Catholic doctrine. In 1930, for example, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Casti Connubii*, which “explicitly recommended fighting birth control practices.”⁵ Written during the height of the Fascist Regime, this encyclical reiterated the belief that Catholic men and women had a holy duty to marry and have children, a teaching that was strongly in line with the pronatalist policies laid out in the Fascist penal code

³ Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, Alessandra De Rose, and Filomena Racioppi, "Low Fertility and Limited Diffusion of Modern Contraception in Italy During the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Population Research* 22, no. 1 (2005): 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

that I discuss below. In 1968, nearly forty years later, Pope Paul elaborated on the Church's policy toward birth control in the encyclical entitled *Humanae Vitae*. The Church's strong opposition to artificial birth control methods was based on the idea that "a necessary connection exists between sexual intercourse, which is to be limited to married partners, and procreation," and that anything that threatens that connection is morally wrong.⁶ However, *Humane Vitae* was issued in the same year that the United Nations included the power to decide the number and spacing of one's own children a human right. By the time the Church issued this encyclical it was already too late to change people's behavior.⁷ This encyclical also appeared during a period of intense political turmoil in Italy. As the historian Paul Ginsborg succinctly states, "the year 1968 [...] was much more than a protest against poor [social] conditions. It was an ethical revolt, a notable attempt to turn the tide against the predominant values of the time."⁸ There was a growing discord between the conservative teachings of the Church, often supported by the policies of the Italian State, and the desires and beliefs of the Italian population as illustrated by their actual contraceptive behavior. In the end, the Church's inflexible stance on contraception only highlighted the fact that many practicing Catholics were using birth control despite the repeated papal condemnation of it. Although the Church tried to influence its followers to abstain from the use of "artificial" contraceptive techniques, it ultimately failed to do so.

The teachings of the Catholic Church about birth control had been codified into law during the Fascist Regime as the State "aimed to discipline women's bodies

⁶ Charles B. Keely, "Limits to Papal Power: Vatican Inaction after *Humanae Vitae*," in *The New Politics of Population: Conflict and Consensus in Family Planning*, ed. Jason L. Finkle and C. Alison McIntosh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 227.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 226-27.

in ways that differ from those of other nations.”⁹ Victoria De Grazia explores these laws about birth control in her book *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*. She observes that the Fascist penal code of 1930 (known as the Rocco Code) “contained an entire chapter [articles 545-55] devoted to ‘crimes against the integrity and health of the race.’”¹⁰ These crimes included teaching about or distributing contraception and performing or obtaining an abortion. These practices were targeted for “impeding the fecundity of the Italian people” and could be harshly punished with fines or imprisonment.¹¹ Many women were profoundly ignorant about sex and reproduction during this time; De Grazia suggests that while many boys learned about sex from older men, Fascist repression may have compounded parents’ and teachers’ unwillingness to instruct girls about their bodies.¹² Women often knew nothing about menstruation, sexual intercourse and childbirth until they themselves experienced these events. The Rocco Code remained in effect after the fall of Fascism, and its continued enforcement was “instrumental in creating a situation where the law became increasingly different from the pattern of most women’s lives.”¹³ In the 1970s, feminists challenged the validity of these laws, citing the large divide between the law and women’s lived experience. Article 553, which forbade the “sale or advertising of contraceptives,” was overturned in 1971, nearly thirty years after the end of Fascism, and abortion was eventually legalized in 1978.¹⁴

⁸ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: The Penguin Group, 1996), 301.

⁹ Miguel Malagrecá, "Lottiamo Ancora: Reviewing 150 Years of Italian Feminism," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 7, no. 4 (2006): 75.

¹⁰ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³ Lesley Caldwell, "Abortion in Italy," *Feminist Review* 7 (1981): 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Contraception Use Today

Perhaps as a result of the strong conservative pressures against the use of contraception, *coitus interruptus*, or withdrawal, became one of the most important methods of birth control before and during the Fascist period. It may have gained popularity in Italy for a number of reasons. First, though this may seem an obvious point, it is an effective method of birth control when used correctly; it has a failure rate of 10.5% during the first year of use and 7.6% in the years after that.¹⁵ In her study “*Coitus Interruptus* in the Twentieth Century,” Gigi Santow states that “while in terms of efficiency withdrawal cannot compete with the pill or the IUD,” its failure rate is similar to that of the condom (8%). In addition, *coitus interruptus* is more effective than either the rhythm method or the diaphragm, which have respective failure rates of 18% and 21%.¹⁶ Withdrawal’s popularity was facilitated by the fact that many Italians see it as a “natural” method of birth control; that is, one that does not require the use of outside devices or the ingestion of pharmaceuticals. In addition, it was not necessary to go to great lengths to practice *coitus interruptus*, and thus it was relatively easy to avoid public scrutiny about one’s contraceptive choices while using this method. This was particularly important during Fascism, when the use of contraception could be strictly punished. Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna and his colleagues note that in some parts of Italy “a man’s ‘respectability’ is partly determined by his capacity for self-control in ensuring that his family can limit its number of children,” and *coitus interruptus* literally gives control over reproductive

¹⁵ Gigi Santow, “*Coitus Interruptus* in the Twentieth Century,” *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 4 (1993): 772.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

decisions to the male partner.¹⁷ Even after so-called “modern contraceptive techniques” such as the birth control pill, the IUD and the condom have become more accepted in the country, Italians are still much less likely to use these methods than citizens of other European countries.¹⁸ In fact, while 52% of European women in couples use modern methods of contraception, only 39.2% of Italian women do so.¹⁹

That being said, the use of *coitus interruptus* is declining. While 58% of married Italian women stated in 1979 that they used withdrawal as their main form of contraception, in 1996 only 34% of Italian women in couples stated that they regularly practiced it.²⁰ The decline is particularly pronounced in the north of Italy. In 1993 the European Study Group of Infertility and Subfecundity found that 10.2% of the Northern Italian couples interviewed used *coitus interruptus* while 33.4% of Southern couples did so.²¹ In addition, more highly educated women are much less likely to practice *coitus interruptus*, perhaps because the spread of modern contraceptive methods is facilitated by the increased awareness of these methods of contraception.²²

Gigi Santow notes that in the 1970s the “argument of the women’s movement that women should control their own reproduction led to strong condemnation of male methods” such as *coitus interruptus* and condoms.²³ Feminists connected the control of contraception with the control of their bodies in general, which would give

¹⁷ Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, and Racioppi, "Low Fertility," 23.

¹⁸ A. Spinelli et al., "Family Planning in Italy," *Advances in Contraception: The Official Journal of the Society for the Advancement of Contraception* 9, no. 2 (1993): 157.

¹⁹ Population Reference Bureau, "Family Planning Worldwide," (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2002), 6-7.

²⁰ Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, and Racioppi, "Low Fertility," 25.

²¹ Angela Spinelli et al., "Patterns of Contraceptive Use in 5 European Countries," *American Journal of Public Health* 90, no. 9 (2000): 1405.

²² Marzio Barbagli, Maria Castiglioni, and Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, *Fare famiglia in Italia: un secolo di cambiamenti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 259.

women the ability to act as independent agents in society. Writing in the feminist magazine *Effe*, the Collettivo del autocoscienza del martedì of the Collettivo femminista Genovese [the Tuesday consciousness-raising group of the Genoese Feminist Collective], based in the port city of Genoa in the North-West of Italy, criticized the idea that “la donna è l’oggetto sessuale per eccellenza; di più: è lei stessa sesso” [the woman is the quintessential sex object; more than that: she is herself sex].²⁴ They elaborated, stating that “il punto sta quasi certamente nel fatto che noi non abbiamo mai avuto una nostra sessualità, ma semplicemente ‘partecipiamo’ a quella degli uomini” [the point is almost certainly the fact that we have never had a sexuality for ourselves, but that we simply “participate” in men’s sexuality].²⁵ Other feminist groups, including Rivolta Femminile [Feminine Revolt], a radical feminist group from Rome, believed that “conception is [...] a fruit of the violence of male sexual culture at the expense of women, who are made responsible for a situation they have actually endured.”²⁶ In this context, feminists believed that female-controlled contraceptive methods such as the birth control pill or the IUD would give women full control over their own sexuality, because they would no longer be limited by their fear of conceiving a child.

These feminists worked to educate other women about these methods of contraception. Perhaps the most important Italian effort at this was the 40-page pamphlet “Anticoncezionali dalla parte della donna” [Contraception from the woman’s side], which was published by the Gruppo medicina della donna [Women’s

²³ Santow, "Coitus Interruptus in the Twentieth Century," 768.

²⁴ Collettivo del autocoscienza del martedì - luglio '74 - del Collettivo Femminista Genovese, "L'uomo È Il Passato Della Donna," *Effe* 4, no. 9-10 (1976): 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

medical group] in Milan in 1974. In 1998, this pamphlet was chosen as one of the 100 most important feminist documents from the 1970s by the Centro Studi e Documentazione Pensiero Femminile [Center for the Study and Documentation of Feminist Thought] in Ferrara. Luciana Percovich states that this booklet was “un piccolo manuale di quaranta pagine che presenta, con linguaggio piano e illustrazioni dalla grafica chiara e semplice, i diversi metodi anticoncezionali” [a small forty-page manual that presented, with careful language and clear, simple illustrations, the different contraceptive methods].²⁷ The women’s medical group published this pamphlet with the idea that “imparare a conoscere il nostro corpo e a controllare la nostra fecondità è il primo passo per riflettere su di noi e diventare padrone di noi stesse” [to learn to know our body and to control our fertility is the first step towards reflecting on ourselves and becoming owners of ourselves].²⁸ The diffusion of this pamphlet helped many women learn about their bodies and the use of contraception for the first time.

The feminists’ work to give women more control of their own sexuality has proved relatively effective. Italian women are no longer as pressured to remain virgins until they marry, and are freer to explore their own sexuality. Increasingly, Italian young women spend their twenties sexually active, but do not cohabit with their partners and often delay marriage. Changes in women’s sexual behavior, as well as this delay of marriage that I discuss in further detail in the next chapter, were

²⁶ Rivolta Femminile, "Female Sexuality and Abortion," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 215.

²⁷ Luciana Percovich, "Gruppo Medicina Della Donna "Anticoncezionali Dalla Parte Della Donna", " in *100 Titoli: Guida Ragionata Al Feminismo Degli Anni Settanta*, ed. Aida Ribero and Ferdinanda Vigliana (Ferrara: Luciana Tufani Editrice, 1998), 146.

²⁸ Gruppo femminista per una medicina delle donne, *Anticoncezionali dalla parte della donna* (Milano: Self-published, 1974), 4, quoted in Luciana Percovich, "Gruppo medicina della donna

facilitated by the availability of contraception.²⁹ As “modern” contraception and the freedoms associated with it became more widespread in Italy in the 1970s, feminists turned their attention to another aspect of women’s reproduction: abortion.

Abortion

During the Fascist Regime, abortion was outlawed by Article 553 of the 1930 Rocco code. Under this legislation, a woman who received an abortion and the person who performed it were both punishable by imprisonment from one to five years. In addition, a woman who performed an abortion on herself could be imprisoned from one to five years.³⁰ Although this law was promulgated during the Fascist pronatalist campaign, it remained in effect through 1978. This law did not stop women from obtaining abortions. In fact, as De Grazia notes:

the main effect of the repression of [contraceptive] information was to *increase* the acceptance of abortion. When abstinence or coitus interruptus failed, and douches and other postcoital home remedies proved futile, women resorted to abortifacients: emetics, irrigation with herbal infusions and chemical irritants, hair pins, knitting needles, scraping, and probes [...] and whether carried out by the hack or the medical professional, all abortions were ‘backstreet.’ They thus carried extra risks of disabling infection, permanent health damage, and death.³¹

The statistics available on illegal abortion during this period emphasize the severity of the discrepancy between women’s actual experiences and the laws that governed them. Estimates of the yearly number of illegal abortions in Italy before 1978 range from 800,000 to three million, and “although accurate statistics are difficult to obtain,

"Anticoncezionali dalla parte della donna", in *100 Titoli: Guida ragionata al femminismo degli anni settanta*, ed. Aida Ribero and Ferdinanda Vigliana (Ferrara: Luciana Tufani Editrice, 1998), 146.

