

**Keeping It All Together:
Changing Perspectives on Marriage, Family, and Career
Among Older Italian Women**

By

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B.A., Brown University, 1993

Dissertation

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Para ti mamá.
Muchas gracias por ser una madre maravillosa y cariñosa.
Te extrañamos mucho.

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*Cuesta mucho ser auténtica, señora,
y en estas cosas no hay que ser rúcana
porque una es más auténtica
cuanto más se parece
a lo que ha soñado de si misma.*

- La Agrado, Todo Sobre Mi Madre

*It costs a great deal to be authentic, ma'am,
and with these things, we should not be stingy
because [a woman] is most authentic when
she most resembles what she has dreamed for herself.*

- La Agrado, All About My Mother

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about changing perspectives on marriage, family relations, and work life among older Italian women. I focus on the lives of three women in their early to mid sixties who came of age in the post World War II era, a period of great economic, social, and statutory transformation in Italy. The watershed of changes brought forth by the economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the feminist movement of the 1970s, opened unforeseen educational and work opportunities for women. These changes also raised questions about the fundamental organization of Italian society where the home, that is the family, is the primary source of social and economic support, and women are its foundation. In this study, I use the experiences of these three women to examine the extent to which the social developments, and legal reforms, of this period succeeded in altering social and cultural values, as well as the way in which they continue to intersect with women's everyday lives.

Immersed in a social setting heavily marked by gender biases that imbue every aspect of Italian social organization, ranging from household expectations, to institutional practices, to state support systems, these women continue to negotiate changing social patterns regarding family life, work life, and post-retirement aspirations. They are doing so amid a long-term economic crisis, a demographic reality characterized by long life and low fertility, and against a perverse undercurrent of male chauvinism that has had detrimental repercussions for women, and Italian society as a whole. Indeed, the

imperative to stay in a marriage for the good of the family, the labor intensive investment needed to keep the family united across generations, and the extra effort required to balance this responsibility with other obligations, such as those of working outside of the home, has prompted some women to reassess the direction their lives are taking as they grow older. From reevaluating their position in the family, to the sacrifices they made for it over the years, these women are questioning the necessity to abide by the assumptions they were asked to accept when they were young. Chief among them is whether it is necessary to stay in a marriage for the sake of the family, and whether a spouse is even desired, or needed, as one grows older. This reevaluation is significant because marriage has long been considered the foundation on which the Italian family is built, and an important source of social reproduction.

Interestingly, even as the structure of the Italian family conforms to accommodate evolving patterns of family formation, as well as life course expectations, the ideal of the woman as the primary provider of care in the family, and in Italian society at large, remains unfalteringly stable. Two important reasons for this, as I have already mentioned briefly above, are the function of women in maintaining the strong bonds that are often used to describe the Italian family, and the institutionalization of women as the principle guardians of family life by the Italian State with guidance from the Catholic Church. Both of these factors are reviewed in more detail in different sections of this dissertation. The order of discussion in this Introduction is as follows: 1) The Strong Family –the historical significance of the bonds that hold the Italian family together, 2) Women, the Family, and the Modern Italian State – the role that the state, and the Church, have historically had in defining the Italian woman, 3) Dissertation Research –

how it was carried out, 4) Ester, Graza, and Adela – a discussion of the three women who are the focus of my study, 5) Making Progress – the social progress made by Italian women following the Second World War, 6) Changes in Life Course Expectations – how the anticipation of a long life has influenced the lifestyle choices that women believe are available to them, and 7) Organization of Dissertation – how the study is presented.

The Strong Family

According to historian Paul Ginsborg, “In Italy, family is very important, both as a metaphor and as a reality.” (2003a:xiii). The intergenerational ties that have historically defined the Italian family have been studied extensively (Barbagli et al. 2003; Dalla Zuanna 2004; Micheli 2004; Livi-Bacci 2001; Reher 1998). Modes of relatedness that characterize family solidarity, like reciprocity and loyalty, have been engaged to strengthen kinlike ties across a variety of social networks. The cross-shareholding practices of Italy’s most powerful industrial family conglomerates, such as the Agnelli of Fiat and the Pirelli tire empire, as well as the organization of criminals by the Italian Mafia, are examples of the consequential influence of a familistic orientation in the formation of the Italian identity (Ginsborg 2003a; Kennedy 1999; Segreto 1997; Stanley 2000). First coined by Edward Banfield as amoral familism (1958), this characterization of the Italian family attempts to explain the peculiar relationship that exists between the Italian family, society, and the state, in which the Italian state plays a subordinate role to that of the family (Ginsborg, 2003a). Specifically, *familismo* is primarily concerned with the wellbeing of the family and kin before, or even to the exclusion of civil society.

Furthermore, it considers the value and needs of the individual and the family to be one and the same (Aldmon and Verba 1963; Balbo 1976; Banfield 1958; Dalla Zuanna 1995, 2004; Ginsborg 1994, 2003a; Kertzer 2007; Saraceno 1994).

In 2008, while conducting fieldwork for my Master's thesis on the provision of eldercare in Italy, two of the women I interviewed, both retired teachers who are about the same age as the subjects of this dissertation, made comments about the Italian family that capture this premise quite well and emphasize the deep sense of belonging and protection that the family can provide. Their comments are worth repeating here:

The Italian structure, the way of life, is based on the family for better or worse because the family is not ultra-modern. It's not a concept that favors the strongest; instead, usually the family favors the weakest. It is not a meritocracy; it is not competitive. Politicians take care of their own by finding jobs for them, by hiring their own. You don't want your father [the politician] to do more for his country; you want him to protect you (Nicoletta, age 59 when interviewed).

Italians have a strong sense of belonging, and this tradition does not favor openness; so, you don't abandon what you came from. You don't abandon it because our society is not mobile; it does not permit you to skip out. The family doesn't give you freedom, but it also does not leave you on your own to solve all [of your] problems. It's two sides of the same coin (Elena, age 57 when interviewed).

Indeed, the portrait of Italians as familistic with strong intergenerational ties has become part of the country's meta-narrative – the story that Italians tell themselves about themselves (Geertz 1973:448). This narrative proves to be especially true for women, whose storyline has been constructed around a naturalized affinity toward being the primary and direct providers of nurturance and familial care (Saraceno 2008:2).

This affinity includes the role of women as the orchestrators of kin work. Several scholars have written about the importance of kin work to fostering and maintaining strong intergenerational ties (Di Leonardo 1987; Mancini Billson 1994; Rosenthal 1985;

Stack and Burton 1993). Kin work has often been characterized as the collective labor, largely performed by women, around sustaining and integrating family-centered networks across households and within them, with specific emphasis on convening family gatherings and ritual celebrations (Bott 1971, Di Leonardo 1987; Rosenthal 1985). According to Stack and Burton, “Kin work regenerates families, maintains lifetime continuities, sustains intergenerational responsibilities, and reinforces shared values” (1993: 160). Kin work is the result of culturally constructed family obligations, and encompasses various forms of “kinkeeping” activities that families need to endure over time, such as family labor for social reproduction, and intergenerational care for children or dependents (Rosenthal 1985: 966; Stack and Burton 1993: 160-61).

Women, the Family, and the Modern Italian State

The significance of the family for the Italian state, and a woman’s primary function as mother and wife, are made explicit in Articles 29 and 37 of the Italian Constitution, adopted in 1947. Article 29 states,

- (1) The family is recognized by the republic as a natural association founded on marriage.
- (2) Marriage entails moral and legal equality of the spouses within legally defined limits to protect the unity of the family.

Article 37, Section 1 states,

Working women are entitled to equal rights and, for comparable jobs, equal pay as men. Working conditions have to be such as to allow women to fulfill their essential family duties and ensure an adequate protection of mothers and children.¹

¹ Adopted on: 22 Dec 1947, Effective since: 1 Jan 1948, ICL Document Status: 23 May 2003; International

Together, the articles imply a hierarchy of legal and social status where the rights of women, as individuals, fall behind those of the family, and of men (Saraceno 1994). These directives not only naturalize the family as the preeminent social entity of Italian society, they also protect its unity by explicitly stating that the demands of the workplace should not interfere with women's principle function as the guardians of family life. The women born in the decade after the conclusion of World War II are the first generation of women to grow into adulthood under the double mandate set forth in Articles 29 and 37. The declaration of parity between men and women in marriage and in the workplace signals Italy's desire to be viewed as a modern, progressive state. Yet, simultaneously, the emphasis on the primacy of the Italian family and on women's responsibility to meet their familial obligations, above all else, safeguards their prominent role in fulfilling the everyday, non-economic, and affective needs of the family. This implicit tension set the stage for social service legislation to follow suit, creating inadequate, fragmented, means-tested initiatives that depend on familial interdependence, as well as the gendered division of household labor, to fill in where services often fall short (Saraceno 2004).

The tension that exists between balancing the needs and demands of family with professional responsibilities, as well as individual aspirations, is not unique to Italy or women. Nevertheless, there are two significant factors that make the experience of this generation of Italian women particularly distinctive. First, social policy in the post World

Constitutional Law (ICL) provides English translations of and other textual material related to constitutional documents; Editor's Note: [This] new text takes into consideration the translation of the 1948 version provided by the Italian Embassy in London, the translation of the 1990 version by C. Neenan published by the House of Representatives in Rome, and the translation of amendments by Bernard DeLury, published in 1994 by Oceana Publications. However, the ICL edition is a new translation and not based on any of those documents. <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/it000000>; Last modified April 29, 2014.

War II war era was dictated by the symbiotic relationship between the Catholic Church and the Italian state, as well as initiatives inherited from the Fascist era that also favored the role of women as homemakers (Ginsborg 2003:50; Naldini 2003:102; Saraceno 1994). Specifically, Articles 29 and 37 draw directly from the Church's position on the preeminence of the family as the key to social cohesion, and the central role that women play in maintaining this cohesion. The Catholic 'principle of subsidiarity' decrees that the family is a private, autonomous, self-sufficient entity, capable of meeting the needs of its members; as such, the state should only be involved with the family to the extent that it can offer support for family unity and stability, as well as uphold the gender division of labor and responsibility (Naldini 2003:110). In accordance with this principle, the Italian civil code (Degli alimenti, titolo XIII) [Regarding support, title XIII] obligates kin members to provide financial support for each other in the case of need. This obligation encompasses family members beyond the nuclear family and includes legitimate and illegitimate children; in the absence of parents, the next of kin or ascendants; sons and daughters-in-law; as well as siblings and half-siblings. Furthermore, the provision of financial support for family in need is determined in proportion to kin members' income, and not the degree of kinship (Naldini 2003:122-24). Second, as participants, or at the very least, observers, of the feminist movement, this cohort of women was also the first to become unfettered from the confines of a patriarchal legal system that granted women few rights as a group and as individuals.

Regarding the first factor, the influence of the Church in legally codifying the "essential" familial role of women in Italian society was fortified by the advent of American-style consumerism ushered in during the years of the economic miracle as Italy

transitioned from a largely agricultural economy to one based in industry. The economic miracle is generally thought to encompass 1958 -1963; there is no general consensus on whether there was any one factor that spurred this period of growth. However, the end of Italy's traditional protectionism played a significant role in the country's transformation to a major industrial nation (Ginsborg 2003b:212 -13). Moreover, in the aftermath of the devastation caused by the Second World War, and the onset of the commercial boom, the idea of being a housewife, surrounded by modern amenities, such as indoor plumbing, was an attractive proposition for many women, especially those that came from rural, farming families. While there were women who negotiated their familial responsibilities with work outside of the home, the mid 1950s to mid 1960s was the era of the housewife (Willson 2010). Families, and women in particular, were encouraged to uphold familial cohesion by investing in modern domestic appliances, such as washing machines and refrigerators, which would ease the management of the household. The most important advantage of these modern technologies was the additional time it gave housewives to devote to the needs of their husbands and children.

While their mothers were largely enveloped in the traditional "idealized confinement of the home," albeit with shiny, state of the art appliances (Ginsborg 2003b:244; see also Willson 2010), as young girls, this cohort of women was also influenced by modernist ideals that clashed with Catholic values of solidarity and charity. They were the first generation of women to grow up under the significant influence of a market economy, an emphasis on the merits of capitalism, the conveniences of modern consumption, and the autonomy of the individual. Additionally, during the 1960s, the number of girls and young women enrolled in primary and secondary schools, as well as

universities, grew dramatically. This increase in enrollment was accompanied by a large-scale transition to mixed sex classrooms. Sociologist Piccone Stella emphasizes that this change in practice fundamentally transformed the way that young women and men related to each other. Young girls could put their plans for the future on the table, as well as debate and challenge their male counterparts openly, without feeling like they were the exception rather than the rule (1993:134).

The second of these factors, the impact of the feminist movement, led to important juridical reforms that reflected changes already underway in the social fabric of Italian society. This included the legalization of divorce (1970), the emendation of the Family Law (1975), which established equality between men and women in marriage, the implementation of the Parity Law (1977), which outlawed sex discrimination in the workplace, and the legalization of abortion (1978). The significance of the divorce law, and the subsequent referendum that failed to overturn it (1974), was that it gave all couples the right to divorce after five years of separation. The failure to repeal the law also demonstrated the waning influence of the Catholic Church over public opinion (Willson 2010). Likewise, the reform of the family law ended the legal conception of the Italian family as an authoritarian, pyramidal structure that favored men as heads of the household. Husbands no longer had the legal right to control their wives' behavior and activities (Ginsborg 2003b:370). Certainly, the success of the public demonstrations that advocated for the implementation of these reforms provided all Italian women with a different visual and legal point of reference vis-à-vis their historical position in society.²

² Whereas in the Center and North of the country, more families were benefiting from at least two incomes, in the South, women's employment remained stagnant and overall active employment declined as a percentage of the population (Ginsborg 2003b:410).

Between 1970 and 1985, the number of women employed rose by almost fifty percent. Unlike their mothers who were expected to be the model housewives of the economic miracle, the women who grew up under Article 37 generally returned to the labor force after getting married and having children.

Dissertation Research

The majority of statistical data I cite in this dissertation refers to Italy as a whole. Although the social and economic differences between the North and South of the country can be quite dramatic, they are not the focus of this study. All of the fieldwork for this project was done in the Italian language, which I speak fluently. From 2008 through 2013, I made repeated 2-3 month visits to my field site, Rome, for a total of 9 months of field research. Social transformation has historically been more visible in urban settings, and Rome is no different. In fact, as the capital of Italy, geographically located at its center, Rome provides an optimal field site to gauge the pulse of the country on social trends. Also, Rome is host to the Vatican, the leadership of the Catholic Church, one of the most authoritative ecclesiastical organizations in the world. As I mentioned in my Introduction, the Church has historically exercised significant influence over Italian state policy, specifically with regard to women.

Dissertation fieldwork consisted of extensive participant observation and life history interviews with women in two groups. Each group is composed of approximately 20-30 women who are in their mid-fifties to late sixties. One group consists of women who are largely retired, and belong to a traditional folk choir. They come from upper

middle class socioeconomic backgrounds, and previously worked as business entrepreneurs, white-collar professionals, and salaried civil servants, such as teachers. The other group consists of working and middle class women that are the proprietors of different individual stalls at a market where they sell products ranging from foodstuff and household goods to clothing. The two groups were selected because they come from disparate socioeconomic backgrounds, and lead their daily lives in contrasting ways. The groups knew of each other, but were never introduced.

I met the women in the choir through a contact I already had in Rome. When I mentioned I would be doing research on perceptions about aging among older, but not elderly Italian women, she told me about a choir, of which she is a member, whose primary purpose is to come together to sing traditional Italian folk music. Most, though not all, of the choir members were older, retired Italian women. She graciously invited me to attend one of the regular potluck dinner parties for the group, and I eagerly accepted. After my initial introduction, I began to attend the choir rehearsals, and potluck dinners, regularly. Other than the choir, my contact also had a few individual retired female Italian friends that had expressed an interest in my research, so I contacted three of them as well. The market where the second group works is located within walking distance of the apartment where I was staying. When I first visited the market to buy some groceries, I noticed that many of the stalls were managed by older Italian women. This is uncommon today. Reflecting the changing social landscape, the majority of vendors at most of the markets in Rome are immigrants. I began to frequent the market quite often, and started to ask questions about different types of vegetables, and other things, of vendors that appeared open to having a conversation with a curious American. I

also mentioned my research project whenever I had an opportunity. Although the women at the market were initially more wary talking about their personal lives, especially since our conversations largely took place at their stalls, I eventually established familiarity and comfort with some women in each group.

As I already mentioned, I attended weekly choir rehearsals and other events with the first group, and consistently went to the market 3-4 days a week for 2-4 hours at a time to buy my groceries and speak with women working there. After conducting preliminary interviews with members of each group to assess availability and accessibility, I conducted life history interviews with 6 women from each group.³ During my visits, I met with each individual woman 3-4 times for 1 and ½ to 2 and ½ hours at a time. I conducted the majority of interviews using a digital audio recorder. At the beginning of every session, I asked each woman whether I could record our conversation. I also emphasized that she could ask me to turn off the audio recorder for any portion of our conversation. Interviews with the retirees were conducted in their homes. Interviews with women from the market were conducted either early in the morning or around midday when they were not as busy. Most of the time we stayed in the vendor's stall, but sometimes we would step out to a nearby café. Also, through 2014, I carried out an additional 3-4 follow-up conversations with particular life history interviewees via telephone or Skype. Each conversation was 1½-2 hours in length.

In the tables at the end of this Introduction, I list the pseudonyms of the twelve women with whom I conducted life history interviews, as well as some additional information regarding marital status, whether they have children, approximate age,

³ I include the three retired women who are not members of the choir as part of this group because they share a similar profile.

profession, educational attainment, as well as some common themes they shared with some of the other women.

Life History Interviews

Ester, Graza and Adela

In choosing to focus my dissertation on three women, I take my lead from Clifford Geertz, Jennifer Hirsh, and Marjorie Shostak. First, as Geertz famously wrote “ethnography is thick description” (1973:10). He continues,

What the ethnographer is in fact faced with ... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them super imposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [s]he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (1973:10).

I propose that examining the thick description of a life history, specifically in relation to significant moments of historical turmoil, such as the feminist movement, provides the anthropologist with the opportunity to probe more deeply into how this “multiplicity of complex conceptual structures” intersect with a single life to facilitate social change.

Again, as Geertz states,

The notion that unless a cultural phenomenon [or example] is empirically universal it cannot reflect anything about the nature of man [or humankind] is about as logical as the notion that because sickle-cell anemia is, fortunately, not universal, it cannot tell us anything about human genetic processes. It is not whether phenomenon are empirically common that is critical in science ... but whether they can be made to reveal the enduring natural processes that underly them (1973:44).

Second, as Jennifer Hirsch explains in her ethnography on Mexican transnational

families, her responsibility as an anthropologist is to represent types of people. She writes, “For example, in a jar of five colors of marbles, the goal here is to select marbles of each color, not to discover what proportion of the marbles is which color” (2003:32-33). For her study, Hirsch uses life history interviews as her primary method of data collection. However, unlike the classic life history method, which focuses on one person’s interaction with broader social changes, Hirsch uses a modified life history method. She focuses on a small, but manageable number of people with a wider range of research criteria (2003:40). I follow suit in this study. I carried out twelve life history interviews, and focus the majority of my analysis on three. Third, the collection of good ethnographic material is largely dependent on the narrator telling the story. As Hirsch writes, “ethnographic sampling is personal” (2003:33). In this regard, it is not surprising that, as researchers, we gravitate toward those who are interested in telling us stories about their lives. Here I refer to Marjorie Shostak’s description of why she chose to focus her ethnographic study on Nisa. She writes,

Among the women I interviewed, Nisa stood out. She had an exceptional ability to tell a story in a way that was generous, vibrant, and moving. Her sensitivity and skill made her stories larger and more important than the details they comprised. Sometimes they captured the most subtle and profound experiences in human life. Sometimes they revealed a confused human entanglement that was all too recognizable. This was the value that her narrative had for me, and the reason it became so compelling (1981:20).

In selecting the types of examples to represent in my dissertation, I chose to focus on three women whose narratives I found particularly compelling because they illustrate three important recurring themes regarding the position of women in Italian society. These themes are 1) the social expectation that women will remain the preeminent *kinkeepers* in the family, carrying the responsibility to preserve intergenerational bonds,

2) how women negotiate their professional and personal aspirations with their social and state sanctioned obligations as the primary providers of emotional and physical care for their families, and 3) the deeply embedded influence of patriarchy in Italian society that makes it difficult to overcome social conventions that accommodate male privilege. These narratives also point to how the position of Italian women is simultaneously evolving, and yet, remains consistent as it intersects with wider structural changes.

The women who are the focus of this dissertation, Ester, Graza, and Adela, whose names have been changed, each represent one of these three important aspects regarding how a woman functions in Italian society. Of course, in ethnography, no case is ever a pure example of one thing. As Hirsch points out, “women can be categorized in many different ways, depending on the criteria” (2003:33). Having said that, the ethnographic examples I use to tell each woman’s story will be used to highlight one particular theme. I provide more detailed information about each woman under the section, *Organization of this Dissertation*. Here I provide a brief overview of why I chose these three women as the subjects of my analysis. Before I describe how the women differ, I review their similarities. All three women are similar in age, all were born and raised in Rome, the location of my study, all earned a high school diploma (at minimum), all three women have children and have been married, and each one has experience working outside of the home. Unfortunately, all three have also been on the receiving end of significant acts of infidelity, and excessive control over their lives, by a partner. This conduct proves to be a critical contributing factor in propelling each woman to make pivotal decisions about her life. Regarding their differences, if we use educational attainment and work history as a guide, it could be argued that Ester, Graza, and Adela each represent a different gradation

of emancipation in relation to traditional gender roles. However, as their narratives demonstrate, it is not a clear and fast distinction. The behavior of all three women can be categorized as traditional or modern, depending with what it is being compared.

In other words, placing these women into too distinct of a category runs the risk of overshadowing incongruities, which is where ethnographic research, in particular, life history interviews, is at its best. So I loosely use the categories of housewife and professional woman to correspond with traditional and modern sensibilities. Ester married soon after graduating from high school and was a devoted housewife and mother for the greater part of her marriage until she began working as a vendor of housewares at a market in her late forties. She continues to live with her husband, but no longer considers the relationship a marriage. Graza began working as a researcher while she attended university, married shortly before earning her degree, and continued to work as a researcher and instructor until she retired in her early fifties. She is separated from her husband and lives alone. Adela began working as a secretary shortly after graduating from high school. She attended university inconsistently for about two years, married and divorced her first husband in her mid twenties, and lived with, but did not marry, the father of her children for ten years before separating from him. In her early thirties, she won a public competition to be a technical assistant, a type of specialized secretary, at a state sponsored research institute. She was eventually promoted and continued to work at the institute in a different capacity until her mandatory retirement in her mid sixties. She currently lives alone. All three women were in their early twenties in the beginning of the 1970s, which I use as my point of reference for their life histories. I take different aspects of their adult lives, insert them into the social and juridical changes that were happening

during that period, and carry their narratives through to today. Doing so provides the opportunity to examine the continuity and change of different important aspects about the Italian family, and a woman's position in it. Additionally, I have chosen to tell each woman's story in the present tense, as if the conversation is happening in real time. I believe this choice complements the rich narrative of each woman. It also enables the reader to appreciate and comprehend her story on a more intimate level because the conversation appears to be occurring between the woman, the reader, and myself.

Making Progress

Ester, Graza, and Adela, like the majority of the women I interviewed, each describe themselves as *autonomous* relative to their mothers at the same age. When I ask each of them to clarify what they mean by using this term, they all give examples of being more personally emancipated than their mothers had been. For instance, Graza replies,

There is huge difference between my mother and me at this age because I lead this life that is *so* different. I am alone; I made the decision to leave my husband. I have interests that have nothing to do with work or the family, but that are very important to me. Instead, in her sixties, my mother took little trips with her husband; they went on vacations together. She led a *very different* life from mine. At my age now, she didn't have any interests [that weren't family related] that involved other people. She didn't lead a life where she interacted with others. That's it right there. In contrast, I made a choice that puts me in contact with other people [not family] often. The two of them [her parents], they were much closer to each other. They were still a couple; they were still very much a couple.

I also ask women about the similarities they perceive between themselves and their mothers. Invariably, all quickly switch the topic to the differences they observe. Ester states,

Well, my mother was the classic mother of the family, the one devoted to her husband. [She had] the typical role of the woman ... raising her children, taking care of them, making sure they did their homework, talking to the teachers at school. That's what women did at one time. The fact that, now, I have this activity [business] alone, that I am autonomous is different. I have to think about, you know, supplies, payments, many things, eh, having a good relationship with customers. She remained the simple woman of her era, without whims. She was the kind that only visited the hairdresser once a year, who didn't know what a gym is; so many things, so many things. *These* are important differences between us, absolutely! Are you kidding?

The process of self-fulfillment that Graza and Ester are describing, that is, of doing something for one's primary benefit, is often associated with ideas about progress and modernity. As Giddens notes, "The self is seen as a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible[]. We are not what we are, but what we make ourselves" (1991:75).⁴ For the women in my study, having responsibilities to meet that are not family related, or even work related, is, without doubt, an important symbol of autonomy. Making the decision to leave their relationships, at least figuratively in Ester's case, is not just part of the process of self-fulfillment, but also of self-determination. It is the bursting open of an accumulation of years of sacrifice and compromise for the good of the family. However much as marriage, or living together, makes it possible to build a family, at times, it also entails overlooking the serious shortcomings of a partner, and of the relationship. In the most traditional sense, doing this is viewed as instrumental to *sustaining* the family. For instance, whereas it previously may have been customary, and

⁴ For further elaboration on this topic, see Collier 1997; Foucault 1984; Giddens 1991, Gullestad 1997.

perhaps necessary, to overlook a partner's infidelity, Ester, Graza, and Adela, as well as many of the other women I interviewed, no longer think they need to do this.

Even so, one can deduce that leaving a partner after years of social, economic, as well as sexual, interdependence doesn't happen seamlessly. All of the women I spoke with expressed some misgivings about the potential implications of leaving a partner, especially if he is more financially stable. Their greatest concern is not having the capacity to care for their children, even if they are adults. Several women, including Ester, Graza, and Adela, are either currently helping their children make ends meet, or have done so in the recent past. Most give the ever-present economic crisis, largely visible in the lack of employment and housing opportunities for young Italians, as the primary reason. The crisis notwithstanding, they also state that, as mothers, being able to help is important for them, and that they will always help their children when feasible. Ester succinctly summarizes this sentiment by rhetorically asking, "That's what a good mother does, no?" Whilst these women may remain the quintessential providers of care for their children, they show no interest in seeking out another partner with whom to share some of their time. There is a consensus that the men of this generation have not made much progress in their outlook regarding women, if at all. For some women I interviewed, even the most mundane tasks conjure up images of being responsible for the care, and happiness, of a man. As Adela states,

I don't know. When I see a man who I think may be interesting, I picture him in my house in the morning, in his t-shirt and underwear, asking if the coffee is ready [she grimaces]. I can't do it. I can't do it. I can't live with somebody anymore, for sure. I am accustomed to having my own space, and doing what I want. The problem is that the men of my generation don't know how to take care of themselves because their mothers conditioned them to expect certain things from a woman. They don't know how to be alone. I know that if somebody comes along, he should improve my quality of life going forward. Otherwise, it

doesn't make sense to invest my time, my energy. At this point in my life, I am not going to be anyone's domestic.

The original purpose of my research was to gain a better understanding of how older Italian women, who are not yet socially categorized as elderly, envision and experience the process of aging (Riley et. al 1972; Kertzer and Keith 1984).

In Italy, the demographic outlook is widely presented as bleak. The majority of academic research and social commentary is focused on the anticipated social and economic costs of caring for the growing number of elderly. Italians who are age 65 and older currently comprise over 20 percent of the population, while those who are age 14 and younger comprise only 14 percent (Istat Il Futuro Demografico Del Paese 2011). This demographic phenomenon has contributed to the perpetuation of a prevailing stigma that associates aging with a declining capacity to make a valued contribution to society (Laslett 1991; Cruikshank 2003). In this politically charged environment, I initially set out to examine how not-so-elderly Italian women, are managing their own, as well as societal, expectations about growing older. I did not anticipate that most of the women I interviewed, in both groups, would independently raise the intersection of marriage with obligation, separation, divorce, and the meaning of being single, as subjects that needed to be addressed. Specifically, I was not expecting infidelity by a husband or partner, along with his desire to control a wife's conduct, to be a common topic of conversation that several women wanted to discuss. More often than not, infidelity by a husband served as an impetus for each woman to redirect the course of her life.