²⁹ Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, and Racioppi, "Low Fertility," 26. I will examine these changes in sexual and marital behavior in the next chapter.

³⁰ Caldwell, "Abortion in Italy," 50.

estimates of 20,000 women dead every year as a result of illegal abortions [are] common.”³²

In the 1970s, the UDI [Union of Italian Women] decided to document these illegal abortions to spread awareness of these dangerous conditions and the deaths that resulted. In addition, the members of the UDI believed that “lasciare a pochi esperti un argomento che ha tante implicazioni nella vita e nella personalità della donna sarebbe stato illogico e sbagliato; noi volevamo invece dare a tutte le donne la possibilità di parlare, di denunciare, di dire quante sofferenze e quante ore tragiche hanno vissuto da sole e in silenzio” [leaving an argument that has many implications in the life and the character of a woman to a few experts would be illogical and a mistake; instead, we wanted to give all women the possibility to speak, to denounce, to state how much suffering and how many tragic hours they have experienced alone and in silence].³³ For the most part, the UDI’s documentation took the form of small group meetings, similar to consciousness-raising sessions, where women could freely discuss their experiences. However, the UDI also sponsored large assemblies where women could state their opinions in a large open forum and conducted individual interviews with 320 women from Campania, the southern region that includes the city of Naples.³⁴ The UDI published its findings in 1977 under the title *Sesso Amaro: trentamila donne rispondono su maternità, sessualità aborto* [Bitter Sex: Thirty thousand women talk about maternity, sexuality and abortion]. In this book, women describe their experiences with abortion, first with small excerpts from the group

³¹ De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, 57-58, (emphasis added).

³² Caldwell, "Abortion in Italy," 50.

³³ Cecchini et al., eds., *Sesso amaro: trentamila donne rispondono su maternità sessualità aborto*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

discussions and assemblies, then with longer chapters that discuss the lives of fourteen women at length. A typical story goes something like this:

Lui tranviere, lei casalinga (Napoli). *Lui:* avevo [...] più figli di tutti. Adesso ci siamo fermata. I figli si fanno quando si è giovani. Speriamo che non succeda più, ma mia moglie s'è dovuta pognere (pungere, n.d.r.) due volte. *Lei:* Mio marito non lo sa, ma sono andata a farmi 'pungere' non due volte, ma sei e non solo negli ultimi tempi.

A train conductor, a housewife (Naples). *Him:* I had [...] more children than everyone. Now we've stopped. You have children when you're young. We hope that it won't happen again, but my wife had to abort two times. *Her:* My husband doesn't know, but I went to have an abortion not twice, but six times, and not just recently.³⁵

Eventually the magnitude of the problem was no longer debatable. However, while “freedom of choice for women was a tenet of all” feminist groups there was considerable debate within the various strains of the feminist movement about what exactly needed to be done to address the problem.³⁶ Two major feminist positions on abortion appear in the 1970s. The first, a radical feminist approach, was mostly advocated by Rivolta Femminile and the Movimento di Liberazione della Donna (MLD), affiliated with the small but active Radical Party. These groups believed that “the legalization of abortion was but another violence against women as it was the outcome of a project of modernization and rationalization devised by men.”³⁷ While these groups believed that women were being harmed by the proliferation of illegal abortions, they were at the same time against the legalization of abortion because they believed that legalization would simply allow men to continue their exploitation and domination of women's bodies. In the *Manifesto and Document of the MLD*, these

³⁵ Ibid., 68.

³⁶ Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, "History of Two Laws: Abortion," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 218.

feminists argued that any law on abortion would give the Italian state the power to control women's reproductive health, instead of giving that power to the women themselves.³⁸ Rivolta Femminile went further, stating, "abortion is not a solution for free women, but rather for women colonized by a patriarchal system."³⁹ Instead, radical groups advocated only the decriminalization of abortion, which would prevent women from being arrested for the abortions they were already having and perhaps give feminists more control over abortion procedures.

The other principal feminist position of the 1970s was located more to the center of the political spectrum. Like the more radical groups, this position refused "to separate the question of abortion from all the other, more fundamental, questions: sexuality, motherhood, patriarchal culture."⁴⁰ The Comitato Romano per l'Aborto e la Contraccezione [Roman Committee for Abortion and Contraception] viewed campaign for legal abortion as a means of "rebell[ing] against a society which imposes on [women] the whole responsibility for maternity and bringing up children, yet doesn't offer the conditions for motherhood to become a free and informed choice."⁴¹ They believed that "a law that stated the legality of abortion on demand would ⁴²symbolically sanction women's self-determination."⁴³ Moreover, these groups maintained that only legalization would guarantee women's access to a safe abortion and end the danger caused by illegal, unsafe abortions.

³⁷ Tamar Pitch, "Decriminalization or Legalization? The Abortion Debate in Italy," in *The Criminalization of a Woman's Body*, ed. Clarice Feinman (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992), 30.

³⁸ Movimento di Liberazione della Donna, "Manifesto and Document of the MLD," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 226.

³⁹ Femminile, "Female Sexuality and Abortion," 216.

⁴⁰ Pitch, "Decriminalization or Legalization? The Abortion Debate in Italy," 31.

⁴¹ Comitato Romano per l'Aborto e la Contraccezione, "Programme of the Crac," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 219.

⁴² Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 394.

After nearly a decade of debate, law 194 legalized abortion in Italy in 1978. This law was the result of a compromise in which the DC did not insist that voluntary abortion remain a crime and the PCI agreed to certain limits on the woman's right to choose. However, many feminists considered this compromise unsatisfactory, and identified a number of problems with the law. The first problem was that on a symbolic level, law 194 did not give the woman full control of her reproductive decisions, because it required approval from a physician for all abortions. In addition, if the woman were under 18 years of age, she had to obtain written permission from both of her parents.⁴⁴ Women's full freedom of reproductive choice was further limited by a clause that stipulated that "induced abortion be confined to women whose physical and psychological health may be at risk."⁴⁵ A woman could not obtain an abortion simply because she did not want a child; instead, a doctor had to agree that the abortion was medically necessary. Law 194 also required that all abortions be performed in hospitals, but the existing hospital facilities did not have the resources to manage the large number of abortions requested each year.⁴⁶ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Article 9 of the new law governed conscientious objection to abortion, and allowed for "the nonparticipation of staff of any level who work in hospitals and do not want to participate in abortions for reasons of conscience."⁴⁷ Within six months of the propagation of the law, reports Lesley Caldwell, "after an organized offensive on the part of the church, 72% of Italy's

⁴³ Pitch, "Decriminalization or Legalization? The Abortion Debate in Italy," 31.

⁴⁴ Karen Beckwith, "Response to Feminism in the Italian Parliament: Divorce, Abortion, and Sexual Violence Legislation," in *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe: Consciousness, Political Opportunity, and Public Policy*, ed. Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Carol McClurg Mueller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 159.

⁴⁵ Silvana Salvini Bettarini and Silvana Schifini D'Andrea, "Induced Abortion in Italy: Levels, Trends and Characteristics," *Family Planning Perspectives* 28, no. 6 (1996): 267.

doctors were objectors and in some areas the percentage was much higher – in some hospitals all of the personnel [...] claimed exclusion.”⁴⁸ Thus, even though abortion was technically legal, many women still had to rely on illegal abortion providers because they could not find a doctor willing to provide a legal abortion. Despite these many problems, women’s legal right to an abortion was guaranteed, and this law was re-approved in 1981 by a popular referendum.

Assisted Fertility Treatments

In the debates about contraception and abortion, women fought to ensure that “motherhood and bringing up children [were] no longer imposed on women at the expense of other social and political activities,” but were instead the result of a free choice.⁴⁹ The newest development in Italy in the realm of reproductive rights is law number 40 of 2004, which regulates Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). The issue at stake is no longer the prevention of an unwanted pregnancy, but rather the right to become pregnant at any cost. Law 40/2004 was enacted to “give Italy a more modern image regarding fertility treatment and to bring previous practices under greater control.”⁵⁰ In 1995 Celestine Bohlen stated that, “Italy is virtually the only country in Europe that still has no law, no controls, not even any minimum regulations governing more than 100 private clinics that perform various fertilization

⁴⁶ Caldwell, “Abortion in Italy,” 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Contraccezione, “Programme of the Crac,” 220.

⁵⁰ Dominic Standish, “Italy: Fertile Ground for Reform,” *Conscience* (2005): 26.

procedures.”⁵¹ The lack of governmental oversight facilitated serious abuses of ART in Italy. John A. Robertson names two events that led Italian legislators to call for a strict regulation of ART in his opinion piece about the new legislation:

[L]ax procedures in screening sperm donors in 1997 led to the use of hepatitis-infected sperm at over 30 clinics. More recently, the willingness of some doctors to provide oocyte [egg] donation to women over 60 and to promote reproductive cloning also suggested that a sense of social responsibility was lacking.⁵²

In this chaotic context, most doctors and legislators agreed that some regulation of ART was necessary.

However, the new law does not simply regulate the potential abuses of this technology. First, it restricts the use of ART to “adults of different genders, married or living together, potentially fertile, and both living,” and thus prevents homosexuals and single women from using ART.⁵³ In addition, it is illegal for couples to be assisted by a third party, which means that sperm or egg donation and surrogate motherhood are forbidden. The law also strictly limits the procedures that may be performed to help the infertile couple. In particular, it restricts the way in which fertilized eggs may be used: only three embryos may be created at a time, and all three must be implanted into the woman at once. In addition, it forbids doctors from freezing embryos to be used in later procedures.⁵⁴ This restriction “increases the risks of multiple births and the burdens of IVF [*in vitro* fertilization] for women.”⁵⁵ These embryos must be implanted even if they are found to have genetic defects, for while

⁵¹ Celestine Bohlen, “Anything Goes in Italian Birth Science,” *The Edmonton, C6* (April 9, 1995), quoted in Andrea Boggio, “Italy Enacts New Law on Medically Assisted Reproduction,” *Human Reproduction* 20, no. 5 (2005): 1153.

⁵² John A. Robertson, “Protecting Embryos and Burdening Women: Assisted Reproduction in Italy,” *Human Reproduction* 19, no. 8 (2004): 1693.

⁵³ V Fineschi, M Neri, and E Turillazzi, “The New Italian Law on Assisted Reproduction Technology (Law 40/2004),” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31 (2005): 537.

“embryo biopsy itself is not illegal, [...] all biopsied embryos, including those that are positive for the disease, must be transferred to the uterus.”⁵⁶ Finally, a last problem with this law is that, like the 1978 abortion law, it contains a clause that allows for conscious objection on the part of doctors and nurses.⁵⁷

Law 40/2004 makes it much more difficult for infertile couples to have children. This is particularly troubling because “the demand for fertility treatment seems set to rise with Italian women, like women elsewhere, having children later in life.”⁵⁸ In fact, recent statistics suggest that one in five Italian couples is infertile.⁵⁹ These restrictions make the procedures less effective and more costly. One study notes that “this present new Italian regulation caused a detrimental effect on the pregnancy rates for all the patients undergoing ART.”⁶⁰ Faced with these problems, some Italian couples are choosing to travel to neighboring countries to have ART performed, because the law only restricts procedures that are performed on Italian soil. However, this raises questions concerning class access: although the public Italian health system ought to provide equal service to all citizens, this “reproductive tourism” is available only to those who can afford to travel outside of the country. Ultimately, however, “the final impetus for reforming the fertility law may come

⁵⁴ Ibid., 538

⁵⁵ Robertson, "Protecting Embryos and Burdening Women: Assisted Reproduction in Italy," 1693.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1695.