Italian masculinity, especially the idea that Italian men remain wedded to a traditional mode of masculinity, has been the subject of growing scholarship over the last

decade (Bellassai 2004; Ciccone 2005; dell' Agnese and Ruspini eds. 2007; Pozzo 2013; Ruspini 2011; Wanrooij 2007). In general, scholars agree that there is a crisis of masculinity in Italy, and its various phases, beginning in the late nineteenth century, have coincided with societal changes that have undermined the foundation of male authority (Hall 1991; Wanrooij 2005). In reference to the persistent influence of a traditional model of masculinity in Italian society, dell' Agnese and Ruspini write,

... First and foremost, there is a lack of awareness among men regarding the full extent of the cultural, political and symbolic effects produced by the feminist and homosexual movements and their impact on the redefinition of masculine identity. Also lacking is a masculine self-consciousness, [a] reflection by men about men, an attitude [that is] connected with the presumption of an absolute and universal masculinity and with the historical superimposition of stories of the male gender on the fate of universal humanity (2007:xxi) (my translation).

Despite this limitation, they also suggest that “something [in Italy] is moving,” especially among a small population of highly educated young fathers who have been exposed to and live a model of masculinity that does not call for a sharply gendered contrast between the public and private spheres (see Chapter 1) (2007:xxi).

Hence, the collective, and rather harsh, assessment by the women I interviewed about the lack of progressive thinking among the men of their generation is supported by current scholarship. Like the women, the men of this generation are a product of their times. That being said, unlike its' influence on women, the Italian feminist movement did not have a significant influence on how men generally think about gender. One possible explanation for this is that in Italy, gender issues, and by extension, gender studies, have until recently, remained largely focused women, a niche area of specialization. Writing about this bias in the discipline of History, Wanrooij writes,

The lack of integration of gender issues in Italian history in general may be explained in part by the fact that in Italy gender history has de facto remained a history of women and has not been integrated with the history of men. In fact, even though traditional historiography had centred almost exclusively on men, studies investigating specifically the concept of masculinity and its transformations are rare. Few attempts have been made to historicize the male condition. Whereas in the past the categories of male and female were defined as natural and therefore non-historical and gender-related questions were rarely raised, today we know much more about the construction of female identity. Nevertheless, the lack of studies specifically dealing with the construction of masculinity has created a distorted image in which the condition of females is interpreted as the result of specific historical developments while masculinity has remained an a-historical category (2005:277).

The proposition that gender ideology influences how social relationships between men and women are created is evident in Italian social policies. In contrast, the idea that traditional Italian masculinity is not absolute, and should not be taken as a given, has only made its way into the corridors of governmental power over the last decade. Ruspini outlines a number of legislative and educational research initiatives aimed at encouraging the adoption of other forms of masculinity that are “more egalitarian and oriented to sharing and caring.” Some of these initiatives include fostering new forms of fatherhood, creating dialogue about different manifestations of patriarchy, like gender-based violence, and ensuring the equal representation of men and women in school textbooks (2011:62-65). Although a more detailed analysis of Italian masculinity is beyond the scope of this dissertation (see Chapter Three for a reference to influential scholarship on masculinity more broadly), this brief overview provides context for how Ester, Graza, and Adela characterize their male partners, as well as certain aspects of the relationships they have had with them.

Changes in Life Course Expectations

It is notable that Graza, Adela, and Ester, as well as the other women I interviewed, would have been considered elderly, if not on its cusp, had they been members of their mothers' generation. In Italy, as in many developed countries, the increase in the probability of living a long, healthy life has affected long-held expectations regarding adulthood. Previously, growing older had been characterized by well-ordered role transitions between education, work, family, and retirement (Settersten and Trauten 2009:456). Now, chronological age is fast becoming a poor predictor of how people will lead their lives. One comment made by a woman during our interview typifies this change in perspective regarding growing older. She states, "Today, the 50s are a threshold in a woman's life. You can do things that seemed limited before because there are no more taboos." The choice by several of these women to go it alone is likely as much influenced by expectations that they will live another twenty to twenty five years as it is by a growing acceptance of separation and divorce. As Ester states, "I no longer care about growing older; growing older has given me strength." Without doubt, adult life stages are being reconstituted in step with this changing demographic reality.

Organization of Dissertation

Organization - This dissertation consists of three body chapters, in addition to an introductory chapter and a conclusion. Each of the three chapters will focus on the story of one woman.

Chapter 1, They Took My Freedom Away - At the time of our initial meeting, Ester was in her early sixties and had been married for 39 years. She met her husband, Gianfranco, while she was in high school. They have two children, a daughter and a son. Ester is the only female of three siblings and had few liberties while growing up. After finishing high school, she worked as a bookkeeper for a few years before becoming a housewife after she married in the early 1970s. Twenty years into her marriage, Ester discovered that Gianfranco had been having a lengthy affair with his young, female apprentice. Although Ester tried to separate from him at the time, if only for a few months, her family would not allow it. Almost six years later, at age 48, Ester, who claims she did not know how to do much else other than be a housewife, began working at an uncle's stall at the market. When she announced her plan, Gianfranco accused her of hurting the family, and her mother warned that she would drive her husband further away. Ester states that although their marriage is effectively over, she cannot leave because Gianfranco had a difficult home life when he was younger. She explains that if she ever left him, he would become a *barbone* (a barbone is a long bearded good for nothing) because he doesn't know how to take care of himself at all. She prefers to focus

her energy and attention on the business she developed in the years following the affair, and their adult son who lives with them.

In this chapter, I use Ester's narrative to discuss how the intergenerational ties of the Italian family are changing, and what this may imply for the role of the woman as the traditional *kinkeeper*. Her story elucidates why these reciprocal bonds are both celebrated and cursed. Sociologist Laura Balbo writes,

Interdependent roles, specialized roles, the family as the privileged or rather unique site for the maximization of resources, all these signal the existence of very heavy pressure on individuals to define themselves and live in terms of their ascribed family roles ... a family of this sort produces individuals but conditions and controls them" (1977:13; translation Ginsborg 2003a:81).

Indeed, Ester's account exemplifies the overt familial pressure that some women feel to maintain tradition and keep the family together, often at a great cost to their own personal ambitions, and to a certain extent, happiness.

Chapter 2, Everything for the FAMILY - When we first met, Graza was in her mid sixties. She is a retired professor who left her husband, Michael, after 35 years of marriage. They dated throughout high school, and she was already pregnant with their first child when they married. In addition to two daughters with Graza, Michael fathered an unrecognized son thirteen years into their marriage, and had a different affair with a younger secretary twenty years later. Graza felt unable to "escape" her situation because she believed that it was her duty to keep her family together at all costs, ultimately sacrificing her career. Graza never divorced Michael. He began dating another woman, who now lives with him in Graza's former house, seven months after Graza moved out. Graza states that she eventually left because she could no longer be a mother to Michael and fix his transgressions for him. She maintains a close, but not intimate, relationship

with him. He bought the house she currently lives in for her, and they see each other or speak every three or four days.

I use Graza's narrative to illustrate how women negotiate taking care of their families with meeting their responsibilities in the workplace, as well as managing their aspirations to grow professionally. Graza's story also draws attention to the lack of institutional support Italian women receive to meet all of the 'care' demands that are being made of them. They often adopt what Italian scholars have referred to as a *triple presence* where they attempt to keep pace with the demands of the workplace, as well as take care of their children, their elderly parents, sometimes their grandchildren, if they have them, and as Graza's story demonstrates, husbands as well.

Chapter 3, Much Ado About A Slap – At the time of our initial meeting, Adele was in her mid sixties and would soon be retiring from her position as copy editor at a textbook publisher. She is currently single, and has two sons. At age 27, she met the father of her sons, Gerardo, almost a year after separating from her first husband to whom she was married for one year. After dating him on and off for a few months, Adele broke up with Gerardo because she found him to be controlling and demanding; qualities that became particularly amplified when he wanted to have sex. Once she realized she was pregnant, Adele "automatically" decided to move in with Gerardo because he was the father of her baby. Adele and Gerardo never married. Although she knew he frequently saw other women during their time together, she worried what the repercussions would be if she tried to leave. After their second son was born, Gerardo threatened to take the kids away if Adela persisted in suggesting that they separate. Gerardo continuously insisted that she fulfill her familial duty to care for him, as well as the children. Adela

was able to leave Gerardo only after she threatened to report an especially physically violent outburst to the police. After ten years, Adela was free.

In this chapter, I use Adela's account, mainly focused on domestic abuse, to demonstrate the deeply embedded influence of patriarchy in Italian society, easily visible in the state's lack of investment in, and enforcement of, measures that challenge accepted practices of male privilege.

Conclusion

Under the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church, Italian women have historically been the principal providers of familial care. Women in their mid fifties to late sixties hold a pivotal position in Italian history. Their youth was not only molded by cultural norms infused with Catholic ideology, but also by a feminist movement that altered the social and civil landscape of Italian society. Using the personal narratives of Ester, Adela , and Graza, I illustrate the changing dynamics of gender in Italian society, and how this contributes to a wider social transformation that is also characterized by a long life expectancy, low fertility, and changing family structures.

TABLES

Table 1: Life History Interviews

Woman	Marital Status	Number of Children & Their Residence	Approximate Age	Profession	Education Attained	Common Themes
Ester	Married, shares same residence; considers herself separated	2 – 1 st (single) lives near home; 2 nd lives at home (has girlfriend)	Early 60s	Former housewife, now market vendor-housewares	High School Diploma	Experienced infidelity; controlling husband
Graza	Separated	2 – 1 st lives w/ boyfriend in home purchased by Graza; 2 nd (single) lives away from Rome	Mid 60s	Retired Professor	University Degree in Biology	Experienced infidelity; controlling husband
Adela	Divorced 1st; never married 2 nd partner	2 – 1 st (married) lives near home; 2 nd recently lived at home; was saving to buy a house	Mid 60s	Retired copy editor	High School; left university after 2 years	Experienced infidelity; controlling partner

Note - For the protection of the participants, women have been given pseudonyms and their ages have been listed as approximate.

Table 2: Life History Interviews

Woman	Marital Status	Number of Children & Their Residence	Approximate Age	Profession	Education Attained	Common Themes
Noemi	Separated	2 - both live at home; 1 st has live-in girlfriend	Mid 50s	Market vendor – linens; later converted stall to studio for accounting	Associates Degree in Accounting	Experienced Infidelity
Giovanna	Divorced; wanted her liberty	1 – lives at home (single)	Mid 50s	Market vendor – dry goods	Primary School	Experienced Infidelity
Elena	Divorced	2 – 1 st (single) lives at deceased grandmother's house; 2 nd lives w/ partner away from Rome	Mid 60s	Retired Teacher	Teacher's Certification	Experienced infidelity; wanted to get out of parental home;

Note - For the protection of the participants, women have been given pseudonyms and their ages have been listed as approximate.

Table 3: Life History Interviews

Woman	Marital Status	Number of Children & Their Residence	Approximate Age	Profession	Education Attained	Common Themes
Chiara	Married; would like to separate	2 – both married; live away from Rome	Mid 60s	Market vendor-vegetables	Primary School	Wanted to get out of parental home; controlling husband
Fia	Lived with husband before marrying	3 – 2 live at home; 1 is married, lives near home	Early 60s	Former housewife; now market vendor-vegetables	Middle School	Wanted to get out of parental home; describes relationship with husband as good
Oria	Married	4 – 1 st died; 2 nd /4 th live away from Rome; 3 rd lives near home (all married)	Late 60s	Family Business	High School; wanted to attend university; wasn't allowed	Wanted to get out of parental home; describes relationship with husband as good

Note - For the protection of the participants, women have been given pseudonyms and their ages have been listed as approximate.

Table 4: Life History Interviews

Woman	Marital Status	Number of Children & Their Residence	Approximate Age	Profession	Education Attained	Common Themes
Camilla	Married	2 – both are single; live in family apt. in Rome	Mid 50s	Market vendor - clothing	High School	May have experienced infidelity; doesn't matter to her, likely short lived
Ines	Married	3 – 2 nd /3 rd live with their partners near home; 1 st lives away from Rome (single)	Mid 60s	Retired Social Worker	University degree in Psychology	May have experienced episode of infidelity; chose not to follow up
Romia	Never married	0 – helps nieces and nephews	Mid 60s	Retired Teacher	Teacher's Certification	Had 2 serious relationships; partners didn't like to be criticized; wanted to be “coddled”

Note - For the protection of the participants, women have been given pseudonyms and their ages have been listed as approximate.

CHAPTER 1: THEY TOOK MY FREEDOM AWAY

Basic Information

Ester is a former housewife who now owns her own small business at the market. She sells housewares. She is married to Gianfranco, who works as a craftsman. They have two children, Luisa and Fabrizio. Luisa, who is in her late thirties, was able to purchase her own house with the help of her father as the guarantor. She works in the telecommunications industry, is currently single, and does not have children. Fabrizio, who is in his late twenties, lives at home with his parents, is about to graduate from university, and with the help of both of his parents as guarantors, recently opened his own business with a friend. When Ester discovered that Gianfranco was having an affair, she attempted to move in with her mother, Lavinia, so that she could think things over. For the “good of the family” Lavinia forbade Ester from moving in with her. On the other hand, when Ester was overcome with overhead expenses, especially after she first opened her business, it was her mother who helped her stay afloat by periodically giving Ester money from her pension.

It is another hot summer morning in the city. As I rush around the apartment, making sure I have everything I need to get out the door, I could already feel the humidity bearing down. On the days I have an interview at the market, I try to get there by 8:00 AM. Although I wouldn’t necessarily call it a rush, there is usually a mid-morning

crowd that comes through many of the stalls. On certain days of the week, it's busy enough to make it challenging for the women I am interviewing to sit and chat with me at their leisure. On this morning I received a text from Ester, asking what time I would be coming by. "I want to talk to you about what I started to tell you the other day. I'll be waiting for you," it reads. On my walk to the market, I wonder what she means. I have spent several of my initial visits to the market trying to make the women working there comfortable with me, and my project, hoping that those that have agreed to be interviewed will not have second thoughts about the stories they are sharing.

When I arrive, most vendors are busy setting up their stalls for the day. I have become a familiar face to quite a few of them, and am greeted with some teasing by Anselmo, one of the male vendors. "Oh, here comes the American researcher, investigating ... what are you investigating again?" he asks. "Ah, yes," he continues, "aging women! But why? Why are you interested in studying dry, old women?" "You are the dry one!" responds a woman who runs one of the vegetable stalls nearby, as she rinses and cuts artichokes. "Well, dry is better sometimes, no?" he responds, winking at her. She rolls her eyes, and ignores him. "Who are you seeing today?" Anselmo asks, adding, "You should talk to me sometime. I have stories to tell you." "I will if you are serious about the interview, and I have time," I respond as I walk by. Ester is already busy with a customer. She looks up, and motions me to sit on the stool next to her stall. "Just a minute," she says. I nod, sit, and take out my notebook, recorder, and pencil while I wait. Once Ester finishes with her customer, she turns to me and asks, "Did you get my SMS [text]?" "Yes. Is everything alright?" I respond, "Is there a problem?" "No,

no,” she replies, “It’s just that I wanted to finish our conversation from the other day. I wanted to clarify the gravity of what happened and why I decided not to speak to my brothers anymore. It seemed a bit dramatic to you, no?” she asks. “Oh, no,” I say, “It’s just that it’s sad.” “Eh, no,” she states and forcefully continues, “What they did is sad. It’s unforgiveable!”

I had briefly met Ester’s younger brother during a prior visit to Italy. At the time, she had described the relationships between her and her two brothers as “close.” In the year and a half since their mother passed away, the relationships had become non-existent. “At first, they tried to talk to me, but I can’t forgive what they did. I have been unwavering. I don’t think that I will speak to them again; both of them because my older brother took my younger brother’s side,” she states. Ester’s parents had lived in a house that was owned by the bank where her father had made his career until he passed away. The rent was low and her mother had continued to live there until her death. She continues,

We had always agreed that this house should remain available to the three of us. Whichever of the three of us wanted to use it, for whatever reason, let’s say for a party, a birthday, or if the grandchildren wanted to use it for something, it should be open to all. So, mom dies and you push your way into getting what you want? He moved into the house with his wife! Well, his partner because they aren’t married. Where is the fraternal love? When I had the crisis with my husband, the affair, I told my brothers that if I ever had to leave him, I would go to my mother’s house because I can’t afford to pay rent anywhere else with the money I earn here. This is what hurts me the most. The fact that, back then, I wasn’t free to decide what to do. The family came to an agreement among themselves to make me stay. I had to do what they wanted. I had to swallow it and keep quiet. That was very hard. Then, with my brothers and mom’s house, the same thing happened. That’s why this is so serious. Do you know how many nights I took my pillow and went to sleep at my mother’s? So, when my brother took the house for himself, he took away my escape route. He took away everything. He knows it, too; they both do. Now, if at any moment I decide to

take back my life and go, I can't do it anymore because the only place I could go is that house. They took away my last real opportunity for freedom. The only freedom I have now is here, this activity. That's it. Basta.

Throughout many of our conversations regarding her marriage, as well as her family life, Ester often emphasizes how she remained in her marriage because her family, specifically her mother, had forced her to do so. She states emphatically, "They didn't allow me to make that decision. I am the one who should have decided whether I would stay or not. It's not you [meaning her family] who makes the decision for me. Even as a human being, it's repression, no?" From Lavinia's perspective, as well as that of her brothers, it was important to keep the family together. More explicitly, this was Ester's primary responsibility as a wife and mother. By framing her question in relation to her right as a human being to make her own decisions, rather than, or as well as a woman, Ester, herself, alludes to this understanding.

In this chapter, I use Ester's narration of the differences in life circumstances between her mother, herself, and her two adult children to illustrate various dimensions of the intergenerational ties that characterize the Italian family. Her experience, initially as a traditional stay at home mother and housewife, then as an older woman working against the wishes of her family to separate from her husband, and later establish her own small business, reveals the consequential influence of the Italian family, both as a devoted imposition, and as an essential resource. I begin with an analysis of Ester's life in the context of the domestic sphere, or private life, and use this concept to examine the tenacious qualities of gender dynamics in Italian society. The public/domestic (private)

dichotomy refers to the division of roles and responsibilities between men and women in a given society. Broadly speaking, men participate in, and are responsible for, the public world of political and economic life. In contrast, women are charged with the management of the domestic sphere, or the household and family. I will review the critiques of this dichotomy at a different point of this dissertation.

I continue with a review of widespread perceptions about Italian motherhood. In particular, I focus on its association with the Virgin Mary and her antithesis, the Grande Madre Mediterranea [Grand Mediterranean Mother]. Both are noted for their personal sacrifices for the sake of the family, especially their sons, and are cited as important contributing factors to the notion of *mammismo*, or the emotional and symbolic attachment of Italian children, and sons specifically, to their mothers well into adulthood. Ester's retelling of her individual relationships with her daughter and son, as well as how their lives are unfolding, provides a rich example of the underlying persistence of long held, common expectations that place the onus of familial care on Italian women. These expectations are particularly evident in the everyday, practical necessities of maintaining a household.

Next, I present Ester's account of her husband's opposition to establishing her own business, as well as her mother's acquiescence and monetary support of it. This example reveals the depth of institutional, and more concretely, financial power that men continue wield in Italian society. It also affirms the importance of intergenerational support, particularly for women. Additionally Ester's account of the contrasts in the choices that she, her mother, and her daughter were able to make, as women from three different generations of the same family, renders the larger demographic and social

transformation underway more accessible. Her story brings depth to our understanding of the continuities and changes of the Italian family, specifically with regard to the intergenerational bonds and gender roles that have historically defined it.

As I briefly reviewed in my Introduction, Italian women have made great social and legal strides since the end of World War II. Nevertheless, traditional perspectives continue to permeate collective expectations, and attitudes, regarding the primary responsibilities of women and men in Italian society. As historian Luisa Passerini writes,

Women have become more visible in a range of places and situations and more visible to one another. For all that, Italy remains a country in which gender relations are still often formed in the mould of an underlying masculinism – old fashioned or newfangled, covert or manifest – and this masculinism both sustains old traditions and invents new ones” (1996:157).

For instance, a 2011 national survey on gender stereotypes and discrimination revealed that half of the population (49.7%) still agrees with the statements that "men are less suited to cope with household chores" and "it is above all the man who has to provide for the economic needs of the family" (Istat 2013). Indeed, several of the women I interviewed, describe their partners, or husbands, as good financial providers. Everything else that pertains to the family, however, is viewed as women's work. During one of our interviews, Ester states, "Like I already told you. He [her husband] has never shown any interest, for example, in coming to speak with a teacher, to come look at a church for the kids for their first communion, for the wedding [their daughter's]. He has never done anything, not even gone to a medical visit, *never*. I have always taken care of everything." In the next section, I discuss how the Italian housewife came to represent the near perfect embodiment of Italian womanhood.

The Era of the Housewife

When Ester first married, she didn't give the idea of being a housewife a second thought. Her mother had been a housewife, as had her aunts on both sides of the family. In the postwar era, being a housewife became the most realizable occupation for a majority of adult married women. From 1951 to 1961, the number of housewives rose from 12,517,193 to 12,697,171 (Piccone Stella 1993:98; Willson 2010:120). Sociologist Chiara Saraceno writes, "Between the 1940s and 1960s, in a sometimes painless, sometimes conflictual manner, a growing proportion of adult married women acceded – or were driven – to the role of full-time housewife that had previously been common in the urban lower and upper middle class. Around this figure - a much more complex one than it first appears ... the model of family as the space of private life developed and spread progressively throughout all classes" (1991a:463–64). With few choices in vocation available to women, the position of housewife increased the most rapidly through the end of the 1960s (Zanuso 1984). There are three important factors that contributed to this development. First, the rapid transformation brought forth by the economic miracle of the late 1950s to early 1960s fostered profound social changes. As Italy transformed from an agricultural economy to one based on industry, rural women, along with men, migrated to urban centers, away from farming to factory work. From 1958 to 1963, the height of the economic boom, female employment in agriculture fell from 35.6 to 27.9 percent and rose from 29.3 to 39.3 percent in industry. Women also

found employment in the service sector, and well as female dominated professions, such as teaching, retail, and glamorized positions aimed at young women, such as air and television hostesses and modeling. Overall, their presence in the service sector rose to 41.3 from 33.1 percent (Del Boca 1988:122; Willson 2010:118). Following this period, women's employment began to decline. As wages rose, women were increasingly dismissed from the labor force, particularly in industry, because they were expected to stop working once they married and had children (Willson 2010:118-119). Additionally, maternity legislation passed in 1950, meant to protect women by extending maternity to one year after a child was born, instead served to dissuade employers from hiring married women (Willson:120).

This broad based expectation that women would work when they were young, and then leave the labor force once they married and had children, was highly influenced by a second factor facilitating the rise of the Italian housewife, the Catholic Church. The Church had a significant impact on the formation of social policies post World War II, specifically because of its association with the long domination of the Italian government by the Christian Democrats. For example, even as it encouraged women to vote in the 1946 elections, the first time that women voted in Italian history, it did so with the objective to uphold traditional values regarding the family, specifically maternity as a woman's primary function (Willson 2010:130-31). In a public address in 1945, meant to motivate Catholic women to vote in the pending elections, Pius XII states,

Every woman's destiny is motherhood ... as such, women can only see and fully understand all the problems of human life through the family. ... Equal rights with men have, by making women abandon the home where they were queens, subjected them to the same burden of work ... dazed by the agitated world they live in, dazzled by the tinsel of false luxury, [women who work outside of the

home] become greedy for suspicious pleasures” (Ascoli 1977:119; translation Willson 2010:130-31).

In the same address, he emphasizes voting as a duty, rather than a right, that women must comply with “to hold back the currents that threaten the home, fight against doctrines that undermine its foundations, and prepare, organize and bring about its restoration” (Willson:134). To ensure women fulfilled this important duty, the Church made an exception to Catholic dogma and encouraged them to *disobey* [emphasis mine] fathers, brothers, and husbands who raised any objections to their participation at the ballot box (Willson:134). By the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 65), the Church had accepted women’s participation in the workforce, and supported legal equality between men and women. Nevertheless, it reiterated that a woman’s primary responsibility was to care for her family in a traditional, maternal sense (Willson:131). This perspective imbued social welfare policies of the 1950s and 60s, and continues to influence women’s labor force participation through today.

A third factor influencing the normalization of the housewife was the lack of social services created for women who chose to work outside of the home. Writes Saraceno, “The very organization of existing services – scarcity of preschool child care, short school days, lack of services for the elderly, and so on – posited a careful family organization based on the mother’s full-time presence” (1991a:499). During this period, the limited services that were made available to working mothers were primarily designed to fill the gap in cases where the normative model of the “wife-mother” could not be carried out due to economic hardship (Saraceno 1991a:499). Furthermore, even where available, accessing services was a notoriously ineffective, corrupt, and bureaucratic process involving long waiting lines and time consuming paperwork. For

many working mothers, as well as married women of childbearing age, the investment made in navigating the social services maze took time away from work, as well as familial responsibilities. Coupled with poor prospects for employment outside of the home, being a housewife easily became the better economic option. Into this mix, it is also important to add the rise of consumption and advertising. The urban, postwar housewife had a newfound purchasing power, albeit limited by her husband's income and willingness to let her manage household expenditures. It follows, then, that married women, in particular, were targeted by media campaigns touting the benefits of owning labor saving domestic appliances, and buying commercial goods that women formerly made at home, such as soap (Willson 2010:120-21). As Saraceno summarizes, "[Consumption and advertising] rendered this figure [the housewife] palatable, 'modern,' and somehow or other emancipated" (1991a:499). Whenever Ester talks about Lavinia, she always describes her mother as this figure, "the classic housewife." She elaborates, "My mother didn't go out very much, except in the mornings to buy groceries at the market near her. In the afternoons, after cleaning the house and preparing food for dinner, she spent time with her sisters, or sisters-in-law, because they all lived close by. This is how she organized her afternoons; they often sewed something on the machine."

By the mid 1960s, however women's attitudes about being a housewife showed a perceptible change. A survey of housewives published in 1964 by the Centro Italiano Femminile (a mass Catholic women's organization), revealed a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of this vocation and a desire to participate in the public sphere, beyond the responsibilities of taking care of the household and the needs of the family (Willson 2010:122; Dau Novelli 1996:120). Nonetheless, even as women's labor

participation outside of the home began to rise in the late 1960s, “the figure of the adult married woman as a full-time homemaker ... lives on tenaciously in the collective imagination” (Saraceno 1991a:464). And so, once she married in the early 1970s, Ester followed suit, and became a homemaker, not only because it remained the most socially acceptable occupation for women. Rather, she wanted to take care of her family, and reap the benefits and rewards that were supposed to compensate her sacrifice. She states,

All of my sisters-in law, on my husband’s side of the family, as well as my brothers’ partners, work, or have worked. I was the only one that stayed home because, well, because the truth is, I didn’t feel the need to work. I liked being at home. I liked taking care of the house; that’s exactly it. I liked taking care of the house, the kids, the family, of all these beautiful things. But I thought I was paying in advance; I would be rewarded later. Instead, it didn’t work out that way. Let’s say that for me, this decision turned out to be more of punishment than a reward, a prize that I didn’t get. I practically dedicated all of my life, all of it, almost thirty years, to the family, the kids, my mother, my parents, the house, all of these things, and in the end, I didn’t do anything for me.

Ester thinks that it was a big mistake not to look for a job and work. She explains, “Think about it. From the time I was twenty-two years old, I was closed up in the middle of four walls. Either I was at my house or at my mother’s. Those were my main destinations; at my house or at her’s, at her house or at mine, practically every day.” Generally, when Ester wasn’t at home or visiting her mother, she was in the car, either dropping off or picking up her kids from school or events, going to the grocery store, taking Lavinia to an appointment, or running other errands for the family. In short, her world revolved around tasks associated with caring for the wellbeing of her family. In the next section, I will review how scholars have discussed the social divide that is often made between affairs that are associated with home life, or the domestic sphere, and those that are associated with life outside the home, or the public sphere.

The Domestic/Public Dichotomy

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have used the domestic/public dichotomy to analyze the gendered division of marital labor that Ester describes above; in the process, feminist scholars have also pointed to the model's deficits (Moller Okin 1998). Anthropologists, in particular, have raised some important shortcomings. Since Rosaldo's introduction of the domestic/public framework in 1974, anthropologists, including Rosaldo (1980), herself, have critiqued the Western European and North American assumptions that underlie it, as well as its seemingly one dimensional, and static, separation of complex gender relations into two hierarchical, opposing spheres (Comaroff, John 1987; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Holy 1996; Lamphere 2001; Ortner 1974; Rapp [Reiter] 1975, 1979; Rosaldo 1974, 1980; Yanagisako 1987). In her analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the model, Lamphere points out that Rosaldo's aim in proposing the dichotomy was not to "*explain* women's subordination," but rather to point out an "underlying structural framework that is present in any society that supports subordination and that would have to be reorganized to change women's position" (2001:108). It is with this intention that I use it as well.

For all of its shortcomings, the domestic/public dichotomy paradigm continues to be useful in deconstructing established social expectations and welfare policies in Europe, specifically in Mediterranean countries. Italy, in particular, has a potent legacy of, at least attempted, demarcations between the domestic and public spheres. From the underpinning social influence of the Catholic Church to initiatives introduced by the

Italian state, such as the Fascist pronatalist campaign, Italian women don't have to look too far back in history to find examples that feature them as the linchpins of domesticity, and managers of a family's private affairs. As Saraceno writes, "... women with dependents [are] the persons principally responsible for the relation and interface between family and society, between the public and the private. ... [They] are the weavers of the social networks in which private life, with its dense and mutable interdependencies, is built" (1991a:501).

More broadly, the domestic sphere, with its intersection of gender norms and family life, also provides a window onto the biases and accepted practices of what sociologist R.W. Connell refers to as "the intermediate level of social organization," or the social institutions, in addition to the family, where daily life, and by extension, gender relations, happens. She writes "We live most of our daily lives in settings like the household, the workplace, and on the bus queue, rather than stretched out in a relation to society at large or bundled up in a one-to-one [relationship]" (1987:119). Connell also provides a different perspective regarding the nature of family life and its social import, adding, "Far from being the basis of society, the family is one of its most complex products. ... In no other institution are relationships so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in their interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance" (1987:121). For instance, in reference to her family's reaction to Gianfranco's affair, Ester states,

They told me that I couldn't leave. When I told my mother I would stay with her for a little while, with the kids, she said, 'What are you talking about? What are you going to do with two children, without a job? How are you going to support yourself? I can't support you. You're going to come here and upset everything!' Everybody was against me, everybody. They all came to an agreement behind my back, the whole family.

She continues, “ So, when you don’t have any support, someone who helps you and tells you, ‘Come, come stay here for a bit; let’s see how things unfold’ it isn’t easy. I couldn’t fight them alone. It’s been twenty years of damage. They don’t even know the extent of the damage they’ve caused because, with time, I hardened, and I could no longer resume my relationship with him, nor would I want to.”

Ester explains that Lavinia’s reaction can be better understood in the context of how she perceived the roles of men and women in marriage, as well as the circumstances of her younger brother’s personal life. Five or six years prior to Ester’s discovery of Gianfranco’s affair, her younger brother had a significant falling out with his partner, who Ester refers to as his wife, although they are not married. She elaborates, “He packed his bags and went to live with our mother for some time. When I tried to do the same, she didn’t allow me to do this, though.” She continues,

She knew my brother doesn’t have a *gran feeling* with his wife, so she said to herself, ‘It’s better that he is free to leave,’ instead of me. ‘She,’ meaning me, ‘can bear the situation, and a man can’t.’ Do you understand the difference she saw between men and women? In her mind, she thought, ‘If his wife [her son’s partner] is crazy and kicks him out of the house again, where will he go? At least he can come stay with me. If I allow Ester to come here, then he won’t be able to stay with me if he needs to.’ She preferred to support him because she believed that men are fragile, and can’t deal with being alone. On the other hand, I had already put up with so much, and I am a woman; surely I can keep doing it. In her ingenuity, I know this is the argument my mother made to herself.

Ester then refocuses our conversation back to her brother’s “shameless” acquisition of their mother’s house. She states,

I expected this type of reasoning from my mother, a woman more than 80 years old with the mentality of her day, but not from my brothers. He, the younger one, only thought of himself, and not about my situation, or how that decision would affect me. You know, it’s always been that way. When he and the older one were single, they took vacations all over the world because they got married late; well,

not married, they live with their partners. All that time, *I* took care of mom and dad. Since I got married, I never left them by themselves, not even for a second. I was always nearby and always brought them with me; summer vacation, winter break, Christmas, Easter; all of the holidays, they were always with me. Those two never gave it a second thought. Do you understand why I had it out with them? Basta; I am tired.

In her analysis about the enduring resonance of patriarchy in Italian society, sociologist Franca Bimbi comments “... overall, the totality and pervasiveness of the hierarchical principle of patriarchy appears to have been delegitimized ... but, on many levels of society, it continues to be explicitly prevalent, and to carry implicit value, recognized in instrumental skills, acquired and in the struggle for power, traditionally assigned to the male gender,” (1990:192) (my translation). Certainly, Ester’s description of the assumptions her family made regarding her desire to separate from her husband, as well why her brothers have a more legitimate claim to their mother’s house, does point to the lingering, and seemingly indelible, influence of patriarchal practices that appear to be woven into the contours of Italian social norms. One of the manifestations of these practices is the purported, and often mocked, close relationship between Italian mothers and their sons, which I will discuss in the next section.

Mammismo

Ester's narrative points to a widespread characterization of the relationship between Italian mothers and their sons, in particular, often referred to as *mammismo*. The term was first introduced by writer Corrado Alvaro who describes Italy as "a society of men elevated as heroes [or leading men] by their mothers" (1952:187; D'Amelia 2005:16) (my translation). Willson writes, "The idea of the *mamma italiana*, a generous and powerful figure whose unconditional love spoils her sons and keeps them at home almost indefinitely, influences both Italians' image of themselves and foreigners' perceptions of Italian womanhood," (2010:12). Referring to the far-reaching, and near mythological image of the Italian mother, historian Anna Bravo notes, "It goes without saying that the stereotype is even stronger in the national culture." She elaborates,

Incomparably loving, servant and owner of the children, often in tears but always on her feet [ready] to sustain the family, the Italian mother has scattered a bit of her traces everywhere. ... She has brilliantly represented the collective sacrifices in crises and in wars. But, it is in the private sector, above all, where she has taken root. ... Adored, feared and caricatured, in discourses about the Italian family, *la mamma* has set herself up as a glorious archetype - and it matters little that other cultures may host "unique" [maternal] figures ... the popular image remains that of the 'strong as rock' Italian mother who admires her child - a son - with a heart full of love, and devotes herself to him intensely, obtaining in exchange the right to veto his decisions, his constant attention, and an emotional and symbolic dependency without equal. Eternal sons, Italian men would be hard pressed to become adults and accept new female role models ... (2001:78) (my translation).

Ester provides confirmation of this widely held image of the Italian mother during a conversation about how Lavinia's position and role in the family essentially remained the same, even as Ester and her brothers grew older. She states, "Mamma was always

completely absorbed by the family because my brothers left home late; they didn't leave until they were 45 and 46. When I was 30, they were both still at home, so my mother took care of my brothers, and my father who was still alive when they lived there, and her grandchildren, naturally."

Scholars have suggested that the close affinity Italians have with the quintessential figure of *la mamma* is not only tied to Catholicism, and in particular, to the Virgin Mary, but also to the *Grande Madre Mediterranea* [Grand Mediterranean Mother]. She is a product of Catholicism and the pre-Christian religiosity of southern Italian peasantry, characterized by fluid boundaries between human and animal. Referencing these characteristics, historian Marina D'Amelia writes that the South is, in particular, "the kingdom of an ancient femininity that has not severed its ties with animality: be it in the form of [the] mother as 'beast of burden and [mother] rabbit' " (2005:21) (my translation). Writer and painter Carlo Levi describes the Grande Madre thus, "The black faced Madonna ... was not the pious Mother of God, but a subterranean deity; black, due to the shadows of the womb of the earth; a peasant Persephone, an infernal goddess of the harvest" (1946:110) (my translation). Whereas the Virgin Mary is seen as the supreme example of motherhood, symbolizing purity, wisdom, sacrifice, humility, and forgiveness, as well as the key mediator between God the Father, and God the Son, the archetype of the Grande Madre is often described as a more pernicious example of Italian motherhood, specifically with regard to the relationship between mothers and sons (Ginsborg 2003a:78). To clarify this complex bond, Ginsborg references the work of German Jungian psychoanalyst, Ernst Bernhard, who after many years of working in Italy, explains the mother-son relationship with the following,

The Mediterranean ‘Grande Madre’ is in Italy a primitive mother. For the most part, she spoils her sons with the maximum of instinctiveness, and as a result her sons are exigent. But the more she spoils them, the more she makes them dependent upon her; and the more natural come to appear her own demands upon her sons, the more they come to feel tied [and obligated] to her. At this point the good mother, protective and nourishing, is transformed into her own negation (translation Ginsborg), into the bad mother who restrains and devours, and with her selfish claims prevents her sons from achieving independence, rendering them helpless and unhappy (translation mine) (Bernhard 1969:171; Ginsborg 2003a:78; D’Amelia 2005:29).

In evaluating how the archetypes of the Grande Madre and Virgin Mary reflect mothering practices in Italy, it is prudent to consider that most post World War II social research on family in Italy, including a fair number of ethnographies, was carried out on Italy’s peasant communities. As sociologists Harper and Faccioli point out, the consensus of a majority of these studies is that “... poverty forces families in on themselves; and as a result the mother assumes the critical role as provider of food (generally with insufficient resources) as her relationships with family members (particularly the sons) take on a mythic resonance that connects to central themes of Catholicism” (2009:103). That being said, Ginsborg cautions that while it is “dangerous” to use these archetypes as “the basis for generalizing about contemporary Italian families,” it is still useful to consider the “*suggestive* nature of the insights” provided by available scholarship on the influence of Mary, in all of her configurations (2003:79). Mary as the ideal of Italian womanhood because of her devotion to, and sacrifice for, the family is at odds with contemporary sensibilities about other roles women can realize in a modern society. In the next section, we can observe Ester struggling to negotiate this schism as she discusses her relationship with her daughter who she describes as her polar opposite.

Ester and Luisa

As several authors have already noted (Passerini 1996, Bimbi, Saraceno), inasmuch as Italian social expectations regarding family, motherhood, and more broadly, gender, have evolved, there also remains an elemental undercurrent of consistency with respect to “traditional maternal models of behavior” (Ginsborg 2003a:79). In my discussions with Ester about her children, particularly, our conversations about the different choice her daughter made regarding her own marriage, we can see Ester’s attempt to reconcile traditionally accepted models of behavior in the domestic sphere with the realities of working outside of the home as a woman. During one of our conversations, she observes, “If you think about it, there is a twenty three year difference between me and my daughter. That’s not very much, really, but it’s as if there is an entire world between the two of us because we have lived our lives so differently.” Ester’s daughter, Luisa separated from her husband after a ten-year courtship, and seven months of marriage. Due to the bureaucratic process involved in getting a divorce in Italy, as well as the high cost, she didn’t actually divorce until almost twelve years after her separation (Rosselli 2014:11).

Like Ester, Luisa began dating her ex-husband in high school. Ester reflects on how different her daughter’s courtship was from her own. She states,

We were very young when we started dating. I was 15 years old and he was 17. We dated for seven years; then when we married, I was 22 and he was 24. Plus, dating back then wasn’t like it is today. Now you have the possibility to see each other for long periods of time. We used to go on these little outings of 30 minutes, maybe 45 minutes because I was young. I was underage, so you can

imagine how strict my father was. I wasn't allowed to come and go, and do what I wanted. ... Their [dating] relationship [referring to her daughter and her ex-husband] was like the youth of today; it wasn't like ours where we saw each other once a day. They were always together [for] vacations, holidays, long weekends; they always went away together. They were already practically living together.

Ester thinks Luisa acted too precipitously in taking the decision to separate after “only seven months of marriage.” She also believes that it fundamentally changed their relationship. She explains,

Our relationship was ruined a little bit after she separated. That's when it 'cracked' because she was too impulsive in making this decision. She got married when she was 26, after dating for 10 years, then she separated after seven months? She didn't stop to think, not even for a second. She made the decision and acted on it immediately. She was immovable! And look, after being separated for over 10 years, she is still alone today, eh. She is 37, almost 38 years old. She has had three or four relationships since then, but they all ended quickly.

She adds knowingly, “I know she regrets it; very much. Very much! She would never say anything to me because she doesn't want to give me that satisfaction, but she regrets it deeply.” “Really?” I interject. “Of course!” she responds and adds, “How could she not? She doesn't have anybody. I know I am not mistaken. I am the mother. There are certain things that you know, that you feel; that's just the way it is.”

As Ester and I discuss what could have triggered Luisa's uncompromising decision, it is not difficult to discern the social disconnect that exists between expectations that a woman will, and should, meet her professional responsibilities and the still diffuse presumption that she will also manage the housework once she goes home (refer to Istat report cited earlier in this chapter).⁵ When Luisa and her husband decided to marry, they moved into the apartment underneath her parents. Ester had already been

⁵ This 'dual presence' (Saraceno 1991a,b) will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

working at the market for a few months, and was “so pleased” with the arrangement. She states, “This helped me overcome my heartbreak [over her own husband’s affair]. I was so happy. I would cook for them, help her at home, iron their clothes. I felt like I was starting a new life. I dedicated myself to her and her husband. I did all of the same things my mother did for me.” When Luisa decided to separate from her husband from “one day to the next” Ester was “deeply hurt,” specifically because she felt like she was “losing a son.” She explains, “She knows I had a soft spot for him. He was a serious, wonderful young man. He practically grew up in our house; he was only 17 years old when they started dating. Plus, he adored her.”

In Ester’s opinion, there were two important factors that contributed to Luisa’s hasty decision. First, she suspects Luisa met somebody else through work. She surmises that it began as a mutual, friendly attraction, but it was enough to give Luisa pause regarding her long courtship with her husband; it had been her only serious relationship. Second, and more important, Ester suggests her daughter’s expectations regarding her marriage were unrealistic. She elaborates,

She is a field representative for her company, so she is often out on sight visits, and comes home late. You know what he [her daughter’s husband] would do? Or rather, *wouldn’t* do [she waves her hand in the air]? Look, like all men in the beginning, when you come home from work, you can’t expect that he would have cleaned the house, cooked any food, ironed clothes, or loaded the laundry machine. Are you going to give him time to adjust? Who is he, after all? He is an only child that lived with his mother before marrying. His mother did everything for him. Like I do for my son; like all mothers that see themselves as good mothers do. Are you going to give him time to adjust to this new life or not? She [Luisa] didn’t do everything that I did [as a housewife], so what does this mean? She could have said to him, “When you come home tonight, can you please remember to run the laundry machine and quickly vacuum the rug?” Guide him! He would have done it. My husband wouldn’t do it, but these are two different worlds. With time, he [her son-in-law] would have done it. He was accustomed to having all of these things done [for him,] like all men. Do you expect a newly married man to come home, tidy up, clean, and make dinner? It’s obvious that it

is always the woman that does everything. Then, later, you slowly bring him along and teach him how to do things.

Ester also believes that Luisa was deeply affected by her parents' marriage. She surmises, "When she saw what happened to me in my marriage, I am sure she said to herself, 'That will not happen to me' and ran away. Fast! Too fast, without thinking about her future."

Even though she is proud of her daughter's professional accomplishments, Ester worries that Luisa will not find a partner that suits her. She states,

She is very smart. She began studying jurisprudence at the university; she would have been the perfect lawyer, but she hit a snag with Latin. All the initial exams about Roman law, and all these things, are in Latin, which she didn't study in high school. So, at that point she said, "Basta, the university isn't for me," and began working immediately. She was barely home for a day. She does very well at work. She bought her own house [with her father as a co-signer]; she lives *alone*. She has done a lot on her own. ... I don't even think about whether she will marry again. Every so often, she talks about how she would like to have a child, and I am sure she would enjoy it, but finding the man she wants isn't going to be easy. She isn't one to compromise.

She adds, "She keeps running after perfection and she is still alone. ... She has had two other live-in relationships, and both ended badly. Beh [sighs], I hope with time, she realizes that what she describes, this perfect man that does everything, this *great* man, he doesn't exist."

Whilst Luisa's "uncompromising" nature may very well be hurting her love life, Ester's retelling of her daughter's apparent aversion to men who do not help out with the housework, and childcare for that matter, forms part of a documented phenomenon, and has been cited as a contributing factor to Italy's low birth rate (Caltabiano et al. 2009; De Rose et al. 2008; Kertzer et al. 2009; Miller 2004; Rosina and Sabbadini et al. 2005; Tanturri and Mencarini 2009). In their article about time use and meeting familial responsibilities among middle-aged Italian working women, Mencarini and Tanturri

plainly state that not much has changed vis-à-vis social expectations regarding gender roles. They write,

Our results show that in Italy, even in urban contexts, not much change has taken place in the family role-set. Qualitatively and quantitatively, men's involvement and gender sharing in the household's workload and childcare are still asymmetric and the weight rests mainly on the woman's shoulders. The implications of a birth are on average negative in terms of gender equality in the couple. Fatherhood tends to increase the time devoted to work, as opposed to an increase in time spent on childcare or housekeeping (2004:134).

They do, nonetheless, draw attention to a small, but significant change in male behavior by observing the following,

However, a progressive adaptation towards gender equity of family organization during the life course, including childbearing, is evident among a small proportion of dual earning couples. Among these couples, belonging to the higher socio-economic level, women have a relatively high education level and men are more egalitarian, when white-collar workers. In these couples, childbearing implies a more similar "revolution" of fathers' and mother's time and activities (2004:134).

Given that they "grew up in different worlds," Ester concedes that "perhaps" she should have been more supportive of Luisa's decision to separate from her husband, even if she was opposed to it. She states, "Maybe, I should have done that." She adds, "... but she can't find the right person for her because she is too demanding. She wants the impossible. In a relationship, there always has to be a small compromise; otherwise, you will be at war every day." I remind Ester that she has said she wanted the opportunity to build her own life. "Build my own life," she repeats. "Sure," she continues, "but I learned to compromise; I learned to coexist. There have been difficult moments, no years, extremely difficult years, but then you say to yourself, 'A human being can adjust to anything,' and so you adjust."

Saraceno points out that women's willingness to "adjust" their behavior and expectations regarding marriage has changed significantly since the 1960s. She writes,

While the (male and female) cohorts entering adulthood in the late 1960s and 1970s did not reject marriage, but struggled to change it from within, subsequent cohorts seem to have tried a different strategy. They negotiate before entering marriage, which they delay until each spouse is fairly settled in the labour market. This, of course, while it delays marriage and possibly increases the quota of people who will never marry because, during the delay they sometimes develop a taste for the single lifestyle, also renders negotiations about and in marriage more complicated. The number of couples in which the woman's job or career chances must be taken into account in both the division of labor within the family and when taking important decisions about things such as when to marry, move or have children, is increasing in the younger generations (2004:51).

Ester's rapport with Luisa is a far cry from what she anticipated it would be when her daughter initially married and moved into the apartment underneath the family home. She states,

When did that girl, at [age] twenty-two, or twenty-three, ever stay at home and clean the house? Clean the kitchen, wash plates, wash the bathroom, clean the floor? What does she know about having children, getting married?

She laments that Luisa's personal life is so "unsettled," as well as the effect she believes this has had on their relationship. She states, "There is as complete detachment. We speak [on the telephone] every day, at least once. We don't see very much of each other, though." When I ask Ester who initiates the phone calls, as well as how often they see each other in person, she responds, "She calls me, always. We see each other about every ten days. I tell her to come over for dinner, so that she can at least see us, especially her brother [who lives in the family home with their parents]. How else are we supposed to see her? She works long hours."

Ester's feeling of detachment from Luisa is significant, given that Italian women have historically been the *kinkeepers* in the family, including doing everyday tasks and

organizing activities for the benefit of their children (refer to my Introduction for further elaboration on kin work). Because Luisa is single and does not have children, Ester finds it challenging to create a similar relationship with her to the one she had with Lavinia. Be that as it may, their frequent telephone conversations do fall well within a common pattern found in a 2003 household survey conducted by Istat on the subject of “Families and Social Topics.” It found that 44 percent of women between the ages of 35-44, who do not live with their parents, speak with their mothers every day, and 39 percent speak with them one or more times a week (Valdoni 2006:17). The study also revealed that 22 percent of women in the aforementioned age group live within one kilometer of their mothers home, while 21 percent live in the same municipality (Valdoni 2006:20). Luisa lives about two kilometers (1.24 miles) from her parents, approximately the same distance from Ester’s house to her own mother’s home.⁶ Whereas Ester considered her mother her best friend, she acknowledges that this is not necessarily the case with her own daughter. She elaborates,

My mother was my confidant for everything, even if she disagreed with me. She would say things like, ‘No, what are you doing?’ She always tried to give me her opinion and silence [conversations about] certain things [for instance, Ester’s desire to move in with her for a short period after discovering Gianfranco’s affair]. It’s another story with my daughter; she has lots of girlfriends who are also her age. It’s different.

Ester adds that she knows Luisa is proud of her for getting a job, and eventually opening her own business. She states,

When I told them [her family] I was going to work, she said, ‘Mamma, now you are changing. It took some time, but in the end, you did it!’ Usually, everyone

⁶ The percentage of individuals who live in the same municipality of the mother remains at 80%; it fell from 83.4% in 1998 to 80.3% in 2003 (Valdoni 2006:20).

makes big changes when they are 18, 20, 25 years old. I did it when I was 48. They [her kids] were very happy for me.

Now both women work and are participants in a type of social reproduction that is, in some important ways, dissimilar from what has long been considered acceptable, or at the very least, desirable, social behavior for women. Moreover, notwithstanding Ester's misgivings about the "crack" in their relationship, Luisa contacts her mother on a daily basis out of her own volition. She also has dinner with her parents and brother at least once every week and a half, demonstrating that the family, especially her mother, remains an important point of reference for her. Still, Ester hopes that Luisa "gives herself the possibility to be in a committed relationship and have a child." She thinks Luisa will seek her out more when, and if, she finds a partner that suits her. Ester's relationship with her son, on the other hand, is more in line with what she envisioned for herself as a mother. I examine their relationship next.

Ester and Fabrizio

Fabrizio is 28 years old, lives with his parents, and is a student at the university. Ester explains that he expects to pass his final exams by the end of 2014. She states, "I can't wait until he graduates. I hope I don't die first [she laughs]." According to the 2014 Annual Report of Italy published by Istat, in 2012, 52 percent of males and 35 percent of females between the ages of 25 and 34 lived in their family home (162). The report states,

This phenomenon is due to several factors: an increased spread in schooling, the lengthening of time spent studying and training, the difficulties faced by young

people when entering the work force, [as well as] the precarity of the work itself, [and] the difficult access to the housing market. The effect of these factors was amplified in the last four years by an unfavorable economic situation that has affected the employment of young people, in particular, and has also contributed to a widespread sense of insecurity and uncertainty (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014:162) (my translation).

Without doubt, the global financial crisis that began with the collapse of the housing market in the United States in 2007 (Golub et al. 2014, Helleiner 2011) exacerbated the challenges faced by Italian young adults seeking to find their place in society (Donadio 2012; Fisher 2007; Livi Bacci 2005; Povoledo 2012; Severgnini 2013). However, both scholars and popular media outlets have noted that this crisis does not negate the accepted practice by many young adults, and their parents, to remain in the parental home because it is convenient and comfortable (Bohlen 1996; Dalla Zuanna 2001; Laurenzi 1997; Livi-Bacci 2001; Riding 2002). The aforementioned household survey conducted by Istat in 2003 found that nearly 62 percent of young adults between the ages of 25-29 lived with their parents (71 percent male and 53 percent female) (Meli 2006:65). Of these, 43 percent (48 percent male and 37 percent female) “responded they were fine with this [arrangement] and could still enjoy their personal freedom while living with family. This [response] could lead [observers] to interpret this phenomenon as more of a choice, rather than a necessity ” (Meli 2006:67 and 74) (my translation). Another 20 percent of those surveyed in this age cohort (16 percent male and 26 percent female) “responded they still live with their family of origin because they are still studying” (Meli 2006:67 and 74).

Ester enjoys her son’s company and doesn’t mind that he lives at home. She believes it is her responsibility as a mother to support him in any way she can as he builds his own life. She states,

He is the most important thing. ... I would never let him go just like that. I need to wait until he finds a position, until he finishes [his studies] at the university. I want to see the results of all my work. I've never abandoned him, not for any moment of his life. Are you kidding?

She adds, "He give me strength; he encourages me so much; so, so much." Ester explains that Fabrizio created a website for her business to try and attract more clients, especially younger clients. She states, "He said to me, 'Mamma, at least people will know about your business. Everybody uses the Internet today.' Can you believe that I already received a few calls? There are so many people that don't know I am here." In addition to keeping Ester "up with the times," Fabrizio also makes a small monthly contribution to the household. She elaborates,

He only began working a little over a year ago [at age 27], so he doesn't earn very much. He gives us about 200 euros [approximately \$250] a month. He started a business with a friend where they help people with all their computer and telephone problems, especially Apple, the iPhone. Everything today is Apple, Apple, iPhone, iPad. The telephone and computer industries are the only ones doing well in Italy, probably because we all need our telephones and computers. Now I have a tablet, too [she laughs]! I am still learning how to use it, but at least I have it. ... He can't afford to help us very much because he needs to repay the loan he took out to open the business. He had to borrow money from private lenders because the banks won't even consider giving a loan to younger people, to anybody it seems. We [she and her husband] had to guarantee it [the loan]. We don't earn very much either, but at least the private lenders are more flexible and have a little more faith that you will pay them back. The interest rates are higher than the banks', but everything gets done through private lenders now. That's the only way to borrow money.

Ester and her husband also help Fabrizio with the monthly installments for the loan. Their household dynamic regarding expenses falls squarely within the findings of the 2003 Istat household survey. The reports states that 35 percent of young adults between the ages of 25 – 29 (30 percent male and 41 percent female) "responded they don't contribute to household expenses because they do not work." Of those that do work, nearly 32 percent

“responded they keep their earnings for themselves” (32 percent male and 31 percent female), 17 percent claimed to contribute to household expenses regularly (18 percent male and 15 percent female), and 15 percent stated they contribute to these expenses occasionally (17 percent male and 12 percent female) (Meli 2006:78).

The relationship between Ester and her son also draws attention to the complex nature of intergenerational support. Ester clearly gets a strong sense of fulfillment from her ability to provide some financial assistance to Fabrizio using money she earns from *her* business. She states, “I really have to stretch it [the money] sometimes because it’s not like I earn a lot. I make do, though.” In a similar vein, the financial support that Fabrizio provides to the household may be small, but the nonmonetary contributions he makes to the family are invaluable to his mother. Ester swells with pride when she talks about her son’s interest in helping her grow her business, as well as the opportunities he and his friends provide to be social. The emotional and practical support Ester provides for Fabrizio extends to his friends, and in particular, to his girlfriend of a little over a year. During one of our conversations about her son’s relationship, she states, “I am happy to be able to dedicate myself to them. I do things for them; I cook. I help with whatever I can.” She continues, “I like her a lot. She motivates him. She is the woman for him. She stays with us, at our house, almost every weekend.” I ask Ester if Fabrizio and his girlfriend sleep together in her house, and she responds, “Oh yes. I don’t have any problems with that. They are adults. Well, she is 23 years old, but he is 28.”