⁵⁷ Fineschi, Neri, and Turillazzi, "The New Italian Law on Assisted Reproduction Technology (Law 40/2004)," 539.

⁵⁸ Standish, "Italy: Fertile Ground for Reform," 25. I will address the issue of women postponing childbirth in the next chapter.

⁵⁹ V Fineschi, M Neri, and E Turillazzi, "The new Italian law on Assisted Reproduction Technology (Law 40/2004)," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 31 (2005): 536. Fineschi, Neri, and Turillazzi, "The New Italian Law on Assisted Reproduction Technology (Law 40/2004)," 536.

⁶⁰ C. Pellegrini et al., "Clinical Impact of a New Italian Law Regulation on Assisted Reproduction Technologies," *Fertility and Sterility* 84 (2005): 5349.

from the realization that it contradicts the government's policies to increase the birth rate," because it effectively prevents some couples from having children.⁶¹

Conclusion

In the end, the spread of more effective contraceptive techniques has certainly made it easier for women to control their fertility. It has also given women more control over the decision to have children, as many modern methods of contraception are effective only within the woman's body. However, this increased ability to control reproduction has probably not contributed significantly to the fertility decline. As Dalla Zuanna and his colleagues note, "the decrease in births is caused mainly by the decline in wanted births" – the spread of contraception has simply made it easier for Italian couples to have only the number of children that they want.⁶²

Nevertheless, an understanding of the ways in which women are able to control their own reproduction within their bodies is an essential first step to the study of fertility decline. Reproduction is a biological event with social, cultural, and political implications, and having explored the biological aspects of reproduction I will now examine these implications. In the two chapters that follow, I consider how the increased control that women have over their own bodies is also manifested in their position within the family and in the workplace.

⁶¹ Standish, "Italy: Fertile Ground for Reform," 26.

⁶² Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, Stefano Gavini, and Angela Spinelli, "The Effect of Changing Sexual, Marital and Contraceptive Behavior on Conceptions, Abortions, and Births," *European Journal of Population* 14 (1998): 61.

Chapter Two: The Family

The father and the mother are not two primary entities but rather the result of a prevarication between the sexes which is given formal expression in the family [...] the family itself marks the unconditional surrender of women to male power. It is in the family that men's pathological anxiety and defences [sic] originate and it is from the family that he transfers them to the community, as its representative.

– Carla Lonzi¹

As I have shown in the previous chapter, in the 1970s Italian women gained control over their own reproduction through the growing acceptance and availability of various contraceptive techniques, which was facilitated by changes in the laws regarding contraception and abortion. However, women's increased control over their own bodies is but one aspect of the renegotiation of gendered power that has occurred within Italian society. A similar debate occurred within the family, as feminists questioned the validity of the "traditional Italian family" with many children, a mother who stays at home, and a father in charge of all of the family's decisions. These women campaigned for a number of reforms to equalize the juridical power between the husband and wife within the family.

The normative model of the family was first sanctioned by law in 1803 with the Code Napoléon, which promoted an idea of the family as a hierarchical institution founded on paternal authority. Although this Code was overturned in 1815, the ideas it promoted were the basis of family law in Italy until 1975. The complete restructuring of the family code in this year was part of a larger series of reforms which included significant changes to the adoption law and the legalization of divorce. The changes in Italian family law in the 1960s and 1970s gave legal sanction to many new family forms, some of which had existed before these laws and

some which are entirely new. However even as the structure of the family changes, its role in Italian society remains more or less the same. In particular, familism is still prevalent in Italian culture, and many individuals rely heavily on their extended families for material support. Familism has serious repercussions for fertility, because many parents choose to have only one child so as to focus all of the family's resources on a single individual. In addition, many young adults stay in their parents' home until their thirties, delaying marriage and waiting to start their own families. This changing marriage behavior has significant repercussions on the fertility rates in Bologna because illegitimate births remain extremely rare in Italy.

A Brief History of the “Traditional Italian Family”

The actual structure of the family in Italy has been marked by significant regional differences. In particular, urban families tended to be small and nuclear, while rural families were more complex, with many married couples living together in the same house.² This diversity was reflected in the laws regulating the family. In *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, Lesley Caldwell states that, “at the end of the Eighteenth Century there was still a wide variety of legislation and norms that bore on the family and its alliances.”³ However, in 1803 the Code Napoléon became the first code to endorse a single model of the family throughout Italy.⁴ Although this code was in effect only through 1815, it became the model for

¹ Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 54.

² Marzio Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto: mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal xv al xx secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), 23-25.

³ Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1991), 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

the codes of individual States after that year. Eventually, it provided the basis for the 1865 Pisanelli Code, which was the first civil code of Unified Italy.⁵ The Pisanelli Code would later be used to create the Civil Code of 1939-1942, which “faithfully reflected the ideological vision, embraced by the Fascist Regime, of a family ‘strongly structured in an authoritative way.’”⁶ Chiara Saraceno elaborates, explaining that “Fascism’s ideal model of the family was the multiple, prolific family of rural Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna.”⁷ The Fascist code endured until 1975, when Italy’s family law was extensively restructured.

All of these codes reflected a very specific idea about the family, based on a strict division of labor inside the home. This normative vision of the family was based on a strict hierarchy in which the father had complete authority.⁸ In this vision, described succinctly in Pocar and Ronfani’s study *Family Law in Italy*, “the parents were owed equal obligations (loyalty, respect, support) but they did not enjoy equal rights, since the husband was proclaimed the head of the family, while his wife was subordinated to him.”⁹ Wives were expected to follow husbands’ wishes, and in some cases refusal could lead to an annulment of the marriage. Ultimately, everyday family life centered around these hierarchically divided sexual roles.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Valerio Pocar and Paola Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," *Law & Society Review* 12, no. 4 (1978): 608.

⁷ Chiara Saraceno, "Redefining Maternity and Paternity: Gender, Pronatalism and Social Policies in Fascist Italy," in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s*, ed. Gisela Block and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1991), 202.

⁸ Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1991), 55. Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, 55.

⁹ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 608.

¹⁰ Yasmine Ergas, "1968-79. Feminism and the Italian Party System: Women's Politics in a Decade of Turmoil," *Comparative Politics* 14, no. 3 (1982): 259.

The Italian State based many social policies around this normative ideal. Anna Laura Zanatta explains that in Italy “la principale istituzione di assistenza e sostegno alle persone non è né lo stato, né l’ente locale, né il volontario, né il privato di mercato, ma la famiglia, intesa sia in senso stretto come nucleo, sia in senso ampio come rete di parentela” [the principal institution for assistance and support for people is neither the state, nor local organizations, nor volunteer work, nor the private market, but the family, intended both in the strict sense of a nuclear family and in a broader sense as a network of relatives].¹¹ Most of these policies assumed that the wife would not work outside the home, and would be free to provide unpaid caregiving and other kinds of domestic labor. These policies also assumed that family members would be willing to provide mutual help. This is consistent with Dalla Zuanna’s description of a familistic society as one in which citizens “consider their own utility and family utility as being one and the same thing [and] believe that everyone else does too.”¹² As I will show, this assumption about the strong connection between the family and the individual endures in Italy even after other aspects of family life have radically changed.

Changes to and within the Family

By the 1970s, it had become obvious that family law needed reform and that the civil code of 1942 was simply outdated. It was still based directly on the Code Napoléon of 1803, which was already considered a conservative and old-fashioned in

¹¹ Anna Laura Zanatta, "Le famiglie con un solo genitore," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 255.

¹² Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, "The Banquet of Aeolus: A Familistic Interpretation of Italy's Lowest Low Fertility," *Demographic Research* 4 (2001): 139.

the late 1800s.¹³ In addition, “the contrast between the concepts of the family underlying [the Italian] constitution and the 1942 civil code is dramatically obvious.”¹⁴ In particular, the civil code of 1942 was at odds with Article 29 of the Italian constitution, which states that “il matrimonio è ordinato sull’eguaglianza morale e giuridica dei coniugi” [marriage is based on the moral and judicial equality of the spouses].¹⁵ The hierarchical power structure of the family was by definition a contradiction to this purported equality. Finally, the disparity between the law and people’s lived experience was clearly seen in “l’esigenza di sottrarre la donna a quella posizione di subordinazione familiare che diveniva sempre più stridente man mano che [...] si faceva più frequente il suo ingresso nel mondo di lavoro” [the need to free the woman from the position of familial subordination that became ever more disagreeable as her entrance into the working world became more frequent].¹⁶ Faced with these problems, the Italian Parliament first addressed the regulation of adoption and the legalization of divorce and then created a completely new family code in 1975.

This reform of family law in Italy began in 1967 with the promulgation of a Law on Special Adoption (Law No. 431 of 1967). Before this reform, “adoptive parents had to be fifty years old and without legitimate or legitimated issue; adoption was a consensual arrangement between natural and adoptive parents and preserved the links between the adopted child and its natural parents.”¹⁷ The ultimate goal of

¹³ Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, 55.

¹⁴ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 609.

¹⁵ Presidenza della Repubblica, “La Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana.”
<http://www.quirinale.it/costituzione/costituzione.htm>.

¹⁶ Diana Vincenzi Amato, "Il diritto di famiglia," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 41.

¹⁷ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 612.

this type of adoption was to secure an heir for the adoptive parents, and the person to be adopted was frequently already an adult. However, the Law on Special Adoption shifted the focus from the interests of the adoptive parents to those of the child. With this legislation, adoption was presented as primarily a means of providing abandoned children with a new home.¹⁸ Valerio Pocar and Paola Ronfani explain that “placing abandoned children in a normal family environment [...] was seen as a means of crime prevention and social defense,” because many believed that children raised in inadequate public facilities were more likely to become criminals than children raised by foster or adoptive parents.¹⁹ In particular, this law “era nata con l’obiettivo di svuotare gli istituti assistenziali per minori” [was born with the objective to empty the welfare institutions for minors] which were notorious for their squalid, overcrowded conditions.²⁰ This goal was accomplished to a certain extent, as “il numero dei bambini ricoverati negli istituti è sceso drasticamente dai circa 300.000 nel 1967 a poco meno di 140.000 dieci anni dopo” [the number of children admitted into the institutions drastically declined from around 300,000 in 1967 to a little bit less than 140,000 ten years later].²¹ However, this has not helped all of the children abandoned in Italian orphanages. As of 1994, between 30,000 and 40,000 children still live in such institutions.²² In some cases, the Italian court system has been hampered in its attempts to place children with adoptive parents by the institutions themselves. Pocar and Ronfani report that “in Italy, because of the sorry condition of public welfare services, ‘assistance’ is oriented more towards the givers than the recipients. In other

¹⁸ Ibid., 613.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Paola Ronfani, “Le adozioni e gli affidamenti,” in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 135.

²¹ Ibid.

words, a vast share (about 16 percent in 1970) of the public welfare expenditure” simply funds the organizations that are supposed to provide care.²³ Most of these organizations are private entities affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, the attitudes of prospective adoptive parents can also be an obstacle to adoption, as “molti bambini non vengono accettati dalle coppie aspiranti perché troppo grandi, con handicap fisici o psichici, o con problemi di comportamento dovuti alla lunga permanenza in istituto” [many children are not accepted by aspiring couples because they are too big, have physical or psychological handicaps, or have behavior problems owing to an extended stay in an institution].²⁴ Perhaps as a result of these difficulties, by 1992 only a third of the children adopted in Italy were in fact of Italian origin.²⁵ Ultimately, the most important legacy of this law was not the help it gives to needy children, but its redefinition of the normative idea of a family. The extreme political Right opposed Law 431/1967 because it believed that the reform undermined the “‘sacredness’ of blood-ties, which ought not be broken for fear of debilitating the family institution, and so leading to the disintegration of society itself.”²⁶ Despite these objections, with this legislation a parent/child bond between two people with absolutely no blood relationship was sanctioned by the law, anticipating the restructuring of rules regarding legitimate and illegitimate children in the new Family Code.

The second major change to Italian family law was the legalization of divorce in 1970. Divorce was another example of the discrepancy between the law and the

²² Ibid.

²³ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 617.

²⁴ Ronfani, "Le adozioni e gli affidamenti," 136.

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 614.

lives of Italian citizens, many of whom had already been separated for a significant period of time but were unable to obtain a legal divorce.²⁷ Most of these separated couples belonged to the lower-classes, because middle- and upper-class couples could typically afford the expensive process of annulment through the Catholic Church by proving that the marriage was inherently invalid. Under law 898 of 1970 divorce was legalized for all couples, and was permitted without requiring an official reason.²⁸ However this “no-fault” divorce law was restricted by the fact that couples had to legally separate for five years before a divorce could be granted.²⁹ Many couples who have legally separated ultimately do not divorce, perhaps because “divorce places women in a far less favorable position financially than separation does.”³⁰ Interestingly, divorce was not presented as a strongly feminist issue during the initial period of agitation for the law, but was seen as simply a way to legally sanction the rights of individuals. It became a feminist issue only during Christian Democratic Party’s campaign to repeal the divorce law in 1974.³¹ However, massive popular support for the law was reaffirmed by the popular referendum in that year, in which ninety percent of all voters came to the polls and sixty percent of those participating voted to keep the law.³² As I will show the legalization of divorce has led to the formation of new types of families and has had significant repercussions for Italian society.

²⁷ Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, 75.

²⁸ Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁰ Paola Ronfani, "Children, Law and Social Policy in Italy," *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 15 (2001): 278.

³¹ Birnbaum, *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy*, 103.

³² *Ibid.*

These two partial reforms of family law prepared for the full reform of the family code in 1975. The most important part of this reform is “the abolition of every residual trace of the husband’s marital authority.”³³ The equality between spouses is manifested in a number of ways. First, familial power is now shared equally by both parents, who must decide together the welfare of their children. The reformed code clearly states that “the spouses are to agree mutually the direction of the family life and to establish the family home according to the requirements of both of them and, above all, of the family itself.”³⁴ The new code also altered the fiscal relationship between husband and wife, as “i beni acquistati dai coniugi nel corso della vita coniugale [...] divengono immediatamente di proprietà commune, in quote eguali, e vengono amministrati da entrambi” [the assets acquired by the spouses in the course of married life immediately become common property, in equal shares, and are administered by both of them].³⁵ Couples can still choose to keep their assets separate, and while very few did so in the period immediately following the reform, the number of couples who maintain separate bank accounts is growing. For example, while only 7% of Bolognese couples who married in 1976 chose to keep their incomes separate, 58% of those who married in 1994 did so.³⁶ Barbagli suggests two possible reasons for this change. The first is that, following women’s increased presence in the workforce, many couples now believe that it is fairer for each spouse to control his or her own paycheck. The second possible reason is that “l’aumento delle separazioni legali e dei divorzi ha fatto nascere in un numero

³³ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 631.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Amato, "Il diritto di famiglia," 43.

³⁶ Marzio Barbagli and Maurizio Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995), 191.

crescente di coppie il timore che anche il loro matrimonio possa finire nell'aula di un tribunale,” [the increase in legal separations and in divorces has created in a growing number of couples the fear that their marriage could also finish in a courtroom], in which case the separation of assets would make divorce a little bit easier.³⁷ The rules governing inheritance were also restructured during this reform, allowing wives to receive more benefits after their husbands' deaths. The increased equality between the married couple is based primarily “on a reevaluation of the economic contribution of the wife, especially that of the housewife.”³⁸ Because men and women are now legally seen as contributing equally to the survival of the family, they must equally divide all the assets and responsibilities of the family. The final innovation of this law did not focus on the relationship between the spouses, but rather on that between the parents and children. This clause recognized the “total equality between children born in and out of wedlock, provided that the latter are acknowledged by one or both parents.”³⁹ This was a particularly controversial part of the law because it threatened the traditional role of the family as the only way to have legitimate children. However, this also facilitated the formation of new families after divorce, as children who are not fully related by blood are given equal status within the family.

The Current State of the Italian Family

With the restructuring of the family law, there has been a “passaggio da un unico modello di famiglia (la famiglia nucleare coniugale) a una pluralità di forme familiari” [a transition from a single model of the family (the married nuclear family)

³⁷ Ibid., 195.

³⁸ Pocar and Ronfani, "Family Law in Italy: Legislative Innovations and Social Change," 631.

³⁹ Ibid., 635.

to a plurality of family forms].⁴⁰ One of these new family forms is single parenthood. While single parent families did exist before the legalization of divorce, they usually resulted from the death of one partner. In this context, the causes of single parenthood were “eventi ineluttabili o non voluti, che non mettevano in discussione la famiglia tradizionale e l’istituzione matrimoniale” [unavoidable or unwanted events, which did not call into question the traditional family and the institution of marriage].⁴¹ However, since the passage of law 898/1970 the vast majority of single parent families come from divorce. In fact, 56.7% of all single mothers and 53.9% of all single fathers are separated or divorced.⁴² For the most part, these single parents are in fact single mothers; in Italy “nell’80% e più dei casi il genitore solo è una donna” [in more than 80% of the cases the single parent is a woman].⁴³ The so-called “feminization of single-parenthood” is the direct result of the normative assumption that women are the best providers of child care.⁴⁴ This is particularly the case when very small children are concerned; Barbagli and Saraceno note that “nel 1995, i minori sono stati affidati al padre solo nel 3% dei casi se avevano meno di cinque anni, ma nel 10% quando superavano i quindici” [in 1995, children under five were entrusted to the father in only 3% of all cases, while children over fifteen were entrusted to the father in 10% of all cases].⁴⁵ This feminization of single-parenthood also occurs in other Western countries. However, unlike their European counterparts, very few Italian single mothers have had children born outside of wedlock. In fact, in

⁴⁰ Zanatta, “Le famiglie con un solo genitore,” 248.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁴⁴ Ronfani, “Children, Law and Social Policy in Italy,” 284. I will discuss further repercussions of this assumption, particularly as it relates to women’s participation in the paid workforce, in the next chapter.

Italy only 8.1% of children were born outside of marriage in 1995, significantly less than the rest of the European Union.⁴⁶ In addition, Italian single mothers are much more likely to come from the middle-class than their counterparts in other European countries. This may be a result of the fact that in Italy “separation and divorce, which account for most lone-parent families, is much more widespread among more highly educated categories” and there is a correlation of education with class.⁴⁷ In Italy, single mothers are also more likely to work outside of the home than married mothers, with 60.4% of the former and only 42.8% of the latter doing so.⁴⁸ This may occur both because single mothers tend to be better educated than married mothers and because they often have “un numero minore di figli (circa il 70% ne ha uno solo) e quelli che hanno sono più grandi” [a smaller number of children (around 70% have only one child) and those that they have are older] than the children of married mothers.⁴⁹

Not all parents remain single following a divorce. In Italy, while “la presenza dei figli influisce negativamente sulla propensione dei separati a chiedere il divorzio” [the presence of children negatively influences the tendency of the separated couple to ask for a divorce], the number of parents who do so is growing.⁵⁰ This is particularly true for younger couples, as “in loro è più forte il desiderio di risposarsi e

⁴⁵ Marzio Barbagli and Chiara Saraceno, *Separarsi in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 123.

⁴⁶ Ronfani, "Children, Law and Social Policy in Italy," 278.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁸ Zanatta, "Le famiglie con un solo genitore," 253.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Guido Maggioni, "Le separazioni e i divorzi," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 240.

maggiori sono le chance di cui godono nel mercato matrimoniale” [in them the desire to remarry is stronger and their chances on the marriage market are greater].⁵¹

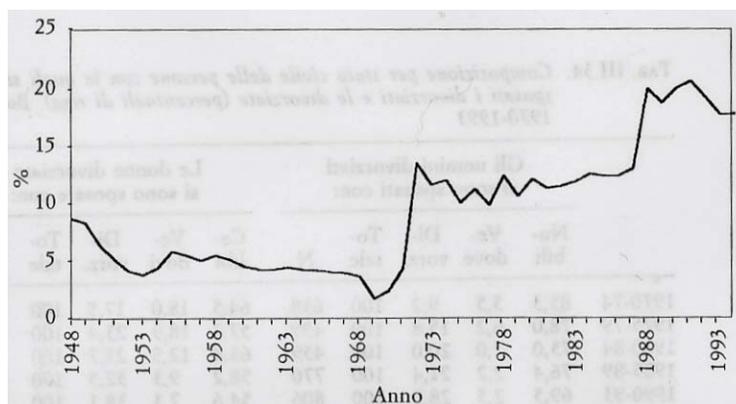


Figure 3: Percent of marriages in which one partner has already been married at least once out of the total new marriages in Bologna.⁵²

Figure 3 shows that the number of marriages in Bologna in which one partner has already been married is growing, and the remarriage of divorced parents opens up two new possibilities for the structure of the family. The first is the creation of step-families, in which children from multiple previous marriages are present in one household. In addition, “l’abbassamento progressivo dell’età media relativa al sesso femminile ha [...] come conseguenza un aumento delle possibilità che la nuova unione sia anch’essa feconda in termini riproduttivi” [the progressive drop in the average age of the female partner has as a result increased the possibility that the new union is also fertile in terms of reproduction], allowing for the creation of half-families in which siblings share only one parent.⁵³ While combined families of this sort had been present before the legalization of divorce, the true significance of these

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Barbagli and Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna*, 201.

new unions comes from the fact that while formerly “il nuovo partner era chiamato a svolgere il ruolo del genitore assente [... ora] al nuovo partner non si chiede di assumere tale ruolo essendo ancora presente il genitore biologico” [the new partner was called on to carry out the role of the absent parent, now one does not ask the new partner to assume such a role because the biological parent is still present].⁵⁴

While these new types of family structures are becoming more prevalent, they are still not as common in Italy as in other Western countries. In fact, the Italian language itself lacks precise terms to describe these relationships, and relies on “termini quali figli di primo o secondo letto” [terms for the children of the first or second marriage bed] such as “matrigna” [step-mother], “patrigno” [step-father], “sorellastra” [half-sister], and “fratellastro ” [half-brother] for every situation.⁵⁵ These words do not distinguish between half- and step-families, and they “hanno anche via via assunto una connotazione negativa” [have also gradually assumed a negative connotation].⁵⁶ In their study *Le famiglie ricostituite* [rebuilt families], Adele Menniti and Susanna Terracina suggest that “il fatto di non aver coniato termini *ad hoc* per tali situazioni familiari nasconde probabilmente una difficoltà nel conferire legittimità a tali famiglie” [the fact that *ad hoc* terms have not been coined for such family situations probably hides a difficulty in bestowing legitimacy to such families].⁵⁷ Perhaps as a result of the unacceptability of these relationships, many parents chose not to remarry after a divorce. In fact, the vast majority of Italian

⁵³ Rosella Rettaroli, "Le seconde nozze," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 262.