Given the growing acceptance of cohabitation before, or instead of, marriage, which increased 70 percent between 2006-2007 and 2012-2013 (Istat Rapporto Annuale

2014:162),⁷ I follow up with whether they have plans to move in together. Despite her strict upbringing, Ester's family already has a history of cohabitation, as evidenced by Ester's brothers' long-term relationships and her daughter's short-lived relationships after her separation from her husband. She responds, "No, neither of them show any interest in moving in together." She adds, "Like I said, she is only 23 years old. [Fabrizio] may move in with his friend, his business partner, after he has his degree and they are more stable." I wonder if living with his parents where he is guaranteed warm meals and a clean living space will deter Fabrizio from moving out, and ask Ester how much he helps out around the house. She responds,

I tell him all the time to prepare. I say, "Prepare yourself because when you get married, or move in with a girlfriend, you haven't found a new mother. You've found a wife, which is *different*, completely different. Because if she works and you work, it's only fair that the two of you work together in the house." He knows this perfectly well because I have been telling him since he was little. It's only fair. It's absolutely fair. You know what his father does? After dinner, he pushes his plate to one side, gets up and sits in the armchair. When Fabrizio finishes dinner, he clears the table and puts his plate in the sink. Him? My husband? He's never even taken a glass from here to the counter [she motions as if she is moving a glass]. You need to serve him as if he is *il padrone* [the master].

I suggest that, perhaps, Gianfranco can learn to help more, just as she thinks her daughter's ex-husband could have learned. She exclaims, "Are you joking? You're joking! Don't even think about it!" Undoubtedly, Ester is negotiating engrained assumptions about her responsibilities in the family with her own evolving expectations of herself, as well as her children. In the next section, I review how scholars have

⁷ "Free unions of unmarried people and "unmarried" stepfamilies [my quotes] are becoming more frequent. Cohabitation *more uxorio* (as husband and wife) between unmarried men and unmarried women has increased 70% between 2006-2007 and 2012-2013 reaching a total of 606,000 families. Overall, there are 1 million 'free unions' [in Italy] (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014:162) (my translation).

analyzed the manner in which these assumptions translate into the compromises of daily home life. In particular, I reference an early example of feminist anthropological scholarship regarding how women exercised authority in European peasant communities, as well as how their power to make decisions was constrained by a larger social structure under the control of men. I then relate this ethnographic work to Ester's circumstances today.

The Limits of Women's Traditional Power

As I briefly wrote earlier in this chapter, during the early 1970s, feminist anthropologists began to analyze, in earnest, how women managed these assumptions on an everyday basis. In their groundbreaking work, *Toward An Anthropology of Women*, Reiter et al. (1975) challenge the male bias of anthropological studies and convincingly argue that it is necessary to conduct more ethnographic research on women, themselves, because "women's experience may be different from that of the men, and is therefore the legitimate subject for investigation" (Reiter 1975:19). This claim may sound obvious today, especially since anthropologists and other social scientists have made significant progress in the study of women, and gender more broadly, since 1975 (Adams and Coltrane 2005; Butler 2004; Gerstel and Gallagher 2001; Coltrane 1997; Ortner 1997; Segal 1997; Mohanty 1991; Wikan 1991; Sanday and Goodenough 1990; Moore 1988; Amadiume 1987; Connell 1987; Sanday 1981; MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Nonetheless, I am struck, as well as somewhat disappointed; by the indelible relevance essays written in 1975 continue to have now, specifically in Italy. For instance, in her

comments about the division of labor among men and women in Oroel, a Spanish peasant community, Susan Harding writes,

A woman knows her house and family, as a man knows his fields and trees. She knows where everything is in the house and how to keep it in order. She knows the tastes and moods and needs of her household charges and how to get those in her charge from one day to the next. ... Women's primary work is at home, the place where lives are made" (286).

Harding then goes on to challenge the premise that women actually have more power than men in peasant societies. She elaborates,

The argument for women having the upper hand in peasant societies runs something like this: The informal power that women have in the household and the village is effectively greater than the formal power that men have in either domain. In the household, women either make the decisions, or when they are mutual or made by men, women invariably get their own way. In the village, decisions are not worked out so much in formal organizations, which men control, as in informal networks, which women dominate. The "appearance" is that men have more power; the "reality" is that women do (306).

Harding argues that this argument seriously underestimates the power that men hold because they run "the structures that determine the conditions of everyday life." In this larger context, the role of women in running everyday life in the village is dwarfed by comparison. The village does not exist in isolation from the "larger structural context from which men derive much of their economic, political, and ideological power" Hence, male dominance in European peasant villages is a structural fact. Women may not experience themselves as subordinate to men, but, in actuality, structurally they are (Harding 1975:306-07).

Ester's experience as a housewife is not dissimilar to Harding's description of the relationships between the women and men of Oroel. She writes, "The powers women have in Oroel and other peasant societies are the kind accorded to the subordinate group

in an enduring relationship of interdependence. If women have any power to affect the conditions of their lives it is through men and on an individual basis” (308). Like the women of Oroel, as a housewife Ester exercised certain managerial powers that were, unfortunately, dependent on her husband’s whim. Not only did she unilaterally make the day-to-day decisions to make the household run smoothly, she also managed its everyday finances, as well as those of her husband’s business. She explains,

I am the one that managed all of the finances, both for his business, and for us, for the house. I went to the bank to make deposits, withdrawals. I paid all of the bills and utilities. I managed all of it. But, practically from the time I bought this business, he took away my access to the bank accounts. One day, he went crazy. He came here and took my bankcard, the checkbook. He removed my right to write checks. He took everything. Now, he controls the finances. It was a punishment.

Two years after she began working at the market stall, Ester’s uncle announced that he would be retiring and offered to sell the business to her. When the time came to initiate the purchase, Ester forced Gianfranco’s hand to give her the money to make the down payment. She elaborates,

We had money saved in the bank, and I told him I needed some to make the down payment. That was my money, too. I worked at home. It’s because of me that we had any saved at all. He earned it, but I always put money aside for a moment of need when it would be useful to have it at our disposal. He works for himself and I didn’t have a salary, but in the twenty years that I managed the finances with his earnings, I put away a nice figure. I was always prudent. I just kept setting money aside, setting money aside for our future when we grew old. So when I told him I needed some of it to give to my uncle, he knew he had to let me have it. First of all, I saved it [points to herself]. Then, also because he knew he was in the wrong with that affair. As much as he denied it, and he still does today, he had to give me the money. But, listen to what he did afterward. Not even a month after I paid my uncle, he [Gianfranco] came here and told me that since I wanted to be autonomous, independent, then I had to support myself. I couldn’t “ride on his shoulders.” I couldn’t count on anything.

Ester comments that she was not entirely surprised by Gianfranco’s action, but it did put

her at a serious disadvantage as the Italian economy began to falter. She states,

He did it to crush me. I was escaping his control. It was over. This was my business and I was going pay my uncle in monthly installments with the cash I made here because I thought I could do it. About twelve years ago, when I first took over the business, this market was always busy and full of activity. I would easily make the equivalent of 3000 – 3500 Euros a month. During that time, Italy had already begun to transition to the Euro. Three or four years later, I am telling you the truth, after they made the transition to the Euro it was a total disaster. I was lucky to bring in 1000 – 1300, 1400 Euros a month. After my uncle passed away a few years ago, I had to renegotiate the cost of the business with his son, so that I could pay it off. Look around. This market is practically dead. In the meantime, until now, I haven't had access to his money, not even the money I saved for the future. Before, when I needed money to buy, I don't know, groceries or these kinds of things, I used that bank account. That was already such a help for me. Now, the money I make is not just to support the business, but also to buy detergent, all of those things for the house. So calculate another 400, 500, 600 Euros a month for groceries. Plus, I try to help Fabrizio in any way that I can.

I interrupt and ask, "Gianfranco doesn't give you any money for household expenses?"

She answers, "*Oh cara mia* [Oh sweetheart]. Are you joking? He buys the oil, the vinegar, and wine wholesale every so often. I take care of everything else." "Does he help Fabrizio as well?" I inquire, somewhat indignant. "Oh yes, of course" she responds and adds,

Like I told you, we both help him pay the loan with what we can and he [Gianfranco] gives him money every so often to help with some expenses; when Fabrizio asks. But it's not like Gianfranco is making the same money he used to, either. There was a time when he made a nice figure as craftsman, but now, nobody is asking for anything. He does small jobs, and if you put them together, he gets by, but it's not like before. He hasn't had a single request for a large job for a good while now.

"It sounds very stressful" I respond and ask, "Are you able to make ends meet?" "For now yes, mostly" she answers and continues,

In any case, I don't have any regrets about this. I mean to have maintained this activity. Maybe I deprive myself. I don't do very many other things outside of work. I don't care. I am carrying the business forward. I don't want to surrender.

This is my future; this is where my pension is coming from. It's a bit harder now because when my mother was alive, she used to help me [Lavinia had recently passed away] and now we have this never-ending economic crisis. Let's hope it gets resolved soon.

“Your mother helped you?” I ask. “But didn’t you tell me she was completely opposed to your buying the business from your uncle?” I clarify. “Yes,” she responds and explains, “Initially, she would discourage me. She would say ‘At your age, you’re going to embark on this thing.’ Then she had to accept my desire to come here and open my own business. Because she realized nobody was going to stop me in that moment.” Lavinia who had swiftly shut down any talk of separation when Ester had discovered Gianfranco’s affair, was, in this case, prepared to help her daughter. Perhaps it was a reluctant acknowledgement that, unlike her own tenure as a housewife, staying at home was no longer be a viable option for Ester, especially since Luisa and Fabrizio were older and required less of her attention. There is very little doubt that times had changed, and will continue to change. Yet, the intergenerational ties that have long depicted the Italian family appear to be modified, but intact. In the next section, I discuss why this bond was especially significant for Ester and her business, and why it may be important for other women entrepreneurs as well.

Ester, Lavinia, and Women Entrepreneurs

Lavinia was instrumental to keeping Ester’s business afloat, especially in the early years. She elaborates,

Not having ever really worked in the past because I got married soon after I got my [high school] diploma, I didn't have any practical information, any experience [on running a business], nothing. Throwing yourself into commerce at the age of 48 isn't for everybody. I paid for this a bit. I paid for it in the sense that I found myself in really hard times financially. The clientele in the market had begun to slow down, and as a solution, I did nothing more than buy merchandise that was costly because I thought "I'll sell novelties, I'll sell items that are in style, I'll do this, I'll do that." Well, I realized my business was drowning. I was drowning. And my mother came to my rescue. She helped me tremendously, economically. When I couldn't make payment, she would help with money from her pension. She would give me something. She never asked me *how much* I owed. She would only ask, "What do you need to pay?" and give me some money. Or she would say, "Here take 300, 500, 800 Euro, pay off some things, and when I need them, you can pay me back slowly."

Were it not for Lavinia's financial support, Ester is certain that she would have been forced to close the business soon after she purchased it from her uncle. Her narration of her relationship with her mother, like her relationship with her own children, also brings out the complicated nature of the strong intergenerational bonds of the Italian family. In this important bond, women hold the distinctive assignment of protecting the sanctity of the family from the certain, and uncertain, changes brought forth by the passage of time and evolving social practices, specifically vis-à-vis gender. When Ester was a full-time housewife, Lavinia was both a valuable source of emotional and practical support, as well as a formidable obstacle to Ester's desire for change. She provided Ester with adult companionship and cooked for the family when Ester's children were young. Later, she closed off any opportunity for Ester to attempt to alter her relationship with Gianfranco, and her role in the family, by forcing her to remain under the same roof with him following the discovery of his affair. Ester's recounting of her rapport with her mother also reveals that even as "a woman faithful to tradition," Lavinia recognized the changing position of women in Italian society. Ester states,

My mother would worry [about the business] and tell me, "You've committed to giving your uncle an amount you will never make." She understood that women don't devote themselves to keeping a perfect household in the same way they used to. Once, this was a woman's primary responsibility. Now, who wants to do it twenty-four hours a day? Today women want to work outside the house. They want a salary. They want to be managers. The merchandise I sell doesn't have the same importance it once had. It doesn't represent the woman the way it used to. Besides, now you can buy these things for cheap from the immigrant on the street. It's not the same quality, but it doesn't matter as much.

Once Ester took over her uncle's stall at the market, she believes Lavinia wanted her to succeed. She states, "I don't think she helped me just because she felt obligated [to do it] as my mother. I think she realized how important this was for me."

In her essay about the women in the village of Oroel, Harding argues that while the power they hold is certainly real, it remains a function of their relationships with the men in their lives. These relationships are embedded in a larger social structure where men control access to resources (1975:308). Sadly, in Ester's case, and in Italy as a whole, this assessment rings true through to today. The gendered assumptions engrafted into the Italian Constitution (see my Introduction) and state welfare policies have historically reinforced the roles of men as the primary financial providers and women as the primary providers of practical, everyday, affective familial care. Regarding the principal features of the Italian welfare state, political scientist Julia Lynch writes,

The central characteristics of the Italian welfare state during the 'golden age' of the 1960s–80s, which persisted into the cautious reform era of the 1990s–2000s, were its Bismarckian structure and male-breadwinner orientation. In the Bismarckian model, social policies are financed by contributions from employers and workers; and the level of benefits, eligibility criteria, and the like, can vary from sector to sector and job to job within sectors. The male-breadwinner orientation assumed that the modal family had a husband employed in the formal sector and a wife at home caring for children and elders, resulting in a welfare state heavy on cash transfers and light on services; and tied most benefits to activity in the labour market (2014:381).

This structural bias toward men is also evident in finance. Men overwhelmingly dominate the banking profession in Italy where women hold less than 10 percent of managerial positions (Tarantola and Magliocco 2007). This lack of presence may influence how women are perceived as business clients. In a recent study on microfirms (those with less than five employees), statistical economists Alesina, Lotti, and Mistrulli find that women own about 25 percent of all microfirms in Italy and pay approximately between 55 to 170 more Euros in additional interest per year than men. Moreover, the average line of credit granted to women is smaller than that granted to men (€53,000 versus €61,000 (2012:45-46, 50)). The possible explanations they provide regarding why women pay more for credit are indicative of a deeply embedded bias that perpetuates the subordinate position of women in Italian society as a whole. They write,

We can think of two possibilities. One is “taste-based discrimination” in the sense that lenders do not see women as appropriate and capable as borrowers and as entrepreneurs especially in some sectors of the economy; therefore they look at them with a combination of aversion and suspicion. The second one is that women are not as good as men at bargaining for better deals from banks, especially since in most cases women face a male loan officer.

Given this proclivity toward male chauvinism that seems to pervade every aspect of Italian society, the intergenerational ties that characterize the family become even more important for women. Unable to access commercial resources that appear to be readily available to men, women like Ester would have no recourse than to remain in an intolerable situation where their livelihood is completely dependent on how they manage their relationships within the family, specifically with their husbands. Even if her business is not as stable as she would prefer, it is still a place where she can claim autonomy, the place where she takes care herself.

Observations

In this chapter, I used Ester's story to examine the intergenerational ties that have historically defined the Italian family. Her description of how her life differs from her mother and her two adult children makes it possible to gain a better appreciation of how the intergenerational bonds of the family are changing. To be certain, I do not intend for Ester's family to represent the quintessential Italian family, nor do I think they offer an exhaustive representation into its internal dynamics. There are, however, some observations I can make that point to important changes in Italian family life.

To begin, intergenerational dependence remains a key component of how the Italian family functions. For instance, borrowing money from a bank to invest in a business, or to buy a house continues to be a challenge for most Italians, especially for women and the young. In this regard, the family continues to fill in where the state fails. Like her parents had done for her, Ester and Gianfranco have helped their children obtain the financing needed to make important investments. Gianfranco cosigned Luisa's mortgage for her house, and both Gianfranco and Ester guaranteed the private loan that Fabrizio took to open his business. The significance of the intergenerational bond grows in importance if we consider the role that gender plays in these types of transactions. Ester was able to open her own business because she purchased it from her uncle, after she had worked for him for several years. She was also able to keep the business open because Lavinia used her own pension to help Ester pay for expenses. Had Ester gone to a bank to secure a loan to finance a new business, it is highly unlikely that she would

have succeeded. At best, because she is a woman, she might have been granted a high interest loan (see the previous section on women as entrepreneurs).

The influence that a family is able to exert on the decisions of its individual members, particularly the women, is also undergoing a transition. For example, when Ester discovered Gianfranco was having an affair, a fact that was already known to other members of the family, she decided it would be best if she spent some time away from him to consider her options. Unfortunately, her family, in particular her mother, decided otherwise. As matriarch, Lavinia decided it was in the family's best interest for Ester to remain with Gianfranco. Once it became clear that she would not be welcomed at her mother's house, not even for a month or two, Ester acquiesced because she had nowhere else to go. On the other hand, when Luisa "abruptly" decided that she would separate from her own husband because he was "lazy" and didn't help with the upkeep of the household, there was very little that Ester, or anyone else, could do to stop her. There are a number of important factors that can help to explain why Ester was unable to exert much influence over Luisa's decision. First, unlike Ester when she was younger, Luisa had a full-time job, and was not financially dependent on her husband. Second, Luisa did not have any children, so there was very little pressure to act in the family's best interest. Third, and most important, based on Ester's account, there is every indication that Luisa has a different outlook than her mother regarding her responsibilities as a wife. As a dual income couple, Luisa did not think it was fair that she work full-time and manage the household on her own. Nor did she think that her primary responsibility was to accommodate her husband's needs.

As of this writing, Luisa has developed a full-time career in the

telecommunications industry, lives alone in a house that she owns, is currently not in a relationship, and does not have children. The categories of everyday life over which Ester anticipated that she would bond with her daughter, such as marriage and children, are for the present moment, inaccessible. She worries this may not change because Luisa is on the cusp of her forties, and “in few years, her opportunity to have children will pass.”

Ester is also not sure how she would feel if this possibility became a reality. Although she is certain she would adjust, she is saddened by the prospect of not having the opportunity to share her mothering expertise, and experience, with her daughter. “It seems unnatural in some ways,” she states during one of our conversations, adding, “Because when you become the mother of a girl, you think that someday, you will talk to her about becoming a mother, too. It’s a cycle. That’s just the way it is.” Ester’s relationship with Luisa has already undergone one important adjustment. By her own admission, once she began working for herself at the market, Ester’s priorities changed. Because Luisa and Fabrizio were older, and no longer required her undivided attention, Ester’s decision to work did not impact them significantly. Additionally, Ester’s day at the market usually ends in the early afternoon, so she still has time to go home and make dinner for her family.

Nevertheless, working has changed her opinion of herself and her capabilities. At the market, she met people from different walks of life, made new friendships, and most significantly, became an entrepreneurial businesswoman. Ester, a former housewife, beams when I ask to whom she thinks she is more similar, her mother or her daughter. “Oh” she responds emphatically, “I am more similar to my daughter. Absolutely, yes.”

Like many adult women, including her daughter, Ester is renegotiating her position in the Italian family, an interwoven tapestry of sorts that is also being

significantly altered by a number of factors. These include the passage of time, an increase in life expectancy, changes in lifestyle choices, like the postponement of children and marriage, economic uncertainty, and a desire for self-fulfillment, to name a few. As the Italian family changes, the significance of the intergenerational ties that have characterized it since time immemorial will change as well. For example, with some modifications, Ester continues to be the primary *kinkeeper* of the family (see my Introduction), just as Lavinia had been before her. Aside from managing her own business, already different than her mother, Ester has, notably, cut ties with her brothers, and does not anticipate that she will reconcile with them. It is unlikely Lavinia would have ever taken a similar course of action, let alone approve of it.

In a similar vein, irrespective of whether she finds a partner and has a child, it is unlikely that Luisa will carry the mantle of primary *kinkeeper* as she grows older. This role, if it continues, may perhaps become the responsibility of Fabrizio, or his future wife, if he marries. Because he lives at home, Fabrizio has witnessed, and experienced, his mother's *kinkeeping* skills firsthand. From hosting dinner parties for him and his friends, to making sure he sees his sister every few weeks, Ester has shown Fabrizio the importance of maintaining ties and bringing people together. Also, for all of the adjustments that Ester has had to make in her relationship with Luisa, her relationship with Fabrizio has remained fairly consistent. She cares for him in a very similar way that Lavinia cared for Ester's brothers, with two important differences. First, Ester claims she has taught Fabrizio that, unlike his father, he should not expect to be served hand and foot by a future wife, or partner, and that he should share the load of household chores. Second, unlike his uncles, Fabrizio is attending university and is running his own small

company. If current research offers any guidance, both of these factors suggest Fabrizio will likely be more egalitarian than his father or Luisa's ex-husband, and may be more willing to do the work of *kinkeeping*. This remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 2: EVERYTHING FOR THE FAMILY

Basic Information

Graza is a retired university professor and lives alone in Rome. She is separated from her husband, Michael, who is also retired. He is a former attorney and worked in the banking industry. After being married for almost fourteen years, Michael confessed to Graza that he had an affair with a younger woman and had fathered an unrecognized son. Graza stayed with Michael “for the good of the family” for another twenty years before she had enough of his antics and left him. They have two daughters, Federica, who is on the cusp of forty, and Clarissa, who is in her early thirties. Federica has worked in the film industry, but is currently unemployed. She lives with her boyfriend in a house that Graza purchased, so that her daughter could have some security, and not worry about paying rent, while she looks for a job. As of this writing, Clarissa, who graduated from university, found a stable position in the museum industry in Milan. She is currently single. Neither daughter has any children.

“There is a strike today, right?” asks the woman standing next to me at the bus stop. “Yes,” I reply and add, “but I think the buses will run from 5 PM to 8 PM and then the strike will continue for the rest of the night.” She nods. I hope I have enough time to get to Graza’s apartment for our meeting, and be back on a bus on my way home by eight o’clock. It was about a twenty to thirty minute ride, depending on traffic, plus another ten-minute walk to Graza’s place. I could see that the approaching bus was

more crowded than usual. I squeeze on and do my best to stand toward the center right of the bus, so that I could see the landmarks and know how close I am to my stop. As we bump along, I, once more, find myself marveling at how the drivers manage to turn the tight corners of this ancient city. I think it's quite a sight and enjoy most of my bus rides for this reason. Once I reach my stop, I make my way out, and briskly walk past the small shops and eateries toward my destination. "No time to buy fruit, or window shop today," I remind myself. The doorman at Graza's building greets me and asks, "Going to see Ms. Portelli? You know, the elevator works, ma'am" he states. "Thank you," I say and make my way toward the stairs. While I walk up the four steep flights to reach Graza's apartment, I could hear her open her door. "I am almost there!" I yell up. "Ah, Laura!" she exclaims and walks over to the stairwell. She leans over and begins talking to me. She states, "As always, you are taking the stairs. It's a good hike, no?" As I reach her floor, I respond, somewhat out of breath, "Yes, it is always a good thing to do. It makes me feel better about eating so much." "I should take the stairs when I don't have groceries to bring up," she replies, and continues, "the elevator was such a beautiful invention, but it makes us lazy."

Once inside the apartment, I walk over to the dining room table and begin to unpack my notebook, recorder, and pencils. It is a nicely laid out, open apartment with a small kitchen, a medium sized dining room that opens into the living room, both with bay windows, and a short staircase that leads to a small loft that serves as Graza's bedroom. "We are having tea, yes?" she asks. I nod and say, "Only if it isn't too much trouble." "No," she responds, smiling "you know it's part of our routine now. Anyway, it makes it

easier to talk these deep topics you are asking about. So, where did we stop last time?" she asks as she goes into the kitchen. I look through my notes, and then my watch and say, "We started to talk about your move to Milan." I continue, "I was thinking we could talk for about an hour, maybe an hour and a half. I would like to be at the bus stop before eight, so that I don't miss the last bus because of the strike. But, if we are talking about something important, I can take a cab home. It's not a problem." "Oh, I don't think we'll go that long today," she says as she walks back to the table with the tea. She adds, "I have to get some jewelry [that she makes] ready to bring with me to the [choir] performance tomorrow. Are you coming?" "Yes, I am planning on it," I reply. "So, like I started to tell you last time " she begins,

We stayed here in Rome for about two years after the shock, after he told me about the affair and the baby. I was 35 years old at that time [in the mid-1980s] and I remember I had a very normal, very just reaction to the news. I kicked him out of the house. ... So, for a while, he went to live in a residence far away from home, a type of hotel. I resisted the urge to see him for some time, for about four months, and then I went to get him, myself.

"Why?" I ask. She responds, "Why? I don't why exactly. I have never clearly understood why." Graza attempts to explain her decision, stating,

Because - well, because I felt that I would overcome this problem. Obviously, the problem was his, but I would help him resolve it. ... Yes, this is what I thought; there is no doubt [in my mind]. I didn't think about what it would do, the effect that it would have on me. The problem was his, and he couldn't overcome it alone, so I would help him. This was my solution. Think for a bit how silly [that is]. Think for a bit how foolish! Don't you think it's foolish? Now I think it's nonsense.

She later adds,

But I had no idea; I never had any suspicions. The whole thing was quite upsetting, quite shocking for me. I was very busy with my research, with my daughters. Maybe I was afraid of ending up alone with two little girls and work. The younger one was 4 years old and the older one was 12, so their activities kept me busy. I also had a prestigious position and was well regarded in my field. This was important for me, too.

Graza emphasizes that her decision to go and get Michael wasn't about opportunism or comfort. She states, "I remember being very emotional, very taken, maybe very in love, capable of overcoming this problem. I behaved how I felt at the time. Perhaps I was too traditional. That's it. I behaved like a woman who takes it upon herself to be responsible not only for her own life, but also the lives of the people that surround her. You know, in the way women were at one time, 'I can do it. I am capable.'

In this chapter, I use Graza's experience as a full-time working mother and wife to demonstrate the intricate balancing act that women, specifically of this age cohort, conduct to meet accepted social conventions regarding Italian family ideals. Graza's narrative perhaps portrays an extreme case of the lengths that women will go to for the "good of the family." Nonetheless, the professional and personal challenges Graza describes as a full-time working mother remain relevant for many Italian women today. I begin with a review of *la doppia presenza*, or the dual presence, a concept feminist Italian scholars have used to analyze the predicament of Italian working mothers and wives in their struggle to harmonize their professional aspirations with meeting their responsibilities at home. I then review the consequential influence of the expansion in

education in the aftermath of the Second World War. The increase in accessibility in education proved to be especially significant for women. In a similar vein, I use Graza's unplanned, premarital pregnancy to weigh the significance of changing social practices regarding premarital sex and conception.

Following this, I examine how working mothers of the 1970s addressed the significant shortage of reliable childcare options beyond what was available through their family network. Even as a young, full-time working mother with aspirations to continue developing her career, Graza, as well as her husband, made certain assumptions about how the responsibilities of family care should be split between a mother and a father. These are assumptions that Italians, in general, continue to make today. In keeping with this theme, I refer to scholarship which suggests that the traditional model of the male breadwinner, who leaves in the morning, works all day, and then comes home to a prepared dinner and clean children, continues to dictate how most employers, and employees, conceive of daily work life. This model sets up unrealistic expectations for working mothers, most of whom manage their children's home life, as well as their extracurricular activities.

Next, I discuss the impact of Graza's husband's extramarital affair on the family, and on Graza's career. I use the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, the triple presence, and emphasized femininity to analyze the social pressures that contributed to Graza's decision to support her husband. *Hegemonic masculinity* refers to the overall structural and institutional bias toward men found in most industrialized societies, the *triple presence* points to the responsibilities of eldercare, and other common responsibilities of familial care, that Italian women have beyond those of tending to their

children, and *emphasized femininity* describes the habitual, and socially sanctioned, practice by women, and societies at large, to accommodate men's predilections. I follow with a discussion about the treatment, and portrayal, of women under the tenure of former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, perhaps the most prominent, self-indulgent embodiment of Italian male privilege in recent memory. For nearly twenty years, Mr. Berlusconi was able to foist his overtly sexualized vision of womanhood onto the Italian public, without much outcry, particularly from women. I use the success of Mr. Berlusconi's portrayal of women, and its longevity, as an extreme example of both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. It lays bare some disturbing, deep-set biases regarding gender in Italian society.