⁵⁴ Adele Menniti and Susanna Terracina, "Le famiglie ricostituite," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 273.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

couples who live in common-law relationships (which are known by the term *more uxorio*, Latin for “as if married”) have gone through a divorce.⁵⁸ The percentage of these “famiglie di fatto” [*de facto* families] is particularly high in Bologna. Based on the number of children born outside of wedlock Barbagli suggests that as many as 16% of Bolognese couples live *more uxorio*.⁵⁹

Despite the changes that have occurred within the family, the strength of the normative model of the Italian family still endures.⁶⁰ In particular, notes Dalla Zuanna, “familism and the traditional family are linked, but familism can persist even where traditional family-life declines.”⁶¹ The importance of the family in the life of most Italians can be seen in a number of ways. First, “more than thirty percent of young workers – interviewed in 1996 – found their first job thanks to the direct intervention of a relative.”⁶² In addition Chiara Saraceno states that “gran parte del dibattito sui salari di ingresso per i giovani sembra basarsi più sull’aspettativa che questi vivano ancora con i genitori che non su valutazioni relative alle loro più basse competenze professionali” [a large part of the debate about the starting salaries for young people seems to base itself more on the expectation that they will still live with their parents than on estimates relative to their lower professional ability].⁶³ In addition, the expectation that adult children will still live at home with their parents has “contributed to the shortage of rental housing accessible to young people.”⁶⁴ This

⁵⁸ Ibid., 277.

⁵⁹ Barbagli and Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna*, 159.

⁶⁰ Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform*, 83.

⁶¹ Dalla Zuanna, “The Banquet of Aeolus: A Familistic Interpretation of Italy’s Lowest Low Fertility,” 140.

⁶² Ibid., 143.

⁶³ Chiara Saraceno, “Le politiche per la famiglia,” in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 309.

⁶⁴ Dalla Zuanna, “The Banquet of Aeolus: A Familistic Interpretation of Italy’s Lowest Low Fertility,” 145.

creates a type of catch-22 situation, where adult children live with their parents because there is no affordable rental housing, and there is no accessible housing because it is assumed that young adults will continue to live with their parents. When adult children do leave the family home, most of them remain very close to their parents. Figure 4 shows that more than half of all married adult children still live in the same town as their parents.

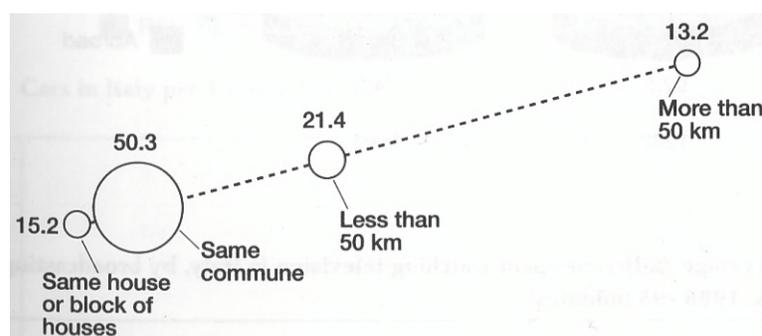


Figure 4: Average distance from mother to the place of residence of married children, Italy 1989.⁶⁵

However, perhaps the most important effect of this continued familism is on the low fertility rates in Italy. In particular, “the strategy of reducing fertility has been a good familistic tool in Italy over the last thirty years, helping the social climb of few children or the only child.”⁶⁶ Increasingly, Italians believe that the family is best served by having only one child who will receive all the resources available from his or her parents. The decline in fertility may also be a result of the late departure of children from the family home. Dalla Zuanna notes that “in a familistic oriented society, the rising of real income hampers – rather than favors – the early departure of children” because there is less economic necessity for children to immediately enter

⁶⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2001), 331.

⁶⁶ Dalla Zuanna, “The Banquet of Aeolus: A Familistic Interpretation of Italy’s Lowest Low Fertility,” 151.

the workplace.⁶⁷ In fact, he calls the parental family “the golden cage of Italian youth,” for while it provides a comfortable place for adult children, it also prevents them from starting their own families.⁶⁸ In addition, in Western Europe parents often “do not allow their children to form a procreative and nuclear residential unit until this new unit can be economically independent,” and living at home hampers this economic independence.⁶⁹

Alessandra Righi shows that, “a partire dalla metà degli anni settanta, il matrimonio diviene un evento sempre più raro e tardivo” [beginning in the mid-seventies, marriage becomes a constantly rarer and later-occurring event].⁷⁰ She continues, explaining that between the 1984 and 1994 “una delle principali caratteristiche della nuzialità di celibi e nubili osservata nel decennio considerato è la crescita dell’età degli sposi” [one of the principal characteristics of the marriage between previously unmarried people observed in the ten years that were considered is the increase in the age of the spouses].⁷¹ During this period, the average age of the bride increased from 24.3 years to 26.5, and that of the groom grew from 27.4 years to 29.3.⁷² In Bologna, these figures are even higher: 30.2 for women and 30.8 for men.⁷³ This later age at first marriage has significant repercussions for fertility rates because in Italy “il 92% dei figli nasce all’interno del matrimonio” [92% of children are born to a married couple], and in this context a delay in first marriage usually

⁶⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁹ Ron Lesthaeghe, “On the Social Control of Human Reproduction,” *Population and Development Review* 6, no. 4 (1980): 533.

⁷⁰ Alessandra Righi, “La nuzialità,” in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 53.

⁷¹ Ibid., 54.

⁷² Ibid., 54-55.

⁷³ Barbagli and Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna*, 147.

signifies a postponement of childbirth.⁷⁴ In addition, “non è da escludere che proprio la scelta di avere figli in età matura [...] finisca poi per risolversi in una rinuncia definitiva alla maternità” [it cannot be ruled out that precisely the decision to have children at a more mature age concludes with a decision to definitively renounce maternity], as postponements continue until the woman has left her childbearing years.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The past thirty years have seen significant changes in the structure and role of the family in Italy. Following the reform to the family law, women and men legally share the power within the family, both in regards to the children and in regards to the sharing of the family’s assets. However, “in Italia coesistono elementi di tradizione e di modernità” [in Italy, elements of tradition and modernity coexist].⁷⁶ While laws regulating the family have changed, many of those that govern social services in Italy still assume that the “traditional family” is the dominant family form. In the next chapter, I will examine how this discrepancy between state policies and the situation of most Italian families is evident in the laws that facilitate women’s presence in the paid workforce. I will show that this assumption about the prevalence of the normative family often leaves women without adequate support when they enter the workforce.

⁷⁴ Righi, "La Nuzialità," 64.

⁷⁵ Antonio Santini, "La fecondità," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 119-20.

⁷⁶ Zanatta, "Le famiglie con un solo genitore," 249.

Chapter Three: The Workplace

Detestiamo i meccanismi della competitività e il ricatto che viene esercitato nel mondo dalla egemonia dell'efficienza. Noi vogliamo mettere la nostra capacità lavorativa a disposizione di una società che ne sia immunizzata.

[We detest the mechanisms of competition and the blackmail that is exercised on the world by the hegemony of efficiency. We want to put our working power at the disposition of a society that is immune to this blackmail]

- *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile*¹

In much of the literature about Italian women's participation in paid labor, it is unclear if women's emancipation in the workplace allowed them to renegotiate their relationships with their male relatives within the home, or if women's growing authority within the home freed them to enter the workforce. Either way, women's role within the family and their presence in the workplace are both marked by the same cultural norms that codify domestic work as women's work. In fact, some of the very state policies designed to facilitate the balance of paid labor and domestic work maintain and perpetuate this normative gender hierarchy. This contradiction is present even in the Italian Constitution, ratified in 1947. Article I states that "l'Italia è una Repubblica democratica, fondata sul lavoro" [Italy is a Democratic Republic, founded on work].² All citizens have the right and the duty to participate in the paid workforce. However, Article 37 states that "le condizioni di lavoro devono consentire [alla donna] l'adempimento della sua essenziale funzione familiare" [working conditions must allow [women] to carry out their essential role in the

¹Rivolta Femminile, *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile* (Milano: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1974), 15, quoted in Maria Luisa Boccia, "Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile," in *100 Titoli: Guida ragionata al femminismo degli anni Settanta*, ed. Aida Ribero and Ferdinanda Vigliana (Ferrara: Luciana Tufani Editrice, 1998), 61.

family].³ In effect, the article defines women's role as one primarily within the family.

Women's participation in the Italian labor market since World War II has been marked by this conflict between their role within the family and their position as paid laborers outside of the home. The tension increased during the boom years of Italy's "Economic Miracle" (1958-1963), when the rapid expansion of the industrial workforce solidified the division between (men's) paid work outside the home and (women's) unpaid labor. However, in the early 1970s feminists began to challenge the gender inequalities in these two spheres. In the last chapter, I discussed some of the ways that feminists critiqued the normative structure of the family; in this section, I shall discuss how they critiqued these norms in terms of labor. This feminist analysis developed in two main ways. First, some feminists lobbied to give housewives a salary, hoping to recognize domestic labor as equally important to labor outside the home. Others challenged the trade unions' policies toward women and tried to improve women's status in the workplace through changes in its structure. Most of these reforms helped women balance paid work with domestic labor. However, feminists did not completely eradicate the normative gender hierarchies within the Italian workforce, and the declining fertility rate may be a result of women's inability to balance paid labor and the work they must do within the family.

² Presidenza della Repubblica, "La Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana."
<http://www.quirinale.it/costituzione/costituzione.htm>.

³ Ibid.

Women's Workforce Participation: Some Background

Italy's industrialization began slightly later than in other European Countries, in approximately 1895. This industrialization occurred very unevenly; while Northern cities such as Bologna grew rapidly, the South remained largely rural, with a predominantly agricultural economy. During this period, women made up 28% of the workforce, and Italy was fourth among all industrial nations for the number of female workers.⁴ Following World War I, however, women were actively forced from the paid workforce by the Fascist regime. Victoria De Grazia explains that:

The dictatorship wanted to secure positions for male heads of household. Otherwise, the self-esteem of jobless men was at risk, as was the cause of racial fitness and population growth [...] building on long-standing sexual biases in the labor market, as well as the gender inequalities which arose as Italian workers were subjected to the corporate system, the regime passed protective laws, propagated discriminatory attitudes, and enacted statutory exclusions. State policy thus interacted with longer-term market forces to accentuate the biases women faced when they worked outside the home.⁵

These policies included laws that banned women from specific sectors within the workforce, such as advanced administrative jobs or teaching positions in high schools or universities, and laws that restricted women from performing specific tasks such as lifting heavy machinery within a factory.

The gender segregation of the workforce continued after World War II, primarily because of problems with the Italian economy. During this period jobs were extremely difficult to find. Between 1946 and 1957 nearly two million Italians, mostly men from the South, emigrated to the United States and northern Europe in

⁴ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 168.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

search of some type of paid labor.⁶ This pattern changed suddenly during the “Economic Miracle.” In the five short years from 1958 to 1963, economic “growth rates reached the highest level since Unification, and the GDP increased by an average of 6.3% each year.⁷ Much of this growth came from large factories in the North. However, Paul Ginsborg notes that economic development in Central Italian regions such as Emilia-Romagna during this time was characterized by the development of small firms that usually employed around twenty workers. He suggests that “in order to survive and prosper in the early sixties, these entrepreneurs relied heavily on the experience and resources of their families.”⁸ This pattern continues today; as I will show below many families in Emilia-Romagna rely extensively on grandparents’ help to care for children.

During this economic boom, trade unions such as the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro [General Confederation of Italian Labor] grew in power. They decided to organize as “class unions,” and “were to be oriented toward the defense of class interests as opposed to the immediate interests of their members, who should act as political subjects, not economic ones.”⁹ Bianca Beccalli, the author of one of the few studies of women’s participation in the Italian labor unions, suggests that certain aspects of this “class unionization” were particularly beneficial to the status of women workers. First, the unions fought for progressive legislation and addressed both social and economic issues during collective bargaining, which gave

⁶ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: The Penguin Group, 1996), 211.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 234-35.

⁹ Bianca Beccalli, “Italy,” in *Women and Trade Unions in Eleven Industrialized Countries*, ed. Alice H. Cook, Val R. Lorwin, and Arlene Kaplan Daniels (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 192.

women a space to work for legislation that would benefit female workers.¹⁰ In addition, Beccalli shows that although the unions did not actively pursue the goal of equal pay for both sexes immediately after the war, they aggressively defended the lowest-paid workers, and won proportionately greater raises for them between 1945 and 1947 than the better-paid workers received.¹¹ Women workers benefited from this because they made up a large part of the lower-paid workers.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the present day, the Italian Parliament enacted specific laws to facilitate women's participation in the workforce. The unions' concern for social issues also led to campaigns to protect women's interests in the workplace, particularly present in laws regarding maternity leave and the protection of pregnant workers. The first important part of the struggle towards women's equality in the workplace was the establishment of an equal pay agreement for manual workers in industry in 1960, which "abolished the separate scale of skill levels for women."¹² Before this legislation, women were consistently paid less than men for the same job. The law was expanded over the next three years to cover all workers, including those in the non-industrial sectors. In 1963 women also benefited from a law that prevented employers from firing newlywed female employees for one year after their marriage, expanding on a 1950 law that had forbidden employers from firing women who were pregnant or had children under one year old.¹³ Finally, in 1963 Parliament revoked the Fascist laws that had barred women from some sectors of the workforce.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 195.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ Ibid., 193.

The sources do not give a clear reason why so many policies that benefited women's employment were enacted in 1963. However, two main possibilities come to mind. First, 1963 was the last year of the "Economic Miracle." As I will explain below, during this period many women left the paid workforce and jobs became much more plentiful. As a result, the women that remained in the workforce may not have seemed as threatening to men's jobs and it might have been easier to enact legislation that protected these female workers. Second, the presence of a Center-Left government under Amintore Fanfani, however problematic it was, may have created a more receptive environment for these labor concerns.

These policies culminated in the 1977 equal opportunity law, which outlawed gender segregation in the workplace, removed the special protective legislation that limited the jobs that female workers could do, and made it illegal to discriminate against women while hiring.¹⁴ However, this law did not include specific regulations for its implementation. This was remedied only in 1996 with the creation of the Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità [Department for Equal Opportunities], which provides "l'indirizzo, la proposta e il coordinamento delle iniziative normative e amministrative in tutte le materie attinenti alla progettazione e alla attuazione delle politiche di pari opportunità" [the location, the proposal, and the coordination of regulatory and administrative initiatives in all of the materials pertaining to the planning and enforcement of equal opportunity policies].¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁵ Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, "Istituzione e competenze," <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/DefaultDesktop.aspx?page=911>.

Gendered Domestic Labor

Despite these policies that facilitated women's presence in the paid workforce, many women left their jobs during this period. As Figure 5 shows, female employment fell from more than 25% in 1959 to barely 20% in the early Seventies and only began to rise again around 1975.

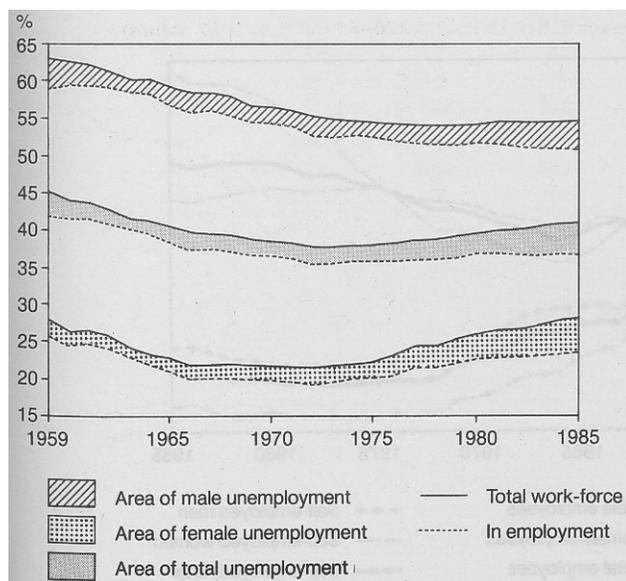


Figure 5: Employment and Unemployment in Italy by gender, 1959 – 1985.¹⁶

This occurred for two main reasons. First, as male employment swelled during the Economic Miracle, women were left to take care of the children and their husbands, “whose day’s work, with overtime and commuting, often amounted to between twelve and fourteen hours.”¹⁷ This reinforcement of the sexual division of labor “creò due figure speculari e complementari [...] l’operaio e la casalinga” [created two similar, complementary roles: the worker and the housewife].¹⁸ These roles depended on each other; the male laborer was able to work these extremely long

¹⁶ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 447.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁸ Chiara Saraceno and Manuela Naldini, *Sociologia della famiglia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 31.

hours only because his wife performed all of the household tasks for free, and the housewife was able to work without pay only because her husband supported her financially. Second, the years immediately following World War II were marked by the emphasis on consumption, particularly within the home. In *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe*, De Grazia explores the gendered nature of this consumption. As the family became a place of refuge for male workers:

[T]he well-managed consumer household not only stimulated industrial demand, turned warmaking [*sic*] technologies to everyday applications, and reinforced family togetherness, but also gave a cozy domestic texture to western [*sic*] Europe's newly cherished culture of security.¹⁹

Statistics on domestic labor show that household consumption became a full-time job for many women. Although some appliances made domestic tasks easier, they also created new demands on women's time because women had to learn to use and, if necessary, repair the items they purchased. Even with the use of household appliances, many domestic tasks cannot be easily or quickly completed. In Rossella Palomba's analysis of the use of time within Italian families, daily domestic work includes "lavare, stirare, pulire, fare la spesa" [washing [clothes], ironing, cleaning [the house], shopping].²⁰ These tasks must be understood in their Italian context, where household mechanization and consumption, while extensive, does not quite reach American levels. For example, although washing machines are common, clothes are usually dried on a clothesline and then ironed. In addition, shopping may require visits to three or four small stores to purchase groceries (for example, one

¹⁹ Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 420.

shop for bread, one for meat and cheese, and one for fruits and vegetables). Italian women spend significantly more time performing unpaid domestic duties than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. Gosta Esping-Andersen has shown that women in France spend an average of 36.0 hours performing domestic work every week. For German women, this figure is 35.0 hours/week; and for Swedish women, 34.2 hours/week. However, Italian women spend an average of 45.4 hours on these unpaid tasks every week, a full ten hours more than other Europeans.²¹ This may be because of the extremely slight male contribution to this domestic work or because of the gaps in the Italian welfare state that assign extra work to women, both of which I will discuss below.

A significant portion of the time that women spend on domestic work goes towards care giving, both of children and of the elderly. Palomba considers this issue in her study of the division of labor within the home, showing that for women “il carico familiare è chiaramente quantificabile: un’ora di lavori di casa [al giorno] in più per ogni figlio in più” [the burden of a family is clearly measurable: one more hour of housework [per day] for every additional child].²² In addition, women often care for their parents and parents-in-law as they age. In 1994 Barbagli calculated that 26% of Bolognese citizens over the age of 80 were physically incapable of leaving their houses; 15% were unable to dress and undress themselves.²³ However, in 1991 only 1,712 people over the age of seventy lived in nursing homes; the rest relied on

²⁰ Rossella Palomba, "I tempi in famiglia," in *Sotto lo stesso tetto: Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000), 166.

²¹ Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63. Data for 1985-1990. In the United States, the average is 31.9 hours/week.

²² Rossella Palomba, "I tempi in famiglia," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 166.

their relatives for help.²⁴ As the population grows older and life spans increase, the amount of time that adult children spend caring for their parents will most likely increase as well. I will discuss some of the repercussions of this in more detail below.

Men's contribution to this care giving remains very slight, as all domestic work is still very strongly gendered female. Palomba shows that, on average, a married, childless Italian woman performs 4 hours and 36 minutes of domestic work every day, while her husband spends only 36 minutes working in the home.²⁵ In the end, Palomba dramatically describes this discrepancy between the husband's and wife's respective input, asserting that "il contributo degli uomini al lavoro domestico e alla cura dei figli è talmente marginale che l'assenza del marito [con il divorzio] finisce per rappresentare una riduzione del lavoro domestico complessivo per la ex moglie" [men's contribution to household work and to childcare is so minimal that the absence of the husband [after a divorce] in the end represents a reduction in the total domestic work for the ex-wife].²⁶ Moreover, Anna Laura Fadiga Zanatta and Maria Luisa Mirabile warn that the "profondo cambiamento del modo di vita delle donne non sia stato accompagnato da un'adeguata trasformazione delle norme, dei valori e dei comportamenti relativi alla divisione sessuale del lavoro" [profound change in women's lifestyle has not been accompanied by an appropriate transformation in the norms, values and behaviors relative to the sexual division of

²³ Marzio Barbagli and Maurizio Pisati, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale a Bologna* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁵ Palomba, "I tempi in famiglia," 166. Data for 1993-1995

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

work].²⁷ Surveys have shown that women in every age group perform about the same amount of domestic labor, underlining the fact that the younger generations of women are replicating their mothers' practices towards housework.²⁸

Feminist Campaign for Salaried Housework

In the 1970s, Feminists began to critique the normative division of labor that codified men's paid work as productive and women's unpaid work as merely supportive. One way that feminists approached this problem was by working to give women a salary for their domestic labor. In 1973, the Padova-based feminist group *Lotta femminista* [Feminist Struggle], which had a particularly strong presence in nearby Emilia-Romagna, analyzed Marx's argument that "the individual consumption of the worker is a directly productive consumption."²⁹ They responded to this idea, stating:

Except that, and our man does not see this, this consumption
presupposes work of some kind.
This work is housework.
Housework is done by women.
This work has never been seen, precisely because it is not paid.³⁰

These feminists argued that wages for housewives would recognize domestic labor as *work* and overturn the "stratification of power between the paid and the non-paid, the root of the class weakness which movement [*sic*] of the left have only increased."³¹

²⁷ Anna Laura Fadiga Zanatta and Maria Luisa Mirabile, *Demografia, famiglia e società: come cambiano le donne* (Rome: Ediesse, 1993), 25.

²⁸ Maria Jose Gonzalez, Teresa Jurado, and Manuela Naldini, "Introduction: Interpreting the Transformation of Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe," in *Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe: Women, Work and Welfare in the 1990s*, ed. Maria Jose Gonzalez, Teresa Jurado, and Manuela Naldini (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 22.

²⁹ Lotta Femminista, "Introduction to the Debate," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 261.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The feminists who advocated for salaries for housework argued that “emphasizing women’s unpaid household work was the only way women could put their struggle for autonomy on a material basis.”³² These women even analyzed the declining fertility rate through a Marxist lens. For example, the feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa argued that women were refusing bear children as a type of strike against the men that exploit their unpaid work, in a modern-day version of the story of *Lysistrata*.³³

According to Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, editors of the landmark *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, “the debate concerning salaries for housewives was [... an] indication of how the rejection of the family implied a total questioning of the organization of society, as well as the rejection of the dominant images of women.”³⁴ Although similar critiques occurred throughout Europe and the United States, they enjoyed a wider popularity in Italy precisely because Italy was a “Democratic Republic based on work,” with very strong communist and socialist political parties. Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum notes in the influential *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy* that “in the early 1980s women in the PCI [Italian Communist Party] acknowledged the significance of the wage campaign in having helped feminist issues be understood by twelve million housewives.”³⁵

This campaign also enjoyed considerable support from the political right, particularly the DC and organizations of Catholic women. Many of these conservatives approved of salaried housework because they believed that it actually

³¹ Ibid., 262.

³² Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 136.