Finally, I consider the discernable, polar opposite assumptions that are often made about Italian men and women regarding retirement and growing older. Undoubtedly, it has long been permissible for senior Italian men, including those who are retired, to act on their virile interests. In contrast, as they grow older, even those senior women who have had longevity in the workforce, continue to be expected to dedicate their time to family, and other activities deemed appropriate for their age. It is as if their experience in their professional lives, as well as their personal needs and interests, becomes null and void once they are perceived as senior citizens. Having said that, Graza's story points to a change in perception among older Italian women about spending the latter half of their lives in an unsatisfying marriage. With that, let us begin.

The Dual Presence

As I briefly mentioned above, Saraceno and other Italian scholars have referred to the predicament of working mothers and wives as *la doppia presenza* or the dual presence (Saraceno 1991a,b; Bimbi 1985; Balbo and Siebert-Zahar 1979; Balbo 1977). She writes,

Italian women scholars originated this concept with reference to the specific experience of women in the early seventies in Western developed countries. Women have become citizens of two worlds: that of the family and that of work. Not only do they assume two roles, they also belong to two complex social systems that are interrelated, yet separate; and they have full-time responsibilities in each. Working women generally have a different experience from that of working men, because the latter do not have full responsibility for the everyday maintenance of the family and, therefore, are not penalized by society for their reduced participation in it. The dual-presence pattern differs from the model of women's work first developed with industrialization. Then, working women were either young and unmarried, or they were married women who entered the labor force in times of crisis. ... at least in principle[,] citizenship in the world of paid work means for women that holding a paid job is no longer seen as a necessary evil. It is part and parcel of being an adult, with full social rights and responsibilities (1991:513).

Bimbi adds that "double presence" (as she refers to the term in English) and "being present" "draws attention to both the civil rights obtained in the family sphere and to the economic rights established in the labor market. In Italy, the concept ... has also been used to reference a new model of gender identity which is no longer exclusively bound up with a woman's role in the family, but rather aims to establish a new equilibrium between public and private life" (1993:140). One important factor that contributed to

women's expectations that they could remain in the labor force after they had children was the expansion of education. Wilson writes,

The proportion of girls in middle school rose from 39.9 percent in 1948-49 to 47 percent by 1972-73 and in upper secondary education from 37.3 percent to 42.4 percent. In higher education, the percentage rose from 26.3 in 1951, to 27.6 in 1961 and 37.5 in 1971. ... Improved [and mixed sex] education gave girls confidence and opened up new worlds to them. Although much of this only came to a head in the 1970s, it meant that a shift was already happening in the two previous decades. Most of the feminists of the 1970s had been in school in this period, enjoying a level of education far higher than that of their mothers (117).

Women further propelled these advances by becoming the educators, themselves. In the next section, I discuss the significance of the expansion of education for Italian women, as well as why teaching, and other professions that were viewed as non-taxing for the family, offered the best opportunity for women to work.

Education and Professionalization of Women

Because it offers a short workday and extended time off during the summer, teaching was the most convenient career choice for women with children. Historian Simonetta Ulivieri writes that from the post-war era to 1971, the number of women employed as teachers from primary through secondary school had grown. In 1951, half of middle school teachers and over 70 percent of primary teachers were women. By 1971 women comprised almost half of all secondary teachers, 64 percent of middle school teachers, and almost 80 percent of primary teachers (Ulivieri 1996:51,75; Wilson 2010:119). Women also made advances in other, typically male professions. Women graduating in medicine rose from 3 percent in 1951 to nearly 13 percent in 1968

(Vicarelli 1989:229), and women employed as lecturers at universities grew from 10 percent in 1958 to 21 percent in 1971. Even so, the representation of women in these professions remained small and earning a promotion remained difficult. For instance, very few women employed as university lecturers were given tenure (Willson 201:119).

The significance of the social and historical context of this period for women and gender relations, as a whole, cannot be overstated. Saraceno writes,

As high school and college students, or as young workers, these women [generally born between 1947-1957] were exposed to the political turmoil and change of the late sixties and early seventies: the movement of 1968, the increasing appeal of the Communist party to social groups different from the traditional working class, the formation of New Left groups competing with the Communist party, [and] a resurgence of trade union struggles that had been silenced in the fifties and early sixties by a political and industrial relations climate heavily marked by the Cold War. ... This cohort of women reached adulthood just as feminism was becoming a publicly debated issue. They encountered, and some of them entered, the women's movement in high school, in college, or at the workplace. ... This cohort also the first to enter the labor force in great numbers and to remain in it after marrying and having children. Especially in the more industrialized and economically developed regions, the pattern of labor force participation of women in this cohort indicated that they expected to have a work life similar to that of men (1991b:504-05).

This is the social setting in which Graza attended university, and was later employed by her department. Graza originally wanted to study medicine, but the length of time needed to earn the degree ran contrary to her and Michael's plans. He wanted to marry soon after they obtained their degrees, so she settled on studying biology, which only required an investment of four years, instead of the eight needed to become a doctor. She states, "You know, I just thought about this for the first time in many years. This is actually the principle reason I didn't study medicine. Can you believe it?" She anecdotally adds that biology was a popular field of study among women choosing to follow the sciences. Unfortunately, their plans changed when Graza got pregnant with their first child before

they married. In the next section, I will use Graza's unplanned pregnancy as a window to examine changing social norms regarding premarital sex and conception.

Getting Pregnant

While Graza studied at the university, Michael left to fulfill his military service. During his first leave, Michael returned to Rome. At that point, Graza was forced to modify her plans. She elaborates,

When I was young, my objective was to get out of my parents house. I planned to study at the university, and then, I suppose, to marry at some point. But, when Michael came home on leave, I got pregnant. I knew then that we would be tied forever. I hadn't yet graduated from university and was not married. This certainly wasn't the norm at the time. My life, after I became pregnant, took a completely different path. My mother offered to take me to Switzerland to get an abortion. I said no, and declared my independence. My mother was very religious, and was embarrassed. I didn't care; everybody was against me. I was kicked out of the house, and moved in with Michael's family. We were married three months later in April, and I graduated from the university in July.

As Graza talks about that period of her life, her voice fills with pride. She describes how she proved everyone wrong. She states, "My father told me I was on a downward spiral. Well, I won a four-year fellowship to continue my research after I earned my degree. I worked immediately. After my daughter was born, I only took three months of unpaid leave. Even during that time, I would go to work for a few hours whenever I could. I would bring the baby with me and breastfeed her there." She asserts, "I had to take my life seriously. It wasn't a decision about becoming a mother. The decision was about taking control of my life. I didn't really want to be married, but that is what people did. My priorities were my life [meaning her career], my baby, and then being married." I ask

Graza about the reaction of her professors and colleagues regarding her pregnancy and she responds, “Actually, I think my professors thought I was brave. I was also good at what I did [she worked with microscopic organisms]. I was very important to the group, so nobody gave me a hard time. I don’t think they cared as long as I did my job.”

Not surprisingly, in the early 1970s, premarital pregnancy was frowned upon by Italian society as a whole, so it is understandable that Graza married Michael, even though she did it with some ambivalence. Nevertheless, social practices regarding premarital sex and premarital conception had already started to change. Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna found that in 1953, there were 1.23 premarital conceptions (PMCs) per 100 never married women. Additionally, in nearly 18 percent of marriages carried out that year, the bride was already pregnant. This remained constant through 1968. Notably, from 1968 to 1975, “PMCs increased considerably, reaching the highest level in 1974 (50 percent more than in 1968) and the number of marriages with PMC was almost 20 percent of all marriages” (1994:120). From 1976-88, premarital conception declined; by 1988, “the bride was pregnant in only 14 percent of all marriages.” Although the data they are examining is scarce, Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna suggest that premarital sex began to increase in the late 1960s, particularly among never married women generally born in the 1950s. Contraception, on the other hand, was used more effectively among never married women born in the 1960s, leading to the decline in PMCs in the late 1970s and into the 1980s (1994:120).

To provide some perspective on how attitudes regarding premarital sex and conception have changed in Italian society, it is worth noting that in 2012 more than one in four babies were born out of wedlock. Irrespective of this trend, the incidence of this

occurrence remains much lower in Italy than in other European countries. For example, the rate of incidence for the Northern regions, where births out of wedlock are more common, is still more than 20 percentage points lower than that of France, the UK, and Sweden (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014:162).⁸ As briefly noted above, in addition to an increasing, albeit measured, openness to premarital sex, the early 1970s also ushered in an increase in women's labor force participation. In the next section, I discuss the ramifications of this increase in relation to the growing childcare needs of working women.

The Challenges of Childcare in Italy

Between 1972 and 1980, the newly employed grew to one and a half million; of these, 1,247,000 were women, particularly between the ages of 25 -35 (Del Boca 1988:123). Most women worked in the growing service sector, as clerks in the expanding public sector, and for the small and medium sized, industrial family firms developing in the Third Italy (northeast and central regions), often off the books (Del Boca 1988:124). Along with the growth in women's employment came a growing need for good, dependable childcare. Graza explains that she stopped nursing her daughter after her three month leave and organized a babysitting schedule among her friends who were also mothers, most of whom stayed at home or worked in positions with more flexibility. She states,

⁸ The regional breakdown for births out of wedlock for 2012 is 27.7% in the Northwest, 29.6% in the Northeast, 29.1% in the Center, compared to 19.5% in the islands and 16.4% in the South (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014:162).

It was important to me to demonstrate that I was like my colleagues, mostly like the men. I had two female colleagues, but they were separated and didn't have kids. I published a great deal and worked very long days, so I really depended on my friends. I called it the circle of mutual support. I remember picking up my baby daughter late from friends' houses; she was usually asleep on the pillow that I brought for her when I dropped her off in the morning. There weren't any daycare options, so if you were a mother working full-time, it was your responsibility to find a way to keep your job and take care of the children.

Italy introduced a federally funded national nursery school program in 1971 (Willson 2010:159). However, implementation took time. Caldwell writes that in the mid 1970s, there was only one public nursery for every 52,800 residents in Milan and one for every 236,000 in Naples (1978:84). Graza enrolled her daughter in daycare when she was almost 4 years old. She explains, "Even though it was expensive, we enrolled her in private daycare because we didn't qualify for any assistance from the city, and the waiting list to enroll in the government program was absurd anyway." Today, public childcare services for ages 3-5 are significantly improved. In 2008-2009, 97 percent of children in this age group were enrolled in *scuole per l'infanzia* (equivalent of preschool in the US). Unfortunately, most of the services for children under 3 years of age "remain steadily anchored to their tradition of the recent past" (Naldini and Jurado 2013:55, 53).

In comparing data from 1999 and 2008-2009, Naldini and Jurado found very little change in people's attitudes regarding working mothers of young children. In both sets of data, over 2/3 of Italians between the ages of 25-74 agreed with the statement, "A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works" (2013:49-50). Whereas both the state and local municipalities subsidize childcare for children over 3 years old, making it fairly available and uniform across regions, only local municipalities subsidize childcare for children under 3, creating great variability by region regarding availability

and cost (Del Boca et al. 2005:455-56). In 2008, the national average of childcare services financed with municipal funds, for ages 0-2, was only 13 percent, with more funds dedicated in the north of the country.⁹ Even with childcare widely available and utilized for children age 3 and beyond, parents must still contend with limited hours of care (on average, 9 AM – 4 PM), as well as long summer holidays and abbreviated services in June and September (Naldini and Jurado 2013:49-50).¹⁰ In the next section, I describe how Graza managed to meet her obligations at home and at work at a time when she worked long hours in the hope of advancing her career. I specifically focus on the presumption made by Graza, as well as those around her, that her familial duties, as well as those of her husband, would remain the same, despite her growing responsibilities at work.

Graza's Work/Home Life Imbalance

When we discuss Graza's efforts to strike a work and home life balance, she emphasizes that although she made the choice to keep working after her daughter was born, she couldn't imagine deciding to do otherwise. She states, "I started working before my daughter was born, so I couldn't just quit. I enjoyed my work and I didn't think having a child should determine whether I could continue to work or not." I ask Graza how supportive her family, including her parents and her husband, was about her choice.

⁹ Municipal funds spent on childcare for ages 0-2 - Calabria 2.7%, Abruzzo 9.8% in the South compared to 28% in Emilia Romagna, 14% in Piedmont, 16% in Lombardia in the North. (Istat 2010).

¹⁰ Private childcare in Italy is not widespread. According to Del Boca et al. (2005), "Regulations by local public authorities seem to have affected the norms for private market child-care in addition to public, limiting both its supply and development" (456).

She responds, “Well, my father was proud that I was studying at the university, so when I got pregnant, it was very difficult for him to even speak to me. It took my parents some time after my daughter was born to adjust to the situation.” “Did your mother help with babysitting when you began working?” I ask. “My mother was open to babysitting,” she replies, and continues, “but she worked as a teacher, so even though she had some flexibility, she wasn’t always available when I needed someone to stay with my daughter.” Graza adds that her mother often left her own children with “the domestic, who was always changing.” “My mother had a very busy life,” she recalls, continuing, “obviously, being a teacher gave her more flexibility. She didn’t work as many hours as I did.”

When we turn to the type of support Graza received from her husband, she laughs, and states, “He has always provided financial security for our family. There is no doubt about this.” Before retiring Michael had built a successful career as an attorney in the banking industry. Graza explains that he initially wanted to be a magistrate, but after he completed his military service, Graza’s father helped him find a position at the same bank where he was employed as an inspector. “He has told me he didn’t like this choice,” she adds and elaborates,

But after I got pregnant, he felt he had to make money for the Family, with a capital F [she extends her arms out wide]. He has also said he did it for me. Of course, I appreciate it, but I am not convinced this is true. To a certain extent, he did it for himself, for his ego. He has always been very ambitious. I won’t say that he wasn’t supportive or proud of me, but I think he was more proud of himself. It was a question of prestige. Especially after I got pregnant before we intended. It was the perfect photo, no? He liked to tell his friends that his wife was a researcher at the university, but beyond that, he never helped with all of the things that need to be done to keep up a household. He never bought groceries, never cleaned; he never even made the coffee in the morning.

I ask Graza if she had domestic help, like her mother, and she responds, “No, I didn’t have any help until I was 33 or 34 years old because we were saving to buy a house. After Michael finished his military service, we moved out of his parents’ house and rented one for ourselves. It was a cute house. We didn’t have very much extra money, but I have to say we were very happy during that period. After about six years, with my father’s help, we bought our first house.”

While Graza describes her everyday experiences as a young working mother, I can’t help but wonder whether she grew frustrated or angry with her husband. “Did it bother you that Michael didn’t help you with the baby or with the housework?” I interject. “You know I didn’t really think about it very much” she responds and continues,

I was very young and had a lot of energy. I thought I was invincible. Today I do ask myself how I managed to do everything, but I just found ways to do what I had to do for work, and also for my family. I do remember that I was often tired. You know what I used to do? After I dropped off my daughter with one of my friends, I would go to the market to buy the groceries and put them in the refrigerator at the lab. Then I would take them home with me after work. Occasionally, I would forget the groceries in the refrigerator, but I took them home the next day. That didn’t happen too often because I am sure my colleagues would have asked me to stop if it created an inconvenience. I found my own way to things more efficiently.

“Did you cook often? Every day?” I ask, somewhat in disbelief. “No, not every day. I frequently cooked things that were easy and I learned to cook quickly” she responds. She adds, smiling, “Even today I have to cook quickly because whenever I try to cook food slowly, it doesn’t work out.”

Inasmuch as working, married mothers like Graza expected to have a professional life similar to that of their husbands, there was a tacit recognition that their familial responsibilities would not change, or diminish. Saraceno suggests that women of Graza’s

cohort generally accepted the implications of this arrangement as part and parcel of a new norm. She writes,

This cohort [primarily born between 1947-1957] tends to underplay the burdens and constraints involved in the dual presence model (in a situation where the rules of work and of men's family responsibilities have remained substantially unchanged). Public debate generally seems focused more on work patterns and rules that do not allow for a full dual presence and citizenship and less on men's behavior within the family, which remains a touchy issue for most couples (1991b:516).

In her discussion of how the prominent position of the man in the family is waning, Italian journalist Chiara Valentini echoes this assessment. She explains,

Even as the role of men as the patriarchal heads of family begins to decline, they retain all of the privileges of a status they no longer have. At the same time, the role of the mother expands; this [is a] superwoman, [who is] more educated, and more of a participant in society [outside of her family circle]. Apparently, at least, this happens without any major conflicts. There is a notable anxiety on the part of these women to keep everything together, not complain, to show that it is possible to do it all (1997:65) (my translation).

Despite her best efforts to be fully present (see Saraceno and Bimbi above) at work and manage her responsibilities in a similar manner to that of her male colleagues, Graza explains that she was unable to reach her potential as a researcher. She states, "If you compare my work to that of my male colleagues, I only accomplished 20 percent, maybe 30 percent of what I could have accomplished in my field." She later adds,

There wasn't any real understanding of what you were expected to do as a mother once you went home for the day. This was something you were expected to forego if you wanted to move ahead in your career. For example, after I got pregnant with my second daughter [eight years after the birth of the first], my boss said that it was too bad because they had already made a significant investment in me. He said, "This is a problem because you will have less time to dedicate to work." Can you believe it? I didn't give a damn what they thought, but to a certain extent, he was right because when my daughters were little, I had to go home by a certain time. Somebody had to be responsible for them; for dinner, homework. My husband was incapable of doing these things.

Graza elaborates on how she prioritized her familial responsibilities as a full time working mother and says “For me, quality time was more important than quantity. When we returned to Rome from vacations, I always felt like I had done my job as a mother. I gave my daughters my complete attention during those trips. We always had a lovely time.” As women have become more active participants in the industrialized labor force, there has also been an expansion in research about the challenges of balancing the responsibilities of work, home, and family. In the next section, I discuss one of the most widely cited studies, Hochschild’s *The Second Shift*, and its relevance to Graza’s narrative.

The Second Shift

Most studies that analyze the difficulties presented in finding some equilibrium between the realm of work and family life place the role of gender front and center, and include topics ranging from workplace models and standards, childcare, housework, and how married, or cohabiting, men and women with children use their time. One of the most notable is Arlie Hochschild’s *The Second Shift*, which provides an in depth study of the dynamics of home life for dual income couples in the United States. Although her research is specific to the United States in the 1980s, her findings and arguments regarding gender expectations in the workplace and at home are widely cited. In her preface, which corroborates Graza’s narrative about her work environment in Italy, Hochschild describes a workplace model that presumes that women, in particular

mothers, will or should mould themselves into an individual, historically a man, who is not actively engaged in childrearing or keeping the household running. She writes,

For I am neither and both the brisk stepping carrier of a briefcase and the mother with the packed picnic supper. The university is still designed for such men and their homes for such women. Both the woman in the station wagon [who is a stay at home mother that is picking up her husband from work] and I with the infant box [in her departmental office with her son in it] are trying to "solve" the work-family problem. As things stand now, in either case women pay a cost. The housewife pays a cost by remaining outside the mainstream of social life. The career woman pays a cost by entering a clockwork of careers that permits little time or emotional energy to raise a family. Her career permits so little of these because it was originally designed to suit a traditional man whose wife raised his children. In this arrangement between career and family, the family was the welfare agency for the university and women were its social workers (1990:x).

Some scholars have also argued that these accepted conventions of the workplace, "full-time, continuous work from the end of one's education to retirement, [a] desire to actualize one's potential to the fullest, and subordination of other roles to work" (Pleck 1977:425) make it nearly impossible for women to build successful, professional careers. As the anticipated default providers of everyday, familial care, women face different challenges conforming to the well-rooted, traditionally male model of work (Maier 1999; Lewis 1996; Harris 1995; Acker 1992; Markus 1987). In her study, Hochschild notes that women are more intensely concerned with balancing their work and home lives than their husbands. She comments,

One reason women take a deeper interest than men in the problems of juggling work with family life is that even when husbands happily shared the hours of work, their wives felt more *responsible* for home and children. More women kept track of doctors' appointments and arranged for playmates to come over. More mothers than fathers worried about the tail on a child's Halloween costume or a birthday present for a school friend. They were more likely to think about their children while at work and to check in by phone with the baby-sitter (1990:7).

All indications in Italy, including the recent data cited above regarding childcare, point to a commonplace understanding that women *should* feel more responsible than their husbands for the children, and the family as a whole. As I mention in my Introduction, this sense of responsibility has historically included overlooking their husbands', and their relationships', significant shortcomings. In the next section, I describe Graza's ultimately unsuccessful strategy of silence to cope with her husband's infidelity.

Managing The Affair

From Graza's perspective, the well being of her family was dependent on her ability to keep it united in the aftermath of Michael's affair, and the news of an unrecognized son. She states,

The most important thing for me in that moment was to keep *my* family together, which was me, him, and my daughters; to overcome this giant problem that had been born, this son. Of course, at the time I didn't want to know anything about him, but I felt him over our heads, his presence was always there.

After Michael moved back home, their lives seemingly went back to normal. She explains, "The girls were happy when he came back. All three of them were so happy that we were all together again." I ask Graza if her daughters knew why their father had moved out. She responds, "No, they were very young. They didn't ask, and I didn't discuss that episode with them until they were adults, about a month before I moved out of the house. It's something that remained completely closed deep inside of me because I never discussed it with Michael again, either." "This is the problem, this is the problem," she adds raising her voice in anger. She continues,

Because he told me this thing [that was], so tremendous, and in that moment, I was very angry, but then afterward, I pretended that it didn't exist. I deleted it from my mind. Well, I tried to delete it, obviously without much success. This is how we moved ahead [for the next 22 years], with this boulder between us, big, like a house. In any case I thought it was a problem that would resolve itself, but that's not what happened. Slowly, slowly, this thing became intolerable for me. I didn't realize it immediately, but what I wanted, what I needed was for him to take responsibility, to be responsible for that boy, for him to say, 'Okay, I will legally recognize him because I am the father. I won't run, I won't hide.' What also hurt me so much at the time [aside from the betrayal] was seeing how little it mattered to him. He washed his hands of this thing [makes motion of washing hands]. He left this poor girl to her fate. The explanation he gave me was, 'I told her she should abort; she didn't abort, and if she wants this [baby], she has to do it alone.' And she did. She was 26 and raised this boy on her own [sighs], with great difficulty from what I heard because she had a lot of work related problems. This is what ruined our relationship. To think that a man brings a child into the world and then doesn't care what happens to the mother or the child? To be honest, as time passed, I just couldn't stand it anymore.

Graza later explains that she never addressed the matter again with Michael because it wasn't a priority. However, keeping it to herself also came with a cost. She clarifies,

I always put myself at the margins of the family. The most important thing, first and foremost, was that he was okay, and that the family remain as close as possible to how it was created; happy with our trips, with our projects, and that it seemed to be moving ahead in the eyes of others. But it wasn't so much a question of image as much as it was a role that I had chosen for myself ... and, well, that was my life. If somebody asked me how I was, I would respond, 'I am fine, I am happy, I am content, but it wasn't true; inside of me that problem was enormous, heavy. ...I behaved poorly, in my opinion, in pretending that it didn't need to come to light. I shouldn't have kept it hidden inside of me. I shouldn't have done what he did, remove the problem, hide it, put it aside. No, I should have had the courage to bring it out in the open and confront it. Instead, I did what he did. I kept it to myself and became his accomplice.

For Graza, becoming Michael's inadvertent accomplice included making a significant professional sacrifice, and to a certain extent, sacrificing the very unity of the family she was so diligently trying to preserve. In the next section, I use the concept of hegemonic masculinity, or the social dominance of men, to examine the factors that contributed to Graza's code of silence regarding her husband's infidelity.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Graza's Career Sacrifice

A few months after Graza and her husband resettled into being together once more, Michael began to talk about finding a new position in another city, and eventually found a suitable, and lucrative, position near Milan. Graza recounts that he couldn't remain in his current post because everyone in the office knew what had transpired, and he wanted to advance his career. Although they never spoke about it, she interpreted his actions as a desire to move away from "the situation that had been created." Graza recalls telling herself, "Just as well. Fine, let's leave. Let's put some distance between us and this problem, even some physical space." She states that she didn't think about the challenges their move would create for her professionally, or about how it might affect her daughters [the older one had a full blown crisis]. "In that moment" she recalls,

I didn't ask myself if there was an alternative; something else that could be done. The right thing to do was to leave. I didn't think about whether I was making a mistake. I thought I was being strong for my family.

"Can you tell me what that means for you?" I interrupt, adding, "How did you decide that this was the best way to be strong for your family?" "Well," she begins,

It's not like anybody was asking me to do it. It was just me, trying to figure out how to manage the situation [she pauses]. Wait. Oh God, he was asking me to do it [she states frankly]. You know, it's almost like a sacrifice. A kind of sacrifice I had to do. I had to do it. It's something inevitable. You know you are making a sacrifice and you do it. And then you say 'I am a good woman to have made that sacrifice. See how good I am.

"Did he ever actually ask you to move?" I inquire. "No," she responds and continues,

He didn't ask. He imposed this thing on me. He had found a very good position, better than in Rome, *much, much better*, and began a successful career there. Instead, I got progressively worse [professionally and personally]. I thought that from one moment to another this thing would be resolved and we would return to Rome. In the meantime, he moved ahead in his career, and eventually could no longer leave his position.

Both Michael and Graza assumed the family would follow him to Milan without much distress, at least for him. "It was very difficult for everybody, but him. A true marvel!" she states, chuckling, then adds, "No, my younger one, Clarissa, did fine, too. She was a little girl, and was in elementary school. She was bright and intelligent. She didn't have any problems. For me of course, [professionally] there was a big issue. Plus I always had that problem in my mind [Michael's unrecognized son]. It never went away." Against her better judgment, the decision to move halted Graza's professional ambitions, and created additional responsibilities and burdens in her daily life. By Graza's own account, other than considering the potential financial ramifications of their move, which became negligible once he found a "much, much better" position in Milan, her husband gave very little thought to how Graza would manage her position at the university, or how their daughters would adjust. The assumption was that they just would.

To establish a more thorough, holistic understanding of Graza's, as well as Michael's, behavior, it is helpful to reference some influential scholarship on masculinity and how ideas about the meanings of masculinity influence the role and position of women in society at large. To begin, Michael benefitted from what sociologist Raewyn Connell refers to as the patriarchal dividend, "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (1995:79). Not only do men benefit from this dividend in terms of honor, prestige, and the right to command, they are also able to draw on it to

access material and state power (1995:82). The patriarchal dividend, in turn, stems from hegemonic masculinity, a concept I use to analyze how Graza attempted to minimize the detrimental consequences of the family's move to Milan for herself. Hegemonic masculinity refers to "how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance" (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1987:92). In a different analysis, Connell expands on this explanation, and adds,

'Hegemonic masculinity' is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works. ... In the concept [], 'hegemony' means (as in Gramsci's analysis of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is. ... The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of 'hegemony' generally implies a large measure of consent. Few men are Bogarts or Stallones, many collaborate in sustaining those images (1987:183-85).¹¹

She also emphasizes that the most important characteristic of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is its heterosexuality and its close affinity to the institution of marriage (1987:186), writing, "A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage ..." (1995:80). So, although the majority of men in contemporary societies are not holders of the most social power – this is the privilege of a

¹¹ For an overview of what some scholars view as the limitations of hegemonic masculinity, see Coles 2009.

small number of men in the corporate and state elite – they are nonetheless complicit participants in the ‘hegemonic project’ (1995:79). Connell elaborates,

A gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defence, and women as an interest group concerned with change. This is a structural fact, independent of whether men as individuals love or hate women, or believe in equality or abjection, and independent of whether women are currently pursuing change (1995:82).

In other words, it is challenging for men to call, and work, for a change in the status quo if they believe it will threaten their commanding position. Under most circumstances, men earn more than women and are more likely to hold a public office, as well as be a chief executive, or direct owner, of a major corporation (often named by, or inherited from, other men) (1995:79).

As I briefly referenced earlier, in most developed countries, it has historically been men that prioritize their work over other aspects of their lives, whether it be to earn wages to support the family, or to advance their professions, or both. To reiterate Connell’s point above, this practice has been facilitated, in large part, by a social structure that enables men to draw on a wide range of resources, including women’s family labor, to help them move ahead. In recounting their respective reasons for moving to Milan, Graza emphasizes that Michael moved for professional reasons, while she moved for family reasons. During one of our conversations about how the move affected her career, she states,

It is not helpful to a person’s career if you move for family reasons. In reality, I didn’t move for professional reasons. It wasn’t like I wanted to go to Milan, for example, to follow a specific line of research that they did in Milan, but not in Rome. In the end, it was understood that I moved for family reasons, and this wasn’t viewed favorably. Men don’t do this, move for family reasons. I don’t think a man like this exists in the world. Instead, there are probably many women that have done it, and I am one of them. Here I am [points to herself]. Even

today, it's not valued. The decision by somebody to move for family reasons is not viewed positively, especially when you leave a position where *you have prestige, where you have funding, where you work well* [like she had in Rome] [sighs]. I think it's also this way for men. Moving for family reasons is only valid for migrants, no, who move for family reunification. It's difficult for someone who has an important position to say, 'I am moving because *my wife* works at a different location,' or for a woman to move because 'my husband works at another place.' But, we, women, we do it more, even if it damages our career. Anyway, moving today is already very difficult because it isn't easy to find a good place to work.

In Italy, the constitutionally sanctioned practice of casting woman as primarily responsible for the provision of family care (refer to my Introduction for review), an important responsibility in its own right, nonetheless relegates them to a secondary position in society at large. The subordinate positions of women in the labor force vis-à-vis wages and seniority, together with welfare policies undergirded by a Catholic doctrine that exalts the role of women as mothers, contribute to the hegemonic project of suppressing alternative approaches to negotiating the responsibilities of family life and work, for both men and women. As the default providers of familial care, women are also often arbiters of familial harmony. Next, I discuss how Graza attempted to maintain some semblance of her professional life as she struggled to satisfy all the members of her family. I use the concept of the triple presence to explain her description of being stretched thin.

Keeping The Family Content

Graza made a concerted effort to maintain her career when the family moved to Milan. Rather than leave her position outright, Graza took a position as a visiting lecturer and researcher in Milan and maintained a “part-time” status in Rome. She states,

Like I’ve said before, I didn’t think about the problems I would have with work, about the fact that, with the decision to move, I was hurting my career. Obviously, because I would be leaving my research projects in Rome. I wouldn’t be able to continue working on the same topics in Milan. I did try to find a post at the university that was similar to what I was doing in Rome, something I knew how to do and could also teach. But I had to completely abandon my particular area of research and occupy myself with something else because in my new department, they weren’t interested in that type of work. This was an enormous sacrifice for me, especially in terms of competency. In a short amount of time, I had to learn a whole new series of things. I had to *study* a whole new series of things because the responsibility of the researcher isn’t just to teach. You also have to advance your research projects. In Italy, from a career perspective, it’s very dangerous to transfer to another university; especially in the way I did it. My colleagues in Rome didn’t know what had happened in my personal life. [To them] I behaved like I was crazy because from one day to the next I was leaving Rome, leaving all of my research. After Michael found this job in Milan, it was difficult to say no because it was a very good post. So, I just said, ‘Okay, let’s all go together, let’s all go together.’ I remember a colleague saying to me, ‘It’s too bad. Be careful, you may lose your chance in Rome, your possibilities.’ In fact, that’s how it went.

To keep up with the responsibilities, and demands, of each of her academic posts, Graza kept a grueling work schedule. She traveled constantly and recalls being emotionally and physically fatigued. She explains,

It was very, very difficult because for five years I took the train between Rome and Milan every week. I worked in both locations. Every Monday morning, I took the train at 6 AM and arrived in Rome in the late morning. I spent Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday there. On Wednesday night, I would take the train back and work in Milan on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. I would also often teach

on Saturday mornings. Every week it was the same trip, Milan – Rome, Rome – Milan, Milan – Rome, Rome – Milan, for five hours. It created an even bigger problem for me because I had students in Rome and I had students in Milan. I taught classes in Rome and I taught classes in Milan. The material was the same in both locations, and teaching is basically the same all over the world, but it took a great deal of work to keep track of everybody. Sometimes, while working on the train, I would look out the window, and for a minute, completely forget whether I was headed to Rome or Milan. For those five years, it was [chuckles], a disaster. Rome paid my salary for that whole period, and they were not happy about it because I was only available to them three days of the week. In Milan, they did not easily accept the fact that I worked there without bringing my tenure, the permanence of my post with me. My tenure was in Rome. It's frowned upon when a person from one university goes to work for another, for what looks to be an indefinite period, without bringing the benefits of the position. So, nobody worked on projects with me because I was precarious. I was somebody who could leave from one moment to the next. Everybody was angry with me; in Rome for one reason, and in Milan for another.

Several members of Graza's family were also angry with her. First, her older daughter, Federica, who was a teenager at the time, resented the move, and the fact that Graza was away for three days a week, and also very busy with her responsibilities at the university when she was in Milan. Over the first year, Graza invested a significant amount of time becoming familiar with new research agendas and protocols. Federica had a "total crisis," made some poor choices regarding friendships, and stopped going to school altogether. Second, Michael was also displeased with the arrangement Graza made regarding her career, but didn't complain to her about it because "he realized how heavily the situation weighed" on her. On the contrary, every Wednesday, he would pick her up from the train station with either flowers, or a small gift in hand before going out for a late dinner. Third, Graza's sister in Rome was upset because their father had passed away about a year and a half before the family moved to Milan. Her sister resented that Graza would not be more available to help her provide care and company for their aging mother.

Graza, herself, was particularly frustrated with how to manage her daughter's crisis. Unlike their younger daughter, who quickly made friends in her new grade school,

enjoyed playing “*donnina di casa*” (little woman of the house) by cooking basic meals for her father, and doing some grocery shopping, Federica spent a lot of time alone. Graza is convinced that Michael could have done more to help their daughter, but also understood that “it wasn’t in his character.” She states,

I went to Federica’s school to speak with her teachers, not him. He could have done it, given that I wasn’t in Milan three days out of the week. He could have followed his daughter’s life more closely. I felt very guilty about not being more present for her, but I didn’t know what to do. What should I have done? Michael was preoccupied with work, with advancing his career. He has never been one to try to understand what makes children tense, their sensibilities. There is nothing to be done about it. He has never known how to be a good father. ... Of course, if you said this to him, he would say, ‘What?! I have done everything for my family. I have helped my family prosper. I’ve done this, I’ve done that.’ For him, providing good economic opportunities for the family, this is what it means to be a father. This is what it means to have a family. Of course, giving your children the economic stability to face life, it’s important. I am not saying that it isn’t, but it certainly isn’t the only thing you can do. You can pay more attention to those that surround you, to your children. I can definitively say that he was a much better husband than father.

Federica eventually did receive a diploma from a private school, and moved back to Rome on the same day the diploma was granted. “She moved in with her grandmother, my mother, thinking the two of them could be a family” Graza states. “Instead,” she adds matter-of-factly,

She found a woman that had become mean and egotistical and didn’t want her in her house. My mother had started to develop dementia, and couldn’t understand why Federica was living with her. Every time I visited I had to explain why Federica was there, and sometimes why I was there, because, of course, I slept in her house too when I traveled to Rome. My sister was also unconformable with Federica living there because it created problems for her.

She continues, “I remember saying to myself, ‘Okay, well, I am already here during the week, so I’ll just manage the situation, and try to keep the peace between everybody.’

And I did. I think I managed it very well. Luckily, my daughter moved in with a

boyfriend after about two years, and at a certain point, I said to my sister, ‘Listen, let’s hire a person for mamma because she needs somebody whose primary concern is to be with her.’ So, both of those situations were resolved in some way.”

Nonetheless, Graza admits she often felt like she was suffering from a type of schizophrenia during those years. She explains, “When I was in Rome, I tried to be completely present, at work and with my daughter. In Milan, I had my younger daughter and my husband, and tried to be a family with them because, after she moved back to Rome, Federica never came to Milan.” “And work?” I interrupt. “Initially, yes, I tried to actively participate in various projects, but, eh, I really didn’t care for the research they were doing [she chuckles]. It didn’t interest me, so I immersed myself in teaching. I enjoyed teaching. I always had an excellent rapport with my students.” It didn’t help that in Milan, Graza found herself in last position among her colleagues. “I understood why, but it still felt like a slap [in the face],” she states. In Rome, she had been a principal researcher, and was able to make important decisions about her projects. She adds,

Think about it. While I was demoted, my husband was promoted, and moved ahead in his career. His success didn’t bother me so much because he was good at his job. It was more that I didn’t know where I belonged. Where was my place of belonging? In Rome, where I was actually interested in the work I did, and could be with my older daughter who I had left on her own when she really needed me? Or in Milan, where I could care less about the work I did, but where my husband and younger daughter were doing very well, professionally and in school. In fact [she chuckles], after the disaster with Federica, Clarissa was determined to redeem the family name at her school.

She emphasizes her struggle by stating, “It wasn’t easy, trying to decide where my place was. I was just divided in two. Let’s put it that way, I was truly split in two.” Upon closer analysis, it can even be argued that Graza was not just trying to manage a dual presence, but also what Valentini refers to as a *triple presence* (1997:80-83), if we consider the

time and energy she spent trying to manage the needs and anxieties of her aging mother, as well as her sister's anxiety regarding Graza and Federica's extended stay in their mother's house. Valentini writes,

In effect women help everybody: little children, adult children, [husbands], parents and in-laws who, as long as they are able, tend not to come live under the same roof for reasons of space or an attachment to their habits, but who are cared for at [their] home. Regarding the care of children, if daycare and preschool are completely inadequate, institutional care for the elderly represents the black hole of Italy" (1997:81) (my translation).¹²

To emphasize the plight of older Italian women, she adds, "Holding all these contrasting pieces together with the skill of a juggler and stitching up the patchwork of daily life, day after day, is a middle aged woman, who twenty or so years ago had improvidently believed in a future of feminine freedom" (1997:82) (my translation).

Not long after Federica moved out of her grandmother's house, Graza requested a permanent transfer to Milan. She explains that a combination of circumstances led to her decision. First, Federica appeared to be creating her own path in Rome, and Graza and her sister had found an eldercare assistant to care for their mother. Second, it became clear the family would stay in Milan for some time. Michael had, once again, been promoted to a higher position with more responsibility. As a man with "a great deal of professional ambition," moving back to Rome would not have been a viable option for him at that time. Third, and most importantly, her department in Milan forced her hand. She states,

So, this dual relationship that I had with both universities, I could only keep it going for so long, no? At a certain point, Milan said to me, 'Alright, what are you going to do? Decide. Here or there.' So, at that point, I had to decide. I couldn't

¹² For an in-depth analysis of why the Italian government has not updated policies in child and elder care, see Barbara Da Roit and Stefania Sabatinelli 2013.

go on like that, as a visiting scholar. It was necessary to make a choice, so I did. Actually, at that moment, I could have said ‘Okay, enough. I am going back to Rome. I could have said this. My younger daughter was in middle school. I could have taken my little girl, returned to Rome, and left him there. Why not?

“Did you consider it?” I ask. “Not even for a minute. Not even for a second,” she responds. “Really” I say. “Yes” she states, continuing,

I thought it was important for me to get closer to my younger daughter, and above all to Michael because he had taken on this project to move the family there, all together. Finally, we could all be together. We could spend some time together. Of course, Federica was missing, [she chuckles] but the three of us did a lot together. The four or five years after I [permanently] transferred to Milan were fairly easy. We had very good economic possibilities. Also, I was now free on Saturdays. I hadn’t had that freedom in so long. Even if my job didn’t give me very much satisfaction, everything now seemed quite manageable. Managing my life was easier. Oh, you don’t know how happy I was not to have to go back and forth on the train.

Later, Graza explains she always felt a duty toward her husband, and that it seemed normal this was her life’s project. She states, “I don’t know, it was like not being able to run from a situation because that was my responsibility. I was obligated to do it.” Next, I use the concept of emphasized femininity to analyze the factors that influenced Graza’s conforming behavior toward her husband.

Emphasized Femininity

In her discussion regarding how femininity is constructed in relation to hegemonic masculinity, Connell suggests it is likely polarized around the themes of compliance and resistance to the dominance of heterosexual men. The most prevalent form of compliance, “given the most cultural and ideological support at present” is an *emphasized femininity*, “oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men (1987:187, 183). During one of our conversations regarding her accommodation of Michael, perhaps to a fault, Graza lends support to this hypothesis, stating,

You know I didn’t perceive the depth of these things [staying with Michael, being silent about the affair, moving to Milan] until later. While they were happening, it was all about a continuous effort to promote him, to stay close to him, eh, to help him.

Connell proposes that the social influence of an emphasized femininity is difficult to avoid, writing “Indeed it is promoted in mass media and marketing with an insistence and on a scale far beyond that found for any form of masculinity” (1987:183). In a study about gender stereotypes in Italian television advertisements, Furnham and Volin found, that at all times of the day, men were about twice as likely as women to be featured as central and authoritative figures in televised advertisements. Whereas “females were far more likely to be portrayed in dependent roles ... males were more likely to portray a professional role” (1989:179-80). Women were featured at home more than men, who were predominantly featured in an occupational setting. Women were also often featured

with children as their backdrop. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to be featured with women as their backdrop. Furthermore, since men were featured as the authority on practically *everything*, the majority of voiceovers and end comments in the advertisements were done by men (1989:182). A more recent, pernicious, and overtly sexualized, form of emphasized femininity unfolded under the leadership of former Prime Minister, and media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi. At one point during his tenure in office Mr. Berlusconi controlled the near entirety of the television media. Stefania Benini, a scholar of Italy and media studies writes,

According to the US-based NGO Freedom House, during his 2001–2006 administration Berlusconi controlled 90 per cent of the Italian television market, including his own three channels (Canale 5, Rete 4 and Italia 1, which belong to Berlusconi's Mediaset holding) and the three most important Italian public television channels (RAI 1, RAI 2 and RAI 3), which were a mouthpiece for his government. In addition, Berlusconi owns Publitalia, which sells 60 per cent of the advertising space on Italian TV, with sales of 2.9 billion Euros in 2008 (2013:88).

Rather than governing, Berlusconi is best remembered for boasting about his supposed sexual charm and prowess with women, his role as host of countless purported orgies at one of his estates, famously nicknamed *bunga bunga* parties¹³, his alleged sexual relations at said orgies with *Ruby Rubacuori* or Ruby Heartstealer, an underage belly dancer,¹⁴ his near institutionalization of the excessive objectification of women on television, and the overall denigration of Italian women over the course of his three terms

¹³ There is some debate regarding the history of the term. Some attribute it to Muammar Qaddafi with whom Berlusconi had a short-lived friendship, and others think the source is an off-color joke set in Africa (Levy 2011).

¹⁴ Ruby's real name is Karima El Mahroug

in office.¹⁵ In the next section, I discuss what I view as the most extreme example of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in contemporary Italian history. Through his unprecedented, unfettered control of Italian media, and his flagrant sexualization of women, Mr. Berlusconi was able to influence how Italian women were perceived in the larger social landscape. During his time in office, any masculinist tendencies already present in the Italian social fabric were validated, and encouraged.

Berlusconi and Italian Male Privilege

In a profile about Silvio Berlusconi for the *New Yorker*, writer Ariel Levy provides a detailed description of the truly astonishing extent to which women have been sexually objectified in Berlusconi's Italian media. She writes,

But even the most permissive American audience might be unsettled by the vision of female sexuality that Berlusconi has communicated through his television monopoly over the years. On "Colpo Grosso," [Big Blow] a game show that aired in the late eighties and early nineties, contestants had to strip if they got an answer wrong, and the inevitable conclusion was a showcase of topless women, blushing and trying to cover themselves with their hands. (The show also featured the Cin Cin girls, notoriously unskilled dancers in skimpy costumes and high heels, singing tunelessly, their faces blank.) "Buona Domenica," [Good Sunday] which is on the air now, features young women in tight dresses being prodded into a clear shower stall to get soaked in front of a live audience. On one episode, the host explains to a guest, "I'm not doing it for me, I'm doing it for all Italian men—you get the shower." On most episodes of "Libero," [Free] a woman is trapped under a Perspex table, like a caged animal. If your only information about female people came from Berlusconi's channels, you would likely conclude that they exist specifically to be sexually humiliated in public. On "Scherzi a Parte," [Joking Aside] a woman in her underpants hangs from a meat hook alongside hundreds of hams as a man in a butcher's costume

¹⁵ Berlusconi served as Prime Minister of Italy from May to December 1994, from 2001 – 2006, and from 2008 – 2011 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online).
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/62274/Silvio-Berlusconi>>.

stamps a sell-by date on her behind (2011).

In “Striscia la Notizia” [Strip the News], Italy’s most popular satirical news program, two showgirls, scantily clad in thongs, commonly called *veline* or “slips of paper” either silently sit on top of a news desk, or crawl around the floor, while two male anchors sit behind the desk, discussing current events (Levy 2011; Hipkins 2011). Though the use of television showgirl began in the 1950s, their presence intensified over the course of Berlusconi’s growing institutional influence, as did the focus on sexualizing and revealing more of their bodies (Hipkins 2011; Morvillo 2003). Writer Barbie Latza Nadeau comments,

That’s how prime time is in Italy. The parade of prurience is inescapable, an expression of the rot that’s now manifest at the very top of the Italian government, a reflection of the society’s deeper problem with the evolving role of women. While headlines tell an endless tale of teenage models, paid escorts, and Moroccan belly dancers cavorting with 74-year-old Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the media make it clear that men are men, and women are window dressing. Boycotts, protests, and even complaints are rare, and when they’re voiced, few listen. So while Berlusconi may well be acting like a dirty old man these days, it has to be said that a goodly number of Italian women have been willing to play his demeaning games for a long time (2010).

In truth, combined with a social structure that strongly reinforces an emphasized femininity, impelling women to sacrifice themselves for the good of the family, Berlusconi’s media monopoly and signature strategy of using “coercive charm [with] seduction through sleight of hand” (Levy 2011) proved to effectively quell dissenting voices for some time (see Benini 2013:89). By presenting his “love of women” as a strength he would use to advocate on their behalf, Berlusconi, instead, appeared to mock the plight of Italian women. For example, he appointed former showgirls on his television programs to potentially important political posts, such as Mara Carfagna, who some argue at

least had a law degree, as Minister for Equal Opportunities. Making a comparison between politics and women, he famously remarked, “Politics is like courting women: you have to confuse the girls” (Levy 2011). Ultimately, his flaunting of escorts and showgirls, many of whom were rumored to be underage, grew too egregious to ignore. The frustration, anger, and resentment underlying women’s apparent silence surrounding Berlusconi’s audacious behavior did boil over into massive nationwide protests on February 13, 2011, in which one and a half million participants called for the restoration of women’s dignity and their rights as citizens.^{16 17}In her contribution to Levy’s piece on the Premier, Rosy Bindi, the Minister of Family under a previous administration, and a long-time critic of Berlusconi, reflects on how the Italian public finally awoke from its long slumber to take action against him. She states, “Of all Berlusconi’s behavioral flaws, his behavior with women – with prostitutes, with minors – is what the Italian people have the most trouble forgiving, because Italians are very tied to the idea of family and the traditional concept of womanhood” (Levy 2011).

Along with exhibiting an impertinent disregard for traditional [Italian] womanhood, Berlusconi’s behavior also highlights an important touchstone of Italian male privilege. In an essay about male desire, Italian historian Sandro Bellassai refers to

¹⁶ The demonstrations came together under the motto, “Se Non Ora, Quando? [If Not Now, When?]” “and took place in more than 230 Italian cities, and 28 cities worldwide, including Paris and Tokyo (Donadio and Povoledo 2011).

¹⁷ Italy had also become internationally renowned for its Prime Minister’s increasingly public indiscretions. Besieged by scandals and accusations of corruption, as well as Italy’s role in the Eurozone debt crisis, Berlusconi resigned as premier in November of 2011. He was ousted from Parliament in November of 2013 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online). <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/62274/Silvio-Berlusconi>>

Berlusconi as “none other than the sexual autobiography of the male nation” (2011) (my translation). He writes,

Let’s look at ourselves in the eyes, men. Deep down, how many of us envy him? How many have heard another man openly admit it at the bar, at work, at the gym? How many, whether from the right or left doesn’t matter, maybe would not want to be in his place, but [claim to] understand him deep down, or at any rate, don’t see what all the scandal is about? According to these men, if there is a scandal, it’s the fact that the indelicacies [of his tryst] (details, conversations, snapshots) were laid out bare (2011) (my translation).

In essence, for many Italian men, including Graza’s husband, Berlusconi’s bravado regarding women, and his unbridled enjoyment of them, endorsed a man’s susceptibility to temptation. If the Prime Minister embraced his wandering tendencies without consequence, then, perhaps, an ordinary man could as well. Moreover, in a social structure where young Italians have very little opportunities to advance, Berlusconi provided young women with a potentially exciting possibility to be famous and make money without having to make any further investment in their education. The increased focus on, and exploitation of, the youthful female body under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi draws our attention to the near invisibility, and irrelevance, of the older Italian woman, unless she appears younger than her age and is pleasing to the eye (Caputo 2009:54-55). In the next section, I use the post-retirement lives of Graza and her husband to examine how women’s expectations of growing older are undergoing a significant transformation.

Post-Retirement in Italy –Growing Older for Woman versus Men

Graza and Michael moved back to Rome as *Berlusconismo*, the hedonistic age of Berlusconi, was unfolding. Graza took an early retirement opportunity as the laws in Italy were changing. She retired in 2000 in her early fifties, and Michael followed suit a year later in his mid-fifties. He had gone as far as he could with his position at the bank and was eager to go back to Rome. He had never enjoyed the lifestyle of Milan, which is more “Germanic” and moves at a faster pace than in Rome. He also hated the wet, dreary, cold winters. While Graza enjoyed retirement, Michael did not favor so well. True to the dynamic of their relationship, Graza took it upon herself to find something for him to do. She found a consumer advocacy group that specialized in finance, and thought that it would be perfect for Michael. He opened his own studio in Rome, and she initially worked as his secretary. She states,

It was a disaster. I hated it. I had to go to the magistrates’ offices early in the morning to pick up and deliver paperwork, along with a bunch of ignorant, young girls that worked for lawyers. They wore their little dresses, and flirted with the magistrates, acting really stupid sometimes. I was so embarrassed! For me, for them. I eventually convinced Michael that we should hire a young office assistant to help him. Not like those girls, though. We needed a young woman that wanted to do something serious with the experience. We interviewed several girls until we found one that was smart and could actually help him do some of his work. I thought it would be a good experience for her to learn from Michael because he was quite good at what he did. She would be responsible enough to take care of the office, so that we could have more time for our trips, to go out with friends. Well, as it turns out, she worked out too well. Do you understand what I mean? I found her. I put her there.

Around the same time, Michael began to change his look. He lost weight, and started to wear tight shirts and tight jeans, like a “*giovannotto*” (a young boy). Their daughters also

noted his antics and began to poke fun at him, in protest. Graza recalls her daughters saying, “Dad, why are you dressed that way? You are older,” or “Mom, look at the t-shirt dad bought for himself. Doesn’t he know he looks ridiculous?” Michael, himself, began making declarations about the life he wanted for himself. One day, he announced to his daughters,

I want a happy, carefree life; a youthful life. Instead, now your mom has gotten old. Now she only thinks about the piano [Graza had started piano lessons after they moved back to Rome]. She only thinks about her music and the piano. But the piano is for old people. I listen to music that young people listen to. I dress like I am young.

“He looked so ridiculous! Truly” she states, adding, “and he was becoming so disrespectful. We would be walking down the street, and he would go on like a fool, saying ‘You are old! I want a happy life. I want to be spontaneous!’ It was so irritating!” Eventually, Michael’s antics may have grown embarrassing for his young secretary as well because she quit abruptly.

However, Graza had reached her limit. A few years after they returned to Rome, Graza left on a weekend getaway with friends. Against Michael’s protestations, who decided they should decline the invitation to attend, Graza went alone. After returning, Graza went straight to a hotel, then stayed at a friend’s house until she found a fully furnished apartment to rent. Once she found one that suited her budget, she paid the first year of rent in its entirety to prevent her from returning to Michael. Graza proudly emphasizes that she only went back to her former house about three months after her initial departure to leave her keys and take her things. After thirty-five years of being the dutiful, good wife, and compromising her professional aspirations, Graza had finally gotten the courage to leave her husband. I ask Graza if she regrets not taking action

sooner. She considers her answer for a minute, then responds, “No, I think things went as they should have.” She continues,

If I had the choice to go back and do it differently, I think I would follow this same path. I did what I thought was best for my family. My one regret is that I didn’t follow Federica more closely. Today, as an adult, she recognizes she made some poor choices. But from her perspective, she was left alone. I would leave to Rome, and her father couldn’t be bothered. It’s true. I left her too alone [she nods her head with visible regret]. She had to manage her life by herself, and perhaps because she was alone, she made mistakes.

Later, when discussing her own choices, and the legacy she is passing on to her daughters, she states, “I did what I knew how to do.” She explains,

I think all of us do the things we know how to do best, that come naturally to us. I have never discussed the life choices my daughters have made in much detail with them, but I have always thought it was important that they have a model, an example, no? I will show you how I live. Then you decide what you would like to do; to follow my example or not. Knowingly or not, I gave them the model of the woman, who, when confronted with the choice between her career and her family, decides that her family is more important. This is what I could offer to them.

“As a mother,” she adds, “and also as a woman, all you can do is live your life as best you can. When you are confronted with an important choice, do what you think is in the best interest of the situation, at that time. “But, what if your best interest doesn’t appear to match the best interest of the situation?” I clarify and add, “You gave up a prestigious position, which you worked hard to get.” “Beh [she chuckles], there is the crux of the matter, that right there, no? As a mother, it’s hard to separate your best interest from a [given] situation, from the family.” She continues, “Also, what was best under the circumstances back then may not be the case today.”

Observations

As part of the first generation of Italian women that expected to keep working after having children, Graza's story demonstrates the intricate balance this cohort of women had to strike to prove they were capable of simultaneously raising their children and maintaining a successful career. In order to do well in this endeavor, Graza, and other women like her, had to accept some deeply ingrained biases regarding gender. For example, it never occurred to Graza that Michael should help her raise their daughters, since she was working full-time as well. The assumption was that he would take care of the family's financial needs and Graza would do all of the rest. The challenge, of course, is that the list of "all of the rest" included everything from making sure there was somebody available, besides Michael, to watch her daughters while Graza completed a project at work, to reminding herself not to forget her groceries at the lab because they were taking up valuable space in the refrigerator. It also didn't faze Graza that she would be responsible for keeping the family together after learning of her husband's affair. Included in this responsibility was the task of making sure that Michael was ok, that he felt supported. During several of our conversations, Graza states that she always "felt a sense of duty" toward her husband, a sense of responsibility that would not allow her to walk away. (refer to section on emphasized femininity in this chapter).

On the surface, and perhaps from my own American bias, it is initially a challenge to attempt to understand how an intelligent, articulate, self-assured woman feels compelled to stand by a man, who from what I could assess, didn't do much more for his

wife and family other than provide a steady income. Of course, it is obvious that Michael did not “just” provide an income for the family; he provided a lifestyle. Because of his job, and work ethic (Graza always emphasizes that he was good at his profession), the family “enjoyed a generous, but not lavish” way of life. Be that as it may, Graza never gave the impression that her sense of responsibility toward Michael was born out of a need to repay a debt. Instead, this profound sense of duty, “un dovere,” is an expression used by several of the women with whom I spoke. Women felt a sense of duty to fulfill their responsibilities as a wife and mother, including taking care of an unfaithful husband because he could not “manage life’s work on his own.” Like Graza, several women expressed a duty to be exceptionally good in their line of work; there was a duty to keep a pristine house, to be an excellent cook. Most revealing is the sense of duty to follow through on all of one’s duties; there is very little room to breathe (see also Krause 2005 on the culture of responsibility regarding Italian motherhood).

As some scholars have suggested (Saraceno, Valentini), this particular cohort was influenced, and in some way, guided by the hope and successes of the feminist movement, by the possibility to do it all. Still, underneath the *possibility* to do it all lay the *duty* to do it well, without complaint. As Graza states “When you are responsible for so many things, there is no time to think, there is only time to do.” Committing to one’s duties as a wife, and a mother, is also a common refrain found in the dictums of the Catholic Church, especially during the height of its influence in the immediate post war period. From the pulpit, priests ordered women to fulfill their duty as Italian citizens and vote in the first election. The Italian Constitution guarantees that women have the same rights and access to opportunities as men, as long as they fulfill their duties at home.

When her daughters were young, Graza always looked forward to their family vacations because she could easily fulfill her duty as a mother and give them her complete attention.

Hence, making the sacrifice to commit to, and fulfill, one's duties as a woman was a continuous drone in Graza's ear during her formative years as a child, a young woman, and to some extent through to her adulthood. Coupled with media and print advertising that overwhelmingly foregrounds an emphasized femininity where men are represented as the pillars of authority and women are their entourage (see Connell, Furnham and Volin, Nadeau in this chapter), it becomes easier to understand why Graza found it challenging to walk away from Michael. Although hers was the generation that pushed for the legalization of divorce, there weren't resources available on how to live life as a single woman after a divorce or separation, no advertisements of women leading single lives without worry, and certainly no official endorsements for women regarding the importance of fulfilling a duty to oneself.

On the contrary, it seems that fulfilling one's duties to family has turned into a lifelong endeavor that carries over into retirement. With an increase in life expectancy, and the continuing trend of adult children remaining in the parental home, a trend exacerbated by the economic crisis, it is not difficult to appreciate why Valentini coined the term *triple presence* to describe the plight of the middle-aged woman who works full-time, and also takes care of her husband, in addition to her parents and adult children, an observation overlooked by Valentini. Once the woman retires, she is promoted to the unenviable position of *always present*, especially if her husband has retired as well. As we learned from Graza's account, even after they both retired, she continued to feel a

duty to Michael, to feel responsible for his wellbeing. In retirement, however, Graza's interest in Michael's wellbeing was, in part, motivated by an interest in her own self-preservation. She states, "He had absolutely no idea what to do with his time, how to organize it. He needed my help. We needed to find something for him to do. Well, I found something for him to do, but I wasn't planning on being part of this activity. I had my own plans, my own ideas about what I wanted to do." She later adds,

That was the beginning of the end, I think. Surely, after the debacle with his assistant; that girl. I had enough when I realized I had become a mother to him. When he looked to me for comfort after she quit. I wasn't a wife who had been betrayed. I was his mother. As a woman, that was something I was not willing to endure. That was the last straw. About a month and a half after that, I ran away from home and never went back.

Based on our conversations, one can surmise that Graza left Michael at a point in her life when she felt it was all right to do. Both of her daughters were older, she had retired, Michael had recently retired, and they had purchased a large, beautiful home where they could entertain friends. Graza loved being retired, even if she had requested it in her early fifties. She believed she was entitled to a more relaxed pace of life after everything that had transpired. She liked the idea of having the time to dedicate to new interests.

It was nearly perfect, except for Michael. He was encroaching on her retirement. First, he needed help with being retired, so Graza found something for him to do. Then he needed help with running his legal studio, so Graza became his secretary. Then there was the matter of finding somebody else to run the studio for him, so they hired a young woman. Then he needed to be comforted after his heartbreak, and that is where it had to stop. "I was exhausted," she states during one of our conversations. She adds, "I didn't want to do it anymore, take care of him. I didn't have to do it anymore, and so, I didn't." With this statement, Graza is echoing a sentiment shared by several women I talked to.

CHAPTER 3: MUCH ADO ABOUT A SLAP

Basic Information

Adela is a retired textbook editor and lives alone in an apartment she inherited from an uncle. She is separated from the father of her two sons, and has no contact with him. Adela had only been seeing Gerardo, a university professor, for a few months when she became pregnant with their first son. He had already shown abusive behavior toward her prior to the pregnancy. However, once she moved in with him, “for the good of the family,” his behavior grew worse. Because she was financially dependent on him, Adela was compelled to stay with Gerardo for ten years, until she passed a state sponsored exam to work as a specialized secretary at a research institute. Adela left Gerardo three years after starting her new position. She had a stable income and could support herself and her sons, if needed. Today, both of her sons are in their mid thirties. The older son, Stefano, is married, and is a researcher in the humanities. He and his wife do not have any children. The younger son, Orlando, was living with Adela while he saved money to buy a house, which he was able to do over the last year with the help of his mother as a cosigner. He has a serious girlfriend, but no foreseeable plans of getting married or having children.

As I have shown in the previous two chapters, in the everyday course of fulfilling responsibilities as wives or domestic partners, raising children, attempting to pursue their

own interests, and being a homemaker or working outside of the home, Italian women encounter a number of familial, societal and institutional constraints. These constraints arise from established assumptions about gender roles and responsibilities that, in turn, interconnect with how the state mandates social norms. As Connell writes, “The state has a constitutive role in forming and re-forming social patterns. ... In managing institutions and relations like marriage and motherhood the state is doing more than regulating them. It is playing a major part in the constitution of the social categories of the gender order. Categories like ‘husbands’, ‘wives’, ‘mothers’, ‘homosexuals’, are created as groups with certain characteristics and relationships [and privileges]” (1987:130). In Italy, notwithstanding the ratification of laws meant to facilitate gender equality, women continue to find themselves in a subservient position to men, both in a professional and personal capacity. Even if legislation mirrors changing social practices, in general, Italians remain tethered to an ideology that promotes traditional womanhood.

In this chapter, I use Adela’s story, principally focused on domestic violence, to examine how the intersection of state power and accepted characterizations of gender constrain the ability of women to extricate themselves from stifling, and sometimes oppressive, home environments. This is especially the case with intimacy where consent for sexual intercourse can be muddled by imbalances in power. In addition, since a man is usually the principle financial provider in the family, an unplanned pregnancy will likely render a woman more dependent on her partner (or her family if the father of the child is absent). That Adela’s best defense against her partner’s power was to acquiesce to his imposing, capricious requests, sexual and otherwise, particularly on the heels of the

juridical success of the Italian feminist movement, highlights the intermittent, unpredictable pace of achieving gender equality. I use the idea of agency as a practice of survival, characterized by both complicity and resistance, to gain insight into how women withstand a partner's abusive behavior. An in-depth, ethnographic retelling of one woman's account regarding domestic violence provides insight into how social, economic, and structural factors shape the circumstances within which gender relations are negotiated (see Hirsch 2003:14).

I begin by referencing Ortner's modified paradigm of practice theory, what she refers to as "serious games" (there is never only one in play at a time), to analyze how Adela negotiates her life circumstances during her time with Gerardo. Next I describe the pervasiveness of domestic violence in Italy today and its historical resonance in Italian society. After this, I devote three sections to the significance of the social and juridical changes that were occurring as this period of Adela's life unfolded, as well as their relevance to her personal experiences. First, I review the legalization of divorce, and the inconvenience created by the mandatory five-year separation period that had to be observed before a divorce could be finalized. Second, I discuss constraints and pressures that young women of the 1970s confronted when they had sex, including the lack of access to effective contraception, the potential for an unplanned pregnancy, and the illegality of having an abortion. Third, I review how social policies regarding births out of wedlock were changing. Specifically, children born to unmarried parents were given the same legal rights as those born in a marriage, giving women more leverage to seek paternity support, especially if their partner remained legally married to another woman.

Next I use Adela's narrative to highlight the shroud of silence that pervades domestic violence and the leaps of compromise that women take to placate their partners. Following this, I examine how dominant cultural scripts about male prestige and power in the family contribute to violent acts against women, particularly when men believe they have lost their post as heads of household. I then follow with a discussion of the different forms of abuse that Gerardo inflicted on Adele, specifically in the form of sexual coercion, for the greater part of their relationship. Thereafter, I review how scholars have examined the power dynamics of sexual intimacy in situations where women are compelled, or coerced, to have intercourse for the sake of keeping harmony in the household. Rather than characterize this action as passively compliant, some scholars have offered a more nuanced explanation, arguing that it is, instead, an exercise in agency, one that recognizes the strategic advantage of living in a peaceful home. Scholars have also referenced the subjective nature of agency, born out of a myriad of interlocked social contingencies that are themselves imbued with different configurations of power and resistance.

From here, I discuss how Adela began plotting her escape, committing herself to two years of preparation for a state sponsored *concorso*, or competition that would provide an opportunity for a different profession, and a higher salary. In order to succeed, Adela followed a strategy of practical acceptance, doing whatever was needed to keep harmony in the house, so that she could study for the exam. Next, I discuss how sweeping changes in the social and legal status of women facilitated Adela's decision to embark on a new career, and a new life. I note that despite these changes, the value of women in Italian society continues to be primarily tied to their role in the family. To close, I discuss

the circumstances under which Adela was finally able to leave Gerardo. Such was her transformation to a confident, full-time working mother that Adela also found the courage to stop accommodating his sexual bidding. Gerardo's grasp for greater control over her, in response to her resolve, provides a disturbing reminder of the profound sense of privilege that many Italian men appear to have with regard to the position, and role, of women in Italian society.

Serious Games and Social Transformation

As I briefly describe above, Ortner explains the concept of serious games in the following manner,

The idea of the "game" is meant to capture simultaneously the following dimensions: that social life is culturally organized and constructed, in terms of defining categories of actors, rules, and goals of the games, and so forth; that social life is precisely social, consisting of webs of relationship and interaction between multiple, shiftingly interrelated subject positions, none of which can be extracted as autonomous "agents"; and yet, at the same time, there is "agency," that is, actors play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge, intelligence. The idea that the game is "serious" is meant to add into the equation the idea that power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways, and that, while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes of these games are often very high (1996:12).

For Ortner, agency, enacted with strong, active, "though not necessarily fully 'conscious'" intentionality, is an important component of the *serious games* of life. It is through intentional, agentive acts, in the midst of "routine practices that proceed with little reflection and planning," that people can individually, or collectively, foster a change in, or the erosion of, long standing social patterns (2006:136; 1996:17). She clarifies, "...whatever the hegemonic order of gender relations may be – whether

“egalitarian,” or “male dominant,” or something else – it never exhausts what is going on. There are always sites, and sometimes large sites, of alternative practices and perspectives available, and these may become the bases of resistance and transformation” (1996:18).

A wider social transformation, however, consisting of changes in the dynamics of everyday institutions, such as marriage, family, and work life, does not follow a linear progression, nor does it happen at a consistent pace. As Clifford Geertz writes,

Culture moves rather like an octopus [...] – not all at once in a smoothly coordinated synergy of parts, a massive coaction of the whole, but by disjointed movements of this part, then that, and now the other which somehow culminate to directional change. Where, leaving cephalopods behind, in any given culture the first impulses toward progression will appear, and how and to what degree they will spread through the system, is, at this stage of our understanding, if not wholly unpredictable, very largely so. Yet that if such impulses appear within some rather closely interconnected and socially consequential part of the system, their driving force will most likely be high, does not appear to be too unreasonable a supposition (1973:408).

Although Adela’s experience occurred between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, it remains relevant. In the next section, I review the state of domestic violence in Italy today, and its connection to long observed practices, such as honor killing, that were meant to preserve the good name of a family or an individual.

Domestic Violence

In a recent analysis about public harassment of women in Genoa, anthropologist Emanuela Guano writes,

It would be inaccurate to claim that Italian women have no consciousness of the abuses and injustices that they suffer on a day-to-day basis; however, this

awareness often remains anecdotal. As a result, most of the scattered stories of exploitation and violence that women tell each other fail to coalesce into a conscious, collective narrative of gender oppression and inequality. The media are complicit in this silence. For example, over the last several years, both conservative and liberal media have consistently failed to read a pattern of gendered violence in the appalling escalation of the number of women murdered by their husbands, boyfriends, and male acquaintances (2007 p. 57).¹⁸

In 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Council released a focused report on the prevalence of violence against women in Italy. In it, Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo called domestic violence “the most pervasive form of violence that affects women across the country” with some service providers indicating a prevalence rate of up to 78 percent, if all forms of domestic violence (psychological, physical, and sexual) are accounted for (United Nations Human Rights Council 2012; Istat 2007). A survey conducted by Istat in 2006 found that nearly 32 percent of Italian women between the ages of 16 to 70 are victims of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. Specifically, almost 94 percent of women who affirmed they had been victims of unwanted sexual relations reported that the act had been perpetrated by a partner, in particular by a husband or co-residing partner (representing almost 58 percent of the total number of victims). Partners were also reported to have carried out nearly 70 percent of rapes, with almost 43 percent committed by husbands or co-residing partners (Muratore et al. 2008:18).

In 2013, the Italian government passed a new strict anti-domestic and gender based violence law. Advocates and service providers have emphasized that while this is step in the right direction, it cannot be implemented to its full extent without a social transformation in attitudes and expectations regarding gender (Nadeau 2013a). Moreover, they argue that Italy’s prolonged recession is likely to “aggravate the problem” and what

¹⁸ For a more recent reference, see Nadeau 2012.

is really needed is a government sponsored, well-funded network of psychological, legal, and financial services for women that are attempting to leave abusive relationships. For instance, the Council of Europe Task Force on Violence Against Women recommends that every country should have one shelter place for a family (a woman and her children) for every 10,000 residents. Following these guidelines, Italy should have approximately 6,019 places, and instead has only about 500 nationwide (Povoledo 2013; WAVE Italy Country Report 2013). These statistics make it quite clear that violence against women is, indeed, a very *serious game* for women, and Italian society as a whole.

In a discussion on structures of power, Connell uses the specific example of rape to argue that, rather than serve as acts of individual deviation, various forms of person to person violence, are in fact, enforcements of the social order (1987:107). State sanctioned violence has deep roots in Italy. For instance, honor killings,¹⁹ were considered quite acceptable until relatively recently. Willson writes, “From 1981, ‘honor’ was no longer accepted as a legitimate cause for leniency in sentencing for crimes of violence (including murder), and the barbaric practice of ‘reparatory marriage,’ whereby a rapist could be absolved by marrying his victim, was outlawed” (2010:163). Until 1996, rape, itself, was legally considered a crime against public morality, carrying lenient sentences, rather than as a crime against the individual (2010:171). These examples indicate that, despite its professed intent of safeguarding the rights and safety of women, the Italian state, in fact, constrains them. It passes legislation that is steeped in patriarchy, condones social practices that actually hurt women, and does not provide sufficient resources to enforce those laws that are meant to make a positive difference in women’s lives. In the

¹⁹ A practice that was more prevalent in the South; see Lieta Harrison, *The Wantons* (1966) for various accounts of why and how people killed to maintain honor.

next section, I discuss how the legalization of divorce *Italian style* created unnecessary obstacles for those that wanted to pursue it.

The Legalization of Divorce

One of the first items of note regarding Adela's life history is that she and her first, and only legal husband, Dorian, married on the condition that divorce, which became legal in 1970, would remain so. After a referendum to overturn the law failed in 1974, with 59 percent of the electorate voting in favor of keeping divorce legal, Adela and Dorian decided to marry. She states, "We had decided that if divorce wasn't going to remain legal, we would move in together without getting married. For us, it was a question of civility. Divorce was a civil victory. It was important to be civil. The idea of getting married and not having a way to leave if things did not work out was an incivility." Notwithstanding this newfound right, Saraceno writes that even before divorce became a viable option, legally sanctioned separations were already on the rise in 1965 (2004:51). In fact, couples had already begun to unofficially separate in the 1950s. Many created new de facto families whose children were considered illegitimate, and without rights (Caldwell 1995:154-55; Willson 2010:159). Adela and Dorian separated one year after they married. Once she discovered Dorian's affair with another woman, whom he described as a "temporary passion," Adela moved out of the converted two family villa they shared with his mother. In compliance with the parameters of the law at that time, Adela and Dorian had to be legally separated for five years before they could divorce. This wait period was later shortened to three years in 1987 (Saraceno 2004:56).

At age 27, almost a year into her legal separation from Dorian, Adela met Gerardo. Had she wanted to remarry, Adela would have had to wait another four years before she and her second husband could partake of the legal protections and benefits that are afforded to heterosexual married couples. During the 1960s, social practices regarding sexual intercourse were also in flux. The first sexual encounter for women was happening before marriage and at a younger age. In the next section, I discuss how the lack of access to dependable contraception, and information about sex, put young, sexually active women, like Adela, in a precarious position.

Sex, Pregnancy, Abortion, and Contraception

As I note in my Introduction, Adele had been dating Gerardo intermittently when she agreed to take a vacation with him. When they returned, Adele ended the relationship. She states, “When we came back from vacation, I told him I never wanted to see him again in my life.” “Why?” I ask. “Because he was unbearable,” she responds and adds,

He was all engulfing, and very imposing; not just jealous, but obsessive. He was sick, sexually. We hadn’t known each other that long, just a few months, and I wanted a little more freedom sexually. I didn’t want to have it on demand. I remember saying to him, ‘I only want to have sex if I want to,’ but he would say, ‘If you don’t have sex when I want it, then it means that you don’t care about me,’ and I remember saying, ‘Give me some time.’

She continues,

Unfortunately, when I realized I was pregnant, after that vacation, I didn’t know how to manage the situation on my own. It was an automatic reaction. If you were having a baby, you had to be with the father. I couldn’t imagine having a

baby and not being with the father. This was his child. So I began a life of a couple with this man, knowing full well that I didn't love him. I thought, 'Okay, let's put this family together; slowly, slowly, we'll learn to get along.' It was a deep denial of my true instinct because my true instinct was to tell him, 'Go away! I don't want to see you anymore.' But, I really wanted this baby, and I didn't have anyone to lean on. So, I took him for life – forever, deliberately.

Also working in the relationship's favor was the fact Adela's father and Gerardo's mother were childhood friends, and continued to stay in contact. Adela is certain that their friendship "conditioned" her decision to stay with Gerardo.

Given her strong reservations about remaining in a relationship with Gerardo, let alone raising a child with him, I ask Adela if she considered having an abortion.

Although abortion was illegal in Italy until 1978, there were options to either find a practitioner in Italy that would do it in secrecy, or to go abroad to have it done. She responds that she had already undergone an abortion when she was 19 years old, and did not want to repeat the experience. At that time, Adela was dating a man who was four years older. He was the first man with whom she had sex; in fact, when she got pregnant, they had only had intercourse a few times. As she recalls the experience, she states,

I didn't want to have sex. It was too soon, but let's just say he practically forced me to do it in the car. He put so much pressure on me. I remember him saying, 'Everybody is having sex now. I can't believe you don't want to. Let me show you how.' I didn't enjoy it. It was really very difficult.

When Adela realized she was pregnant, her parents insisted that she have an abortion.

She states,

My parents were very upset. I thought they would have been more supportive. My mother had gotten pregnant without being married. She had my oldest brother before she met my father. But, instead, they forced me to abort. I waited until I was three months along because I wanted to have the baby.

“Did you go abroad?” I ask. “No, I had it here in Rome,” she replies and adds, “The only other option was to take a bus to London, but my parents found a place here. It was very expensive. They paid for it.” Adela elaborates that the actual physical procedure was performed without any consequence, under general anesthesia, in a private apartment with several beds and curtains. She states, “I remember looking at all of the curtains and thinking, ‘How strange that we are all laying here like this, in this ordinary apartment. How could something so devastating happen in such an ordinary apartment?’ At least that’s what it looked like on the outside.” Because it was illegal to advertise and distribute information about birth control until 1971, many couples used abortion as a backup method of birth control, after *coitus interruptus*, or withdrawal, which was the most widespread method used until the late 1960s (Dalla Zuanna et al. 2005:23-4). Article 553 of the Penal Code, which prohibited the spreading of contraceptive information, was established in 1930 during the Fascist era. It was upheld by the Constitutional Court in 1965, and only declared unconstitutional in 1971 (Wanrooij 2001; see also Gribaldo et al. 2009). The most reliable estimates of abortions in the decade prior to its legalization in 1978 are 150,000-200,000 induced abortions per year, about one for every four births (Dalla Zuanna et al. 2005:23-4; see also Bonarini 1993; Colombo 1977).

The lifting of the ban on advertising of different types birth control methods, along with prescription sales of the pill and the IUD, as well as cheaper and better condoms, changed the role of women in the sexual encounter. Dalla Zuanna et al. elaborate,

In the 'pre-revolutionary'²⁰ situation, the woman was normally fertile, strategies to avoid a conception were adopted only during sexual intercourse (mainly coitus interruptus and the condom), and practical responsibility for contraception fell upon the man. After the revolution, the couple was usually not fertile (thanks mainly to the pill or IUD), and this condition needed to be abandoned temporarily in order to achieve conception. Moreover, it was the woman who became directly responsible for contraception (2005:23-4).

After she had the abortion, Adela began using the birth control pill, but used it inconsistently. She states,

I didn't like using the pill. It affected my mood, and made me feel bloated. I also gained weight while using it. The hormones in the pill back then had more side effects than they do today. Later, I preferred using an IUD. When I got pregnant [during that vacation] with Gerardo, I was in the middle of a transition from the pill to an IUD. I wasn't taking anything.

Dalla Zuanna and his colleagues write that several qualitative studies during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate that Italian gynecologists had a strong bias against the birth control pill, and emphasized its medical contra-indications with their patients. Instead, gynecologists preferred and prescribed the IUD and the diaphragm more readily (2005:39-40). They explain, "Italian gynaecologists' preference for the IUD and the diaphragm in the 1970s and 1980s and their distrust of the pill may be explained by the specific nature of their profession. In Italy, gynaecology is an offshoot of surgery, unlike in France, for example, where gynaecologists are closely related to specialists in internal medicine." "Finally," they add, "most Italian gynaecologists working in public and private hospitals are conscientious objectors to abortion; 63 percent in 1993" (2005; see also Spinelli et al. 2000). While this stance does not necessarily make them objectors to

²⁰ Some scholars refer to this transition as a second contraceptive revolution, the first being the diffusion of coitus interruptus during the end of the nineteenth century until the 1960s of the twentieth century (Léridon 1987 in Dalla Zuanna et al. 2005:24).

the pill, Dalla Zuanna and his colleagues point out that objection is stronger in areas where secularization, and the decline of *coitus interruptus*, has moved more slowly. Thus, the “orientation of health professionals towards different methods of contraception may have been important in conditioning the adoption of more reliable contraceptive methods” (2005).

Adela’s choices regarding her intimate relationships, ranging from “being practically forced” to have sex for the first time, to having an abortion, to marrying and separating from Dorian, to choosing a type of birth control, as well as deciding to have and raise her child with Gerardo, are all interconnected. They are tied together, as Ortner argues, through webs of religious, state, and individual power, through evolving norms around gender and intimacy, as well as familial pressure to conform to established standards surrounding the conception of a child, even if that conformity is, at best, superficial. As young girls and women, Adela’s cohort had more opportunities to take sexual risks than the prior generation. The increase in mixed sex classrooms and women’s labor force participation provided more possibilities to come in contact with the opposite sex (see Chapter 2). Curiosity, pressure from boyfriends to have sex as a *prova di amore* (proof of love), and limited access to effective contraception, raised the risk of getting pregnant during this period of social transition (see Chapter 2) (Willson:126-27; see also Piccone Stella 1993:86-7). In the next section, I will review how the increase in children born outside of marriage compelled the state to adjust its social policies to meet the needs of these children, and reflect the change in social practices.

Social Policies and Legal Rights - Children Born Outside of Marriage

Neither of Adela's pregnancies fit the social expectations befitting the image of the nuclear family established in the 1950s. At age 19, her parents thought it best to terminate her pregnancy, although it meant disobeying Italian moral and legal edicts. At 27, against her "true instinct" and the red flags raised by Gerardo's behavior, Adela decided to keep her baby and stay with Gerardo to secure the child's future. Other than her family, who forced her to abort the first time, Adela had no other social or economic recourse than to be with the father of her child. Writing about the invisibility of lone mothers in Italian social policy, Bimbi comments,

... in the politically conservative climate of the 1950s and 1960s, lone mothers were morally embarrassing for all political parties. Catholics felt the need to censure any deviation from the norm of the legitimate family, while the Left partially shared these Catholic prejudices while also fearing their attacks. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies and unmarried mothers were often held up as examples of the undesirable effects of the presence of women in the labor market. From the 1970s onwards, the social rights of mothers have been subsumed under measures aimed at the families of employees, in industry or the public sector, and women workers. Thus, the working mother in the nuclear family became the subject of new policies in local welfare administrations (1997:185-86).

Luckily, the reform of the Family Law in 1975 gave children born out of wedlock the same legal rights as children born in marriage. The provisions of this law also recognized men and women as equal partners in marriage, and held both parents accountable for the welfare of children, including making decisions on their behalf (Willson 2010:159).

Adela and Gerardo's sons were born after 1975. Had Gerardo refused to recognize

paternity, or provide financial support for his children, Adela would have had legal recourse to force him to take responsibility.

On the other hand, because Adela and Gerardo never married, her rights in the relationship with respect to her partner were non-existent. This lack of recognition continues through today. To quote Wilson, “... by the end of the twentieth century Italy still granted no legal rights to cohabiting couples (whether heterosexual or gay)” (2010:181). Adela explains that she spent the majority of their time together trying to figure out how to leave, but was afraid of his potential reaction. In the next section, I discuss Adela’s growing list of concessions to appease Gerardo’s excessive need to control every aspect of her life. Like many women who endure domestic violence, Adela kept silent about her ordeal because she was embarrassed and couldn’t imagine that any other woman would endure such abuse, or that anyone else’s situation was as dire as her own.

Leaps of Compromise and the Shroud of Silence

Unknown to Adela at the beginning of their relationship, Gerardo had a history of mental health issues and had been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. He was quite volatile. She states,

He was terrible; really terrible and very controlling. I couldn’t wear earrings. I couldn’t wear makeup. He would say things like, ‘If you wear makeup, or earrings, it means you want to look different than the person you really are. You are having my baby, and you are thinking of showing our child a different face than the one you were born with. I can’t allow that.’ I couldn’t occupy myself with stupid, frivolous things because now I was a wife, now I was a mother. So I had to play the role of wife and mother. Every conversation was like that. There

were so many things that he couldn't allow [she pauses]. There was so much anguish, so much fear. When my first son was born, and we were still at the hospital, I couldn't even let my family know. He did not want me to call my family to tell them that my son had been born until *he* decided that it was all right to tell them. I had to slip a note to the nurse with my parents telephone number on it, so that that they could be notified. They came the next day. I remember when they walked in, he said, "Oh, ciao. We were going to tell you once Adela had the opportunity to rest. How did you know? Who told you?" and my parents responded that the hospital had called them.

Adela adds that she later found out her family had begun to worry about Gerardo's controlling behavior, but never approached her about it. She states, "They didn't say anything to me. Nobody asked. Nobody asked me if I needed help." Adela attributes this apparent indifference on her family's part to their habit of not getting involved in one other's personal affairs. As much as this may be true, only Adela can attest to the internal dynamics of her family, it is also true that domestic abuse in Italy, and in general, is shrouded in silence. While the aforementioned study by Istat found that almost 37 percent of Italian women who have experienced domestic violence have spoken of it with a friend or neighbor, and 33 percent have spoken of it with a member of the family, 34 percent have never spoken of it to anyone. Also, almost 93 percent of victims have not reported it to the authorities, and even fewer have turned to anti-violence centers or specialized centers for help. (Muratore et al. 2008:74). In her study about violence against women in Trieste, psychologist Patrizia Romito found that a majority of women who had spoken with somebody about their violent circumstances, be it family, emergency rooms, police stations, or local parishes, were encouraged to endure the abuse for the sake of the family (2000:74-77).

During one of our discussions Adela states that she didn't speak to somebody about her situation for many years because she couldn't imagine that any other woman's

story was as desperate as her own. She states, “When you are in it, you don’t see anything else ... aside from the fact that he wasn’t the right person for me, he was psychotic. He had very deep mental health issues. I made an exhausting effort every day to avoid his crises.” As is often the case with domestic abuse, Adela found herself compromising in ways she never would have expected. She states, “I moved out of my parents house when I was 19 after I got my first job as a secretary [shortly after the abortion]. One of my girlfriends and I, we found an apartment to rent on our own. After I left home, I made my own decisions. I wasn’t expecting to be one of those women that couldn’t do this. I wasn’t expecting to be so trapped. But I was so afraid of him. She explains,

He was a great manipulator, from a psychological perspective, especially in daily life. He knew how to manipulate the things you did every day. You know when you live with somebody and are afraid that he will get angry, or that he may have a tantrum at the slightest disagreement, or that he may get violent, everything you do slowly, slowly becomes conditioned around making him happy. He wants you to do something a certain way, and you really don’t want to, but you say fine. You accommodate him to keep harmony. Eventually, you find yourself giving more and more because he keeps demanding more. This is what Gerardo did. He just kept making new, ridiculous demands. Like, it got to a point where I couldn’t speak to my mother on the telephone if he was home. I had to give all of my attention to him. If he saw me on the telephone, he would get furious and ask, “Can’t you do that when I am not here? If you know that I don’t like it, why do you do it?” I would argue with him every time. Every time I would say, “You are crazy, or your demands are impossible to meet, or do you realize what you are doing?” But in the end, I would accommodate him.