³³ Ibid., 141.

³⁴ Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, "Women at Home: Salaries for Housewives," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 260.

³⁵ Birnbaum, *liberazione della donna: feminism in Italy*, 141.

defended and reinforced women's role within the family. Some of these attempts to provide financial support to domestic work have had mixed success. For example, in 1957 Parliament established a pension system for housewives, but this system was later shut down because too few women contributed money to the plan.³⁶ As late as 1990 the DC proposed a paid maternal leave of five years that would have functioned as a type of subsidized housework stipend, but it was defeated.³⁷ Many liberal feminists were wary of this Catholic support both because they believed that it reinforced normative ideas about the family and because they feared that these stipends were too similar to the Fascist pronatalist policies that had offered financial awards for children.

Easing the Balance between Paid and Unpaid Labor

Another critique of the prevalence of these gender norms within the paid workforce came from women who were already working and who were active in the class-based trade unions of the Left. Recognizing that "hierarchy and an unequal division of labor were the reality women faced as union activists," some women decided to separate from these unions and create independent feminist collectives to target sexual discrimination in the workplace.³⁸ Working within the union structure, women also took advantage of a 1972 law that "allowed workers to use up to 150 hours of their paid working time to participate in courses in the public education system."³⁹ These 150-hours courses frequently developed into consciousness-raising

³⁶ Chiara Saraceno and Manuela Naldini, *Mutamenti della famiglia e politiche sociali in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 169.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁸ Beccalli, "Italy," 201.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

sessions, as female-only classes allowed women to discuss and address the systematic discrimination that women faced in the unions. Often, these discussions were not confined to the discrimination that women faced in the workplace, but also addressed the need for contraception, women's role in the family, and their position in society as a whole. Many of these groups gave birth to the major feminist organizations of the 1970s, as women who had been politicized in the union movements were now able to channel their energy and knowledge toward defeating sex discrimination.

These feminists campaigned for laws to facilitate women's need to balance responsibilities to their families and to their employers, challenging the idea that only male work was productive.⁴⁰ One such law (amended most recently in 1975) governs Italy's maternity leave policy and gives all employed women (including those who are self-employed) a 22 week leave at 80% of their normal wage. This mandatory maternity leave begins two months before the woman's due date and ends three months after she gives birth. In addition, a law enacted in 2000 established a new parental leave policy that grants six months of leave, paid at 30% of the normal salary, at any time before the child's third birthday.⁴¹ The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union may have provided the extra push for this law, because it required all EU members to grant at least three months of unpaid parental leave to all workers.⁴²

Beginning in 1968 Italy also expanded its system of state sponsored childcare and education for young children. The state established publicly funded *Asili Nidi*, or

⁴⁰ Alessandra Mecozzi, "Women at Work: Trade Unions -- A Survey," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991), 279.

⁴¹ Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy, "The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies," www.childpolicyintl.org/countries/italy.html.

day care centers, to provide child care for infants between three months and three years of age; *Scuole Materne*, or preschools, are available for children between the ages of three and six, when state elementary schools begin.⁴³ These facilities are not evenly available throughout Italy, and they are particularly prevalent in Emilia-Romagna. In 1989, the region of Emilia-Romagna “was the first to undertake a systematic attempt at, and partially to achieve, institutional welfare based on a comprehensive model of social citizenship.”⁴⁴ These welfare provisions are based on “the individual’s freedom of choice in the field of sexuality and reproduction, and equal recognition of all family forms.”⁴⁵ During the 1980s this region was also at the forefront in establishing laws relating to the gendered use of time which changed the timing of school schedules and the hours that childcare services are available to make them more accessible and more compatible with women’s schedules.⁴⁶ As a result, services that are hard to find in many other regions of Italy are more widely available in Bologna. For example, the *Asili*, which are available to only six per cent of all Italian children under the age of three, provide childcare for thirty per cent of children in Emilia-Romagna.⁴⁷

The one area that Italian feminists did not pursue was part-time work, which has proven to be an extremely effective way to help women balance domestic and paid responsibilities, particularly in the Scandinavian countries. Figure 6 shows that

⁴² Linda Haas, "Parental Leave and Gender Equality: Lessons from the European Union," *Review of Policy Research* 20, no. 1 (2003): 93.

⁴³ Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy, "The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies," www.childpolicyintl.org/countries/italy.html.

⁴⁴ Franca Bimbi, "The Family Paradigm in the Italian Welfare State (1947-1996)," in *Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe: Women, Work and Welfare in the 1990s*, ed. Maria Jose Gonzalez, Teresa Jurado, and Manuela Naldini (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

an extremely low percentage of Italian women are employed in part time work as compared to their counterparts in other Industrialized countries. In 1993, only 11% of all employed Italian women were working part-time. In fact, a number of Italian feminists were strongly against part-time work. In 1975, Paola Alfieri and Giangiulio

	France	Germany	Holland	United Kingdom	Sweden	Denmark	Italy	Greece	Spain
1979	23,3	27,6	44,0	39,0	46,0	46,3	10,6	-	-
1983	26,1	30,0	50,1	42,4	45,9	44,7	9,4	12,1	-
1988	23,8	30,6	57,7	44,2	-	41,5	10,4	10,3	13,0
1990	24,4	-	61,7	43,8	40,5	-	10,9	-	12,0
1993	26,3	32,0	64,5	43,9	-	37,4	11,0	7,7	14,8

Figure 6: Part-time jobs as a percentage of women's total employment, selected countries.⁴⁸

Ambrosini collected some of these feminists arguments in the book *La condizione economica, sociale e giuridica della donna in Italia*. Alfieri and Ambrosini outline Italian feminists' main objections to part-time work for women: that part-time jobs are less valued than full-time work and thus keep women from advancing in their careers; that part-time work reduces the potential for class consciousness and political activity among women; that the pension benefits for part time work are half those of full-time work; that the cost of transportation is higher for part-time work; and that a campaign for part-time work would detract from the campaign for social services such as preschools.⁴⁹ In the end, the authors conclude that "nell'ambito di movimenti

⁴⁷ Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy, "The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies," www.childpolicyintl.org/countries/italy.html.

⁴⁸ Rossana Trifiletti, "La famiglia e il lavoro delle donne," in *Lo stato delle famiglie in Italia*, ed. Marzio Barbagli (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 208.

⁴⁹ Paola Alfieri and Giangiulio Ambrosini, *La condizione economica, sociale e giuridica della donna in Italia* (Torino: Paravia, 1975), 136-38.

femministi l'opposizione [al *part-time*] è intransigente" [within the feminist movement the opposition [to part-time work] is unshakable].⁵⁰

These feminists all make valid points. Labor-market discontinuity is particularly discouraged in Italy, where prolonged absences from the workplace affect seniority rights, and thus directly affect pay levels and promotions. A woman who works part-time may be seen as disloyal or, at the very least, not interested in the company. This workplace structure based on seniority also creates a particular situation for pregnant Italian working women, and, naturally, for women in Emilia-Romagna. While it is illegal to fire a woman within one year of her giving birth, many women are hesitant to use parental leave because removing oneself from the workforce for this additional time may seem disloyal to the company. Finally, if women leave or lose their jobs it is often extremely difficult for them to re-enter the workforce because there is a "low turnover in employment among adult workers," who usually occupy the same position for life.⁵¹

Conflicts between Workforce Participation and Fertility

When women are in the workplace, their double burden is not entirely supported. This is particularly evident when it comes to women's child care responsibilities.⁵² A number of related problems emerge. First, while the *Scuole Materne* are free, the *Asili Nidi* for the youngest children are not. Tuition for the *Asili* operates on a sliding scale, which in theory makes the *Asili* affordable to everyone,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁵¹ Francesca Bettio and Paola Villa, "To What Extent does it Pay to be Better Educated? Education and the Work Market for Women in Italy," in *Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe: Women, Work and Welfare in the 1990s*, ed. Maria Jose Gonzalez, Teresa Jurado, and Manuela Naldini (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 151.

but in practice “most children who attend are from middle and upper class families.”⁵³ In addition, while preschools for children between the ages of three to six are widespread (88% of children in this age group attended these nursery schools in 1988), *Asili* are not.⁵⁴ As I mentioned above, nationally only about 6% of children younger than three are enrolled in these daycare centers because adequate facilities for all children simply do not exist.⁵⁵

In this area, the State consistently demonstrates a “lack of innovation [...] *delegating* to families rather than *providing* for them.”⁵⁶ It is usually assumed that families will cover the gaps in public assistance, yet another example of the familism that I addressed in the last chapter. When the family is made responsible for childcare, the work typically falls to women, and working mothers are not the only women affected by this trend. Elderly family members also factor into women’s net domestic labor. On the one hand, as I discussed above many women must care for their aging parents or parents-in-law. However, grandparents frequently care for their grandchildren when the parents are unavailable, and this is particularly true in Emilia-Romagna. Figure 7 shows that more grandparents in Emilia-Romagna take care of their young grandchildren than their counterparts in other regions. In particular, these grandparents help while the parents are at work, when the child is

⁵² Gonzalez, Jurado, and Naldini, "Introduction: Interpreting the Transformation of Gender Inequalities in Southern Europe," 27.

⁵³ Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy, “The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies.”

⁵⁴ Franca Bimbi, "Gender, "Gift Relationship" and Welfare State Cultures in Italy," in *Women and Social Policies in Europe: Work, Family and the State*, ed. Jane Lewis (Brookfield: Edward Elgar Publishing Company, 1993), 146.

⁵⁵ Columbia University Institute for Child and Family Policy, “The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth, and Family Policies,”

Region	Occasions when grandparents care for their grandchildren under age 13, percent of total care							
	Never give care	While the parents work	When the parents have occasional time commitments	When the parents go out for fun	During vacations	When the child is sick	During emergencies	Other
Italy	14.4	24.4	24.5	11.8	8.9	9.3	15.7	1.7
North-West	12.1	29.2	27.1	11.8	9.8	9.4	14.8	1.6
North-East	14.4	27.6	22.8	11.9	9.6	12.7	15.9	2.2
Center	12.5	27.5	24.0	11.6	7.2	8.9	15.8	2.9
South	18.3	17.2	24.2	9.9	8.9	7.7	15.8	0.9
Islands	15.5	16.8	22.1	15.5	8.3	7.4	16.9	0.6
Emilia-Romagna	9.5	30.1	25.3	16.1	13.3	19.2	18.0	1.5

Figure 7: Occasions when grandparents care for their grandchildren by region, 2003.⁵⁷

sick, and during emergencies, all times when it would be particularly hard for a working parent to take care of the child. This societal expectation that women will perform the domestic tasks of their family inhibits their participation in the paid workforce. Juanita M. Firestone and Beth Anne Shelton express the problem very clearly:

Because time is finite (there are only twenty-four hours in a day), hours spent in one activity must, to some extent, reflect a trade-off. The trade-off is most typically between forms of labor. Thus, the more time spent in household labor the less time available for paid labor.⁵⁸

According to economic analyses of fertility, normative beliefs about women's role in caring for the children specifically affect the fertility rate. Economists analyze this trend using the "cost of time" model. Starting from the assumption that the mother is

⁵⁶ Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State, 1980-2001* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2001), 227., (emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) ISTAT, "Parentela e reti di solidarietà," (Rome: ISTAT, 2003), 42.

the primary caregiver, they theorize that “every hour she spends in childcare will ‘cost’ her the foregone wage” that she might have earned if she had spent that hour working at a paid job.⁵⁹ Most studies of the fertility rate conclude that fertility and women’s employment, as it is currently structured, are incompatible. This “incompatibility of paid work and parenthood only applies to one parent,” because while the birth of a child greatly increases the domestic work of the mother, the statistics mentioned above show that the father’s contribution to the domestic sphere does not increase in any noticeable way.⁶⁰ As women’s participation in paid labor increases, so will the expected “cost” of children, “in termini sia di tempo, sia di risorse economiche e psicologiche”[in terms both of time and of economic and psychological resources], because those children would presumably draw the mother away from this paid work.⁶¹

This cost-benefit analysis works in a cyclical way. Although only the woman’s participation in paid labor is considered in these analyses, the number of children in a family affects both parents in the long run because “the standard of living is markedly reduced with the arrival of each additional child,” straining further the resources that parents have to dedicate to each child.⁶² The ever-increasing cost maintaining a certain standard of living is part of a cycle in which parents work longer hours at salaried jobs to pay for the new child, which in turn reduces the chance that they will have an additional baby.