She continues, “I endured this. When I think about it now, I am surprised I didn’t end up in a mental institution, but I endured it because I had my baby.”

Adela did work throughout the ten years she was with Gerardo, but explains that she initially did not make enough money to be able to leave him. “For some time, I gave lessons at a music school,” she states, continuing, “It was a flexible schedule, so it didn’t interfere with my responsibilities at home too much. I think this is why he allowed it. He

thought it was frivolous and stupid, but at least it brought in some money.” Adela adds that Gerardo was very critical of her salary, often reminding her that *he* provided the primary financial support for the family, and anything she brought home “didn’t count for anything.” “I didn’t think I could separate from Gerardo at that point. I thought I had to wait for an opportunity. Of course, I didn’t know what this opportunity would be. Maybe I just needed to have that hope.” Three years before she would leave Gerardo, Adela got another full time job as a technical assistant, a specialized type of secretary.

Women in abusive relationships often give the fear of economic hardship as a reason to stay, especially if they have young children. Though having access to money is an important consideration, advocates maintain this fear should not keep women from leaving because the consequences of staying in an abusive relationship could be dire. Some caseworkers have suggested force of habit is actually the stronger pull that keeps women in abusive relationships (Plesset 2006:90). Following this thread, scholars have also pointed to the role dominant cultural scripts play in perpetuating the idea that power and prestige are properties of the male gender. In the next section, I review research suggesting these popular scripts may be contributing to an identity crisis among Italian men, largely reflected in an increase of violent acts against women (also see my Introduction).

Power, Prestige, and Gender

In her examination of the link between prestige and power and their association with maleness, Ortner writes,

... cultural notions and practices related to “prestige” [seem] to provide the most powerful interpretive keys for understanding the social and cultural ordering of gender, sexuality, and reproduction cross-culturally ... there is a simple reason for this fact: it is because gender is itself centrally a prestige system – a system of discourses and practices that construct male and female not only in terms of differential roles and meanings but also in terms of differential *value*, differential prestige” (1989:41).

She later amends her proposition by adding that “the cultural level of prestige” cannot be analyzed without also considering the significance of “practices of power” (1989:43). In a recent article, forensic psychiatry expert Carabellese and her colleagues note how ideas about male prestige have been historically significant for Italian social mores. They link the high rate of “intimate partner violence” (IPV) against women in the country to the loss of male prestige and power, writing,

On the one hand, the old male cultural stereotype that demands obedience within the home is no longer practiced and on the other hand, lip service is paid to the concept of an equal role of the woman. However, this cultural “passage” is more apparent than real. In fact, in our nation, women’s rights are formally accepted by both partners but when the woman demands her independence this is perceived by the man as a threat. Any attempt by the woman to draw away from him – either physically or psychologically – or from his overriding influence causes him to react forcibly and violently to prevent this. In some way, it is as if the man sees his role and power placed in jeopardy, and hence, his very identity. From this standpoint, violence against women could be the means whereby some men attempt to bolster their weak sense of identity and to obtain the power that is often denied them in their daily life. This is especially true within the family that is now organized on the basis of more fluid models that do not assign a superior authority to any of the members (2013:534).

This weak sense of male identity can be further exacerbated if the woman attains a higher job profile than the man (Carabellese et al. 2013:538), or if she was formerly at home, but now has a job and an income. The demands of work life, including new friendships and interests, usually compel the woman to make some changes. Whereas her life once revolved around her partner and family, now she splits her attention and time between her

family and other responsibilities (see also Plesset 2006:137). This transition can be especially challenging for men who view a partner's new life as a menacing reminder of their own loss of prestige and control over the family. Specifically, among some men, Carabellese and her colleagues (2013) cite a particular type of personality disorder that is prone to narcissistic, borderline, anti-social behavior (known as Cluster B). The problem, they suggest, is that narcissism is also part of a prevailing social model that promotes the prestige of men. They write, "In practice, it is as if some relational styles and behaviors typical of a cluster B disorder seem to have turned into widespread cultural factors as a result of strong social pressures. These cultural contents belong to our society in which the care for the narcissistic ego is a dominant model" (2013). The kind of violence that Gerardo inflicted on Adela, and people's acquiescence and acknowledgement of it, fits the profile of the narcissistic ego. I provide a more detailed account of his treatment of her in the next section.

Gerardo's Abuse of Adela

Given Gerardo's diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, as well as his penchant to use angry outbursts to get his way, one day I carefully ask Adela if he also used physical force with her, which I suspected he had, but she had not yet confirmed. Whatever misgivings I had about prying too much, or too soon, were quickly alleviated by her frank response. "Well, there were two important incidents," she begins, and adds. "One was worse than the other, but it gave me an opening to leave. One time, in the beginning, after our first son was born, he slapped me really hard. I remember I took the baby and left. I left for a month! Can you believe it? It was a month of complete, genuine

happiness.” “For a month? Where did you go?” I ask. “You are not going to believe it. I went to stay with one of *his* friends,” she states somewhat proudly. “Wait,” I interject, “So, his friends knew about his behavior toward you, your family knew, his family knew, but nobody offered to help you leave?” “Well, everybody knew his character, and I think they suspected he was harsh with me, but nobody talked about it. Nobody asked about it,” she responds. “On the contrary,” she continues,

For me, the idea that he had slapped me was inexcusable. It was unforgivable. But those few I told thought I was overreacting. I remember somebody saying, ‘So much drama over a slap.’ Plus, he told everybody I left without thinking, irrationally, with the baby, and that he was very worried about us, which I thought was [she pauses and shakes her head]. Not that I thought it was a facade, I do think he cared, but I also knew how manipulative he was. He said he was going crazy looking for me. It’s not like I completely disappeared that month. True, I didn’t tell him where I had gone, and I know his friend didn’t tell him, but I did see him. I let him see the baby. I would make appointments to see him in different parks and piazzas. Eventually his mother intervened. She said he was very sorry, and that he was being sincere. You know, she gave me the usual story you hear, “He has changed; he won’t be jealous anymore.” So I went back. Anyway, it’s not like I could have stayed with his friend indefinitely.

She adds, “Of course, he hadn’t changed. But I thought, ‘Perhaps I could use his sexual fury to my advantage.’ Because I wanted another baby, and like I said before, I knew we would not stay together, but I didn’t want my first son to be alone. Very reasonable, no? And I got pregnant pretty easily because we had sex every day.”

Adela goes on to describe the sexual coercion she underwent at least eight out of the ten years that she and Gerardo were together. Initially, she states, “I suffered through a lot of subtle violence [she pauses]. Oh goodness, actually, I guess it was also physical because he would torment me.” She continues,

He had a type of obsession. I don’t even think it was about the sex. I wanted a little bit of parity, but he wanted to have sex every night because he said he needed it. He would say, “I need it to sleep, so you have to do it,” and I would

answer, “I can’t do it just because you say you need it to sleep.” It was really awful. I would say no and turn to the other side. He would wait until I fell asleep and wake me up in the middle of the night and say, “I won’t let you sleep until you do it. You have to do it!” This happened *every* night. He would torment me so much that I couldn’t take it anymore. In the end I would say, “Fine, do what you want,” and let him have his way. Afterward, I would get up to go to the bathroom and throw up. This went on for so long, at least eight of the ten years we were together because eventually I began leaving the house at night.

She chuckles, and then states, “You know, I don’t know if I actually ever told anybody about this particular aspect of my life. I guess, perhaps, it is like the famous domestic violence that everybody talks about, no? Keeping silent about things that seem unspeakable. Well, there is very little to be done about it.” Adela then explains how she managed to detach herself from nightly intercourse with Gerardo, as well as how she became motivated to end the practice, and eventually the relationship. Her only respite from having sex with Gerardo was a few weeks after giving birth and few other rare occasions. She states,

During that time, I developed enormous doubts about my own sexual capacity because he would constantly tell me there was something wrong with me. He would say, “You aren’t normal. There is definitely something wrong with you because you don’t have any more desire.” Over time, slowly, I began to think, “Maybe he is right.” But maybe, in some way, this was useful because I stopped caring. I tried to stop feeling.

“Until, one day,” she explains, “One of my colleagues at work began to show an interest in me.” “At the music school?” I clarify. “No, no,” she responds, “I had already started to work as a technical assistant. It was at the beginning of the 1980s.” “So,” she continues,

He [her colleague] would say to me, ‘Come on! Let’s have some fun. Let’s see one another.’ I have to say, I liked the attention, and I thought, “Maybe I am not abnormal” because *I had a sexual desire to be with him*. So, eventually, I did it. I stuck Gerardo with [my] horns, and had sex with my coworker a few times. It was really very pleasurable, very gentle. I remember thinking to myself, “This isn’t possible!”

Adela describes these encounters as instrumental in cementing her decision to leave Gerardo, along with working in a new position that provided her with a regular, larger salary and job security. She states, “That’s when I woke up, and started to seriously plan to leave him because I realized he was the one who was very sick, not me!” “Not me,” she reiterates forcefully. Adela’s account of her sexual rapport with Gerardo reveals that in matters of intimacy, ideas about what constitutes agency ought to also be considered in the context of endurance. That is, managing an oppressive situation that appears to have no foreseeable end in sight. Even in these types of scenarios, where women are not engaging in sexual intercourse out of their own desire or volition, scholars have suggested that agency exists. In the next section, I review scholarship on agency and sexual intimacy.

Agency and Sexual Intimacy

Sociologist Meenakshi Thapan writes, “the truth about agency is that the dividing line between compliance and subversion is thin and the woman’s body is often the conflicting site of both giving in to, as well as resisting dominant constructions” (1997:11). For the greater part of her relationship with Gerardo, Adela was actively engaged in a serious game of survival. It is certainly possible to depict Adela’s response to Gerardo’s nightly sexual coercion as a type of succumbed passivity. After all, eight years is a very long time to provide sex on demand every night. The problem with this interpretation, although not necessarily inaccurate, is that it is incomplete. Not only does it dismiss Adela’s vocal protests against Gerardo’s controlling behavior and eccentric

demands, it also erases the intentionality of her efforts to maintain harmony in the household for the sake of the family, and an uncertain future.

In a study about sexual attitudes and practices among rural, married Vietnamese women, Vu Song Ha proposes that rather than serve as a purely passive response to sexual relations, women use silence as a form of agency to maintain harmony, or *hoa thuan*, within the family. He writes, “Harmony is seen as important in maintaining stability and happiness within the family, and ensuring children are nurtured and cared for” (2008 S171). One participant in his study observes, “If men do not have their needs satisfied, they fly into a rage. If we want to keep harmony in the family, we need to please them (Yen, 31 years old, focus group discussion)” (2008 S171). In a similar study about newly married adolescent Indian women, George observes that young brides are encouraged to be pragmatic about sexual relations with their new husbands. She writes,

The dominant cultural discourse in this urban working-class community was that a woman without a husband had no life. If the woman did not live up to the expectations of a wife, including being sexually available to her husband, he could move his attention to other women who were more willing. So, to have ‘a life’, status, esteem and honour as a married woman, she had to submit to the legitimate and reasonable demands of her husband. Other women, too, realized that whatever the nature of their experience of sexual relations, it was a necessary means through which they acquired the status of married women. We can view pragmatic brides as compliant with cultural expectations or as agential in forming their particular identities as married women (2002:216).

As one new wife in her study notes, “A woman needs some support. How long will her parents support her? So, a woman like me will say, ‘if I’ve got to have clothes to wear and food to eat, then you do whatever you want [with my body] but keep me as a wife should be kept” (2002:216).

Acknowledging the significance of agentive acts in the midst of great precarity, like the circumstances experienced by Adela and the women quoted above, provides a

much more nuanced understanding of how and why women, in particular, secure themselves to withstand continued, unimaginable violence. The idea that women have a broader, or perhaps more focused, objective in mind when they are, even passively, participating in sexual intercourse with their partner suggests that agency is subjective. It also suggests that women may be engaging in a more strategic form of agentive resistance where the recompense for enduring unwanted sex is highly valued. For instance, Adela cherished the pockets of peace she had to herself where Gerardo did not overpower her. In the next section, I will review how scholars have linked the enactment of agency to ideas about resistance and subjectivity.

Resistance and Subjectivity

As Ortner reminds us, agency cannot function apart from the circumstances that surround it, in truth, the circumstances that contribute to its enactment. Instead, agency is subjective and forms part of a complex web of relationships involving social contingencies and expectations, as well as different configurations and negotiations of interest, power, and resistance (see 2006, 1996).²¹ Resistance, in itself, need not be an explicit, planned and intentional counter-force to power abuse. Rather, “[t]he ‘willing victim’ may be operating from the vantage of strategic resistance, watching for openings and coalescing the fragmentary forms of resistance which, in combination, articulate a potential challenge to the status quo” (Faith 1994:39). In a similar vein, anthropologist Henrietta Moore posits that an analysis of resistance unavoidably implicates complicity,

²¹ In addition to Ortner (2006, 1996), also see Keane (2003) for further reading on how anthropologists, and other scholars, have debated the significance, role, and position of agency in social structures.

an action, or lack thereof, not typically referenced at length in discussions of agency. Nevertheless, she argues that both resistance and complicity are at once types of agency and forms of subjectivity, each “marked through with structures of difference based on gender, race, ethnicity, and so on” (1994:50). With specific regard to gender, she adds, “All of the major axes of difference, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, intersect with gender in ways which proffer a multiplicity of subject positions within any discourse” (1994:57).

In her examination of the intersection between gender, the body, and everyday life, Thapan further elucidates Moore’s premise. She writes,

Thus, a woman's resistance to the dominant discourse is dependent on her variously marked and changing subjectivity which, at different times, will influence her resistance differently depending on which factor is most important at any given time. In certain situations, a woman's class and social background determines her response while in other situations her educational background, ideological and political commitments may shape the nature of her response. Her status as a mother or as a single parent is likely to effect her response in some situations whereas in some other situations her regional and community background are the influential factors. ... As women, we therefore respond to different subject positions by either accepting them wholeheartedly or denying them altogether or by manipulating the situation through an apparent acceptance but in fact offering resistance (1995:42).

As I briefly noted earlier, Adela’s perception of the types of opportunities that could be available to her began to change once she allowed for the possibility of securing a job that would enable her to support herself, and leave Gerardo. In order to do this, she had to adjust her point of reference, that is, her subjective assessment, about her professional capabilities and her home life. In the next section, I recount how Adela came to the realization that leaving Gerardo could be a real possibility.

The Concorso

Adela recounts how she almost missed her opportunity to at least open the prospect of doing something else as a profession. She had always thought of herself as a musician and hadn't considered other options. She states, "I think I clung to my music because it was my only outlet. It was a part of me that Gerardo could not own." "But then," she continues,

In the late 1970s there were quite a few state sponsored opportunities for jobs. A girlfriend of mine who worked for the organization where I still work told me about an announcement that was released regarding a *concorso*²² (competition) for technical assistants at the institute, like a type of secretary with specialized skills. I remember she said to me, "Why don't you participate in the *concorso*?" And I said to her, "Are you joking? I am a musician. This is what I chose as my profession. All my life I wanted to be musician. I don't want to apply for that job. Besides how am I ever going to compete to get one of those positions?" You know, she looked me directly in the eyes and said, "But are you going to stay with Gerardo the rest of your life? You practically have two years to prepare for the exam." In that moment, I knew I had to do it. I said to her, "You are absolutely right." Suddenly, I had an opportunity. That was the pathway out. To be able to separate without worry, I needed a good salary. Teaching at the music school was fun, and it was great to be with my students, but it wasn't enough money. So, in a way, this girlfriend of mine saved my life because she made it clear. She made me understand that if I wanted to separate, if I wanted to leave Gerardo, I had to participate in this *concorso* to have a chance at a stable salary. It gave me tremendous hope. So, for two years, I completely invested myself in preparing for the exam. I absolutely had to pass it, and I did. I won the *concorso*, and got the position. I am so happy I made that decision. I had security. I had a steady income.

²² Plesset provides the clearest and most succinct explanation of the *concorso* process that I have read, so I have quoted her directly. She writes, "Public competitions, or *concorsi*, are used as standard hiring procedures for positions in many areas of state and local government. Schoolteachers, office workers, state functionaries, police personnel, postal workers, and non-elected positions throughout government offices and agencies are all hired through the *concorso* process. Participants in *concorsi* are not only competing against many other entrants, they are also competing against the strength of the *raccomandazione* (a recommendation from someone with ties to the people making decisions). Many routinely complain it is impossible to win a position through a *concorso* without having connections or engaging in corruption" (2006: 224).

As Plesset notes, in Italy winning a *concorso* is no small feat. She writes, “Entrants must compete against hundreds, if not thousands of other people for a specified number of openings ... by completing oral and/or written exams. Those who win the competition not only are assured a position with the state but often enjoy job security for many years to come” (2006:137). Adela is a prime example of this likelihood. She states, “I started off as a technical assistant, and ten years ago, I became an editor. I had to pass an internal exam to raise my grade level and then requested an internal transfer. With my new position I also got a higher salary. I love my job. I will be very sad when I have to retire.”²³

I ask Adela what she would have done had she not won the *concorso*. “I didn’t consider not passing the exam,” she responds and adds, “That was not an option. Of course, if I think about it, I would have been disappointed, but the change inside of me had already taken place. During those two years I had studied to do something else with my life. I had newfound knowledge about my capabilities. Eventually I would have found an acceptable job so that I could leave him.” In the next section, I recount how Adela embarked on a plan to be practical and accepting of whatever circumstances arose over the next two years. This would be the only way to successfully prepare for the exam

²³ The so-called ‘Save Italy Decree’ - Section 24 of Legislative Decree No. 201/2011 (6 December), converted into Legislative Decree No. 214/2011 (22 December) – raised the age for accessing the old-age pension (*pensione di vecchiaia*) to 66 for both men and women employed in the public sector. It also amended the rules on pensions by changing how much recipients can be paid and how they become eligible for pension benefits. The basis of calculating pensions now depends on the amount of contributions paid rather than salary received. The new rules were effective 1 January 2012 (Faioli 2015).

without making it obvious that she was, in fact, preparing to leave Gerardo.

Practical Acceptance as Empowerment

On the subject of Adela's personal journey of empowerment, I wondered how she managed her relationship with Gerardo as she prepared for the exam. Given his volatile and controlling disposition, it would seem that he could have prevented Adela from participating in the *concorso* at any point during the two-year process it took to study and sit for the exam. I ask her whether Gerardo raised any objections to the time her preparation took away from him, and whether he perceived her interest in finding a more lucrative job as a threat. She responds,

You know, at first I thought he would not be supportive of the idea, and that I would have to be very careful with how I managed whatever objections he had. Then, I realized this opportunity was perfect because it was a research position. Well, it was as a secretary, an assistant at a research institute. He was *so* arrogant about being a university professor, and he found my passion for music, my job as a music instructor, to be beneath him. So, if I won the *concorso*, it would give him more prestige. Plus, I would bring in more money. The boys were getting older and we had more expenses. But it's not like he helped me. He just didn't try to prevent me from doing it. In fact, I think he found it amusing because sometimes I would ask him to clarify something for me. I did somersaults to accommodate him. I could never study during the day because he wouldn't watch the kids. I studied at night when they were already asleep. He knew how I was using my time. He liked that I was doing something useful, and not out doing something stupid with music. I did whatever I could to keep harmony in the house during that period. I had my goal. I don't think he realized the *concorso* was the beginning of *his* end, at least for me.

To echo Thapan (1995) and Faith (1994), Adela's response to the circumstances of her life, particularly to Gerardo's abusive, controlling eccentricities, was a combination of apparent complicit acceptance and strategic resistance. Her story provides a worthy

example of the complicated construction of agency, both as a practice and as analytical tool. It demonstrates that agency, specifically in the form of resistance and complicity, cannot easily be bifurcated into distinct categories wherein one is either resistant or complicit. More accurately, resistance and complicity shift and fluctuate, often functioning in tandem with each other, and are highly influenced by an individual's subjective perspective and experience. Kleinman and Fitz-Henry capture the nature of the intimate relationship between subjectivity, agency, and experience, when they write,

... experience always takes place within particular social spaces and is inextricable from the shifting exigencies of practical, everyday life within those spaces. In villages, neighborhoods, families, and workplaces, people are aware that certain practical things matter greatly – status, relationships, *resources* [emphasis added], ultimate meanings, death, or transcendence – and they struggle to preserve and protect those things” (2007 p. 54).

Adela's experience with Gerardo's volatility, as well as her limited financial capacity to support herself, informed her decision to acquiesce to his demands regarding her duties as a “wife” and mother, including the perceived responsibility to satisfy him sexually. This same experience, and a concern for her children, also prompted her to embrace an opportunity that would require a significant investment in time, energy, patience, and a continued acquiescence to Gerardo's demands.

Of consequence is the fact that there was no guarantee Adela's gamble would work. From Gerardo's potential opposition, to not passing the exam for the *concorso*, to not being hired for the position, even if she did win, there were a host of contingencies that could have adversely impacted her plan. Irrespective of these risks, the potential for a way out of her oppressive circumstances gave Adela hope, and this hope opened the door for a subjective, and real, transformation. Again, Kleinman and Fitz-Henry relay why it is

important to recognize the interconnection between individual life circumstance and social, political, and economic processes. They write, “Recognizing the multiplicity of human conditions, we affirm that our subjectivities and the moral processes in which we engage are forever in flux – not static, abstract, biologically fixed, or divorced from political, social, and economic processes, but fluid, contingent, and open to transformation. *As our worlds change, so do we* [emphasis added]” (2007:55). In the next section, I review how the position of women in Italian society was changing in the 1970s, and how this period of social transformation made it possible for Adela to take decisive action.

Legal Rights, State Inaction, and the Social Value of Women

Verily, the world around Gerardo and Adela was changing. Adela made her decision to act in a social and legal environment that purported to recognize and support the rights of women on par with those of men and open more, as well as uncharted, opportunities to them. The feminist movement ushered in an unprecedented assemblage of landmark legislation to guarantee these new rights. For instance, the Parity Law of 1977 outlawed sex discrimination in employment, including in recruitment, promotions, pensions, training and dismissals. The law even introduced paternity leave, making it possible for men to take some time off from work if their child got sick. In short, the social circumstances were ripe for Adela’s emboldened decision. Even if she had not won the *concorso* for a post as a technical assistant, it is probable that she would have found another position to secure stability and a better income. After all, she had invested two

years of her time gaining more knowledge and developing a different skill. Yet, whilst the Parity Law and others like it, carried symbolic importance, there was, unfortunately, very little done to ensure its implementation (Willson 2010:160).

Referring back to Ortner's characterization of gender as a prestige system, and to the arguments made by Guano (2007) and Carabellese et al. (2013) (see this chapter), the primary value men, the holders of institutional power, give to women's contributions to Italian society stubbornly continues to be as protectors of the hearth and the family. Indeed, this perverse attachment to a social structure that has, in reality, been in transition for some time diminishes the immeasurable benefits Italian society gains when women are empowered to contribute in various capacities. When Adela reflects on how much her life changed once she became a full-time working mother, she is not just referring to the reality of being able leave an abusive partner without being concerned about how she would feed her children. She is also referring to the possibility of creating a life for herself that extends beyond her responsibilities to her family. She states,

Winning that *concorso* was one of the best things that happened in my life because it brought me out of the stringent, everyday life of family. When you work, you cross paths with so many different people, with different lives. Also, you begin to realize that what happens to you also happens a bit to other women. You realize there is a wider sense of a shared humanity. Think about it. I separated three years after I began working there. It gave me so much strength. It gave me autonomy. Do you know what I felt when I got my first paycheck? I was overcome with joy. I realized I was going to get a paycheck every month; possibly for the rest of my life [she laughs]! It felt like a dream. I was so happy because it meant that no matter what happened, I wouldn't starve to death and neither would my kids. It was so liberating.

Working gave her autonomy - from Gerardo, from being financially dependent, and from "the stringent, everyday life of family." These are all good things for women as much as men. In the next section, I describe how Adela outsmarted Gerardo at his own charade,

giving him no choice but to let her and the kids move out without any serious repercussions.

The Way Out

About a little over a year before Adela would leave Gerardo for good, she began to leave the house at night after she put the kids to bed. She didn't have to comply with Gerardo's demand for sex. She states, "The monster isn't so frightening when you know you have a way out." She would return in the morning, wake the kids, get them ready for school, take them to school and go to work. "He didn't try to stop you?" I ask. "Not initially," she responds, and adds

I had suspicions he was seeing someone else for some time, maybe casually. I don't know, and I didn't care because it took some of the tension, the stress, away from me, from the kids. But, one night he lost it. He said, "Tonight you are not leaving. From now on, you do what I say." I, of course, was determined to leave and tried to open the door, but he grabbed me and slapped me. I managed to open the door and get out into the hallway, but then he took me by the hair and I screamed. My older son woke up and came running out into the hallway, yelling at him to let me go. He had his arm around my neck, and my hair in the other. Our neighbor above opened her door, and I remember thinking to myself, 'At least I have a witness.' We went back into the house; he took my purse, locked the door and closed the windows and the shutters. I could see he was in another zone. So, I immediately went into crisis mode, and tried to calm him and my son down. I put my son back in bed, and kept calm. I said yes to whatever he asked, and obeyed and kept quiet. I was so afraid of what he might do because he had closed the shutters. After about an hour, a small miracle happened. A friend of his came to visit. He was in the neighborhood and came by to say hello! Can you believe it? Well, Gerardo was very good at making everything seem normal in front of other people, so I used it to my advantage and said, "Gerardo, honey, would you please give me my purse?" He had no choice, but to give it to me and I left.

Adela thought about going to the police to denounce Gerardo. Instead, she called one of his friends who was a lawyer and told him what had transpired. If Adela denounced

Gerardo to the police, they would be obligated to notify the university. Gerardo's friend told Adela that this could potentially ruin him. He would not be able to keep his position. Adela used this information as leverage to enable her to move, to create actual physical space between herself and Gerardo. She had found her way out.

Observations

In this chapter, I used Adela's account of domestic violence to exemplify how patriarchal bias continues to infuse everyday life in Italy, both in its institutions and in civil society. That said, the legal and social gains made during the feminist movement have not been inconsequential. The fact that men and women were legally declared equal partners in a marriage, and that a husband no longer had the legal authority to dictate his wife's behavior, was a monumental coup. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Italian feminist movement is that its social impact remains inconclusive. Legally, Italian women have unprecedented recourse to address institutional sexism. Also, as I have already reviewed, since 2013 there are now strict anti-domestic and gender based violence measures that can be brought to bear to punish perpetrators, most of who are reported to be husbands, ex-husbands, partners, and cohabitants. When the law passed, it was done under the mechanism of an urgent decree. This meant, "gender-based violence had attained the status of an emergency affecting public order" (Dona 2014:275).

When and how the law was passed is revealing for several reasons. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, I focus on two that, once more, reveal an underlying dysfunction regarding the state's capacity and willingness to address issues related to

gender abuse, discrimination, and inequality. First, Adela's narrative takes place in the 1970s, nearly forty years ago. As I began to gather information for this chapter, it occurred to me that Adela and I could have been having conversations about a *current* abusive partner. The issues she raised regarding people's readiness to reprimand her for making "a big deal out of a slap," but unwillingness to talk about the abuse because it was a private, family matter, remain largely the same today. Second, because the law was proposed as an urgent decree measure meant to address a public emergency, the principle focus of the legislation is to enact repressive penal measures aimed at reducing the number of criminal acts. As such, the text of the law reflects "a traditional discourse on security – a discourse that conceptualizes women as vulnerable