⁵⁸ Juanita M. Firestone and Beth Anne Shelton, "The Interdependence of Housework and Paid Work," in *Women and Work: A Reader*, ed. Paula J. Dubeck and Kathryn Borman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 110.

⁵⁹ Diane Macunovich, "Economic Theories of Fertility," in *Women, Family, and Work*, ed. Karine S. Moe (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 117.

⁶⁰ Eva M. Bernhardt, "Fertility and Employment," *European Sociological Review* 9, no. 1 (1993): 36.

⁶¹ Zanatta and Mirabile, *Demografia, famiglia e società*, 30.

Perhaps recognizing their disadvantage on the work market, women are enrolling in post-secondary education in record numbers. In fact, the number of women enrolled in the universities surpassed the number of men in the 1993/94 school year. This trend is now particularly pronounced in Emilia-Romagna. As of 2003, 37.3% of all Bolognese youth between the ages of 19 and 25 are enrolled in University. However, only 33.2% of male Bolognese are studying, while 41.3% of all females are pursuing a higher education.⁶³ Women's enrollment in higher education has repercussions on the fertility rate for two reasons. First, the increased education of women contributes to the delay in the age of marriage that I discussed at length in Chapter Two. This delay occurs because the average age at which Italians receive their university degrees is 25, and most students wait until completing their studies to marry.⁶⁴ In addition, note Zanatta and Mirabile, "le donne più istruite hanno maggiori aspirazioni professionali e quindi si offrono in maggior numero sul mercato, hanno superiori opportunità di impiego e di inserimento in attività meglio pagate, più qualificate e gratificanti" [women with more education have greater professional aspirations and thus offer themselves in greater numbers on the work market, have a greater chance of finding well-paid, well qualified and gratifying work].⁶⁵ However, this greater participation in the workforce increases the perceived cost of childcare and may influence educated women to have fewer children.

Ultimately, the structural and cultural patterns of the Italian workforce affect the "negative price effect" of childcare and childbirth for women. If women's

⁶² Jean-Claude Chesnais, "Fertility, Family and Social Policy in Contemporary Western Europe," *Population and Development Review* 22, no. 4 (1996): 731.

⁶³ (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) ISTAT, "Sistema di Indicatori Territoriali," <http://sitis.istat.it/sitis/html/index.htm>.

⁶⁴ Bettio and Villa, "Better Educated," 158.

options are neither widely available nor socially acceptable, they become too “expensive” in cost-benefit terms for women to use.⁶⁶ If women are ashamed to use or discouraged from using the resources that exist, the presence of those facilities will not make it easier for them to balance work and family. The difficulty women have combining work and family tasks is a result of the historical and social circumstances that define their lives. In the end, as Bernhardt shows, “the incompatibility of work and motherhood is mainly a consequence of existing gender structures in society and the ensuing power relations within marriage.”⁶⁷ On the surface, there is nothing about the biological fact of reproduction that creates this incompatibility between fertility and women’s employment – “the actual event of becoming a mother does not prevent any work-force participation except temporarily.”⁶⁸ The problem comes when this biological fact becomes the justification for relegating women to the role of primary caregiver for those children until they become adults. The incompatibility between work and motherhood is “largely structurally determined” by the practices and resources found in a society.⁶⁹

Conclusion

These cultural contradictions inherent in Italian society create a difficult situation for women workers because it is increasingly necessary for women to take on paid employment as the cost of living rises. This can be seen in the fact that couples often delay marriage until both partners can contribute to the economic

⁶⁵ Zanatta and Mirabile, *Demografia, famiglia e società.*, 35.

⁶⁶ Macunovich, "Economic Theories of Fertility," 117.

⁶⁷ Bernhardt, "Fertility and Employment," 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

support of the family because two incomes are essential to the family's survival.⁷⁰ State policies are not enough to change the true situation of women workers and increase the fertility rate. Attitudes and expectations about the division of domestic work must also be examined and modified to permit the full participation of women in the workforce. Ultimately, there is no single solution that will help women to participate fully in the workplace while allowing them to also become mothers. This issue develops in a complex environment, influenced by state policies, normative ideals about the family and gender roles, economic constraints and individual situations. All of these areas must be addressed to provide women with truly equal access to the workplace. Until that time, the fertility rate may continue to decline as women struggle to balance work and family responsibilities.

⁷⁰ Saraceno and Naldini, *Sociologia della famiglia*, 92-93.

Conclusion

Come impedire [...] che la donna diventando madre non cessi di essere persona? [...] Una risposta adeguata [...] è una risposta che, se idonea a modificare il ruolo della donna nella famiglia, nel lavoro, nei rapporti sociali, modificherà in modo rivoluzionario le strutture stesse della società.

[How can one ensure that a woman, becoming a mother, does not stop being a person? An adequate response is one that, if it is able to modify the role of the woman in the family, in the workplace, in social relationships, will also modify in a revolutionary way the very structures of society]

Paola Alfieri and Giangiulio Ambrosini¹

Writing in 1975, Paola Alfieri and Giangiulio Ambrosini recognized that reproductive behavior is profoundly linked with women's status in the family, in the workforce, and in society as a whole. Changes in any one of these spheres will have repercussions on the others. In the end, different behaviors in each of these three areas are simply different manifestations of the dynamic, continual renegotiation of the norms that both shape and are shaped by Italian society.

Possible Causes of Low Fertility

There is no single, clear cause of low fertility in Bologna. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some of the factors that might work together to influence fertility behavior. First, the decline in fertility rates has been facilitated by the existence of highly effective birth control methods such as the birth control pill, which make it easier for couples to have only the number of children that they want. It has also been aided by the legalization of abortion, which standardized the conditions under which women terminated their pregnancies and sought to limit the number of fatalities from abortions. However, my research has shown that couples were using

contraception and women were obtaining abortions long before either was legally available in Italy. While increased access birth control has definitely made family planning easier, it is not solely responsible for the decline in fertility.

Second, changing marriage practices have had a strong effect on low fertility. Fewer people are choosing to marry, which may be part of a larger renegotiation of the role of marriage in Italian society as divorce rates rise. When individuals do marry, they do so at an increasingly latter age. This trend toward delaying marriage will most likely continue as familism encourages young adults to stay in their parental home and more women enroll in the universities. In Italy, marriages patterns strongly influence reproduction, as childbirth rarely occurs outside of marriage. Thus couples who delay marriage also delay reproduction, and continued delays might eventually result in the refusal or the inability to have children.

Third, cultural expectations influence couples to have smaller families. In particular, familism encourages parents to have only one child in order to concentrate all of the family's resources on one individual. This tendency will increase as the cost of raising a child remains high, both in terms of material resources and in terms of the time commitment needed for care giving.

Finally, it remains difficult for women to balance work and family. Even though the "typical" family structure has drastically changed as a result of divorce, adoption, and changes to family law, many State policies are still based on the idea of a normative, hierarchical family. In addition, some aspects of this normative family are present even within families with alternative structures, such as families that

¹ Alfieri and Ambrosini, *La condizione economica, sociale e giuridica della donna in Italia* (Torino: Paravia, 1975), 232.

contain step-siblings or in relationships *more uxorio*. In the end, these contradictions may influence women have fewer children as they attempt to balance their domestic responsibilities with those in the workplace.

Possible Effects of Low Fertility

As I have shown, low fertility has significant repercussions for changes in the structure and role of Italian families. Families become much smaller, reducing the network of extended relatives that typically provides social support to individuals throughout their lives. In addition, low fertility endangers the Italian welfare state. The structure of social benefits in Italy assumes a normative model of the family that is increasingly outdated, creating conflicts between people's lived experiences and the laws that govern them. The Italian pension system is also at risk, as fewer workers are expected to support a growing number of retirees. As these structural problems become more severe, as is inevitable as the population ages, the social contract between the generations will be increasingly threatened.

These problems will have particular weight among more educated, middle-class women, because it will become increasingly difficult for them to balance work and family as the cost of leaving the workforce rises. In addition, a growing number of women will be affected by these issues as more women enroll in the universities.

In the end, the causes and effects of low fertility are cyclical and are simply different aspects of the continual renegotiation of norms within Italian society. For example, as families grow smaller, fewer individuals are available to provide support to relatives. This increases the social cost of care giving, which in turn may influence couples to have fewer children according to a "cost of time" analysis of care. This

leads to still smaller families with even fewer individuals to provide support to the network of relatives in a long downward spiral. As long underlying cultural tensions that influence people to have fewer children continue, fertility rates will remain low.

Some Indications for Further Study

In this paper, I have studied the contradictions that create and are created by women's renegotiation of their normative role within the domestic space, through changing birth control practices and their presence in the paid workplace. However, my study has not been exhaustive. A study of cultural expressions such as films, music, and literature could shed light on the way that the Italian population has been sensitized to these issues. Additionally, a study of the popular press could explore some of the alternative ways that Italians are addressing this problem, as social change does not only come from State policies.

In addition, further study could examine some of the other tensions that arise from the demographic changes in Italy. For example, immigration plays an important part in the changes within Italian society, and has helped maintain some of the social structures that are threatened by a declining population. The political scientist Harlan Koff noted that in 2000 "two of Italy's major economic institutions, the Bank of Italy and the General Accounting Office of the State (Ragioneria Generale dello Stato), published a report arguing that, without immigration, Italy's pension system would collapse in the near future."² In addition, third-world women increasingly perform

² Harlan Koff, "Immigration or Integration?: Examining Political Events in the Year 2000," *Italian Politics: A Review* 16 (2001): 199.

the domestic labor that makes Italian women's participation in the workforce more difficult. However, population growth that comes from immigration is not sustainable, because immigrants tend to adopt the same demographic patterns of native citizens within a generation. The cultural contradictions in Italian society eventually affect these immigrants too. I have not had the time or the space to fully address this issue, but it may provide an interesting correlation to my study of gender and low fertility.

In this paper, I have focused on the way that fertility decline takes place among middle-class, well-educated women who, for the most part, participate in the paid workforce. However, these negotiations do not occur in the same way among all Italian citizens. Further research could explore the ways that this low fertility is manifested among different generations and different social classes, and how the relationships between these different social spheres change as a result.

Bologna's demographic change provides insight into fertility decline as a whole. As an exaggerated example of the low fertility levels that are present throughout Italy, it hints at the problems that may arise for the rest of Italy should this decline continue. These problems are not confined to Italy's national borders, particularly as Italy negotiates its role in the global economy as part of the European Union. Italy's low fertility may have profound effects on its place in the world.

In the end, if Italians want to reverse this low fertility and avoid the collapse of the pension system and the breakdown of the social contract between generations, they must work to change the larger social processes that have shaped this fertility decline. The second wave feminists that struggled against gender inequalities in the 1970s greatly improved women's position in Italian society. However, feminists

today need to continue this work. Low fertility is but one symptom of the fact that gender inequalities still exist, and the consequences of this unbalance will continue to unfold in the following years. I hope that my work has illuminated some of the ways that women negotiate their life choices, and that a fuller understanding of these processes will inspire feminists to address the social inequalities that still exist.

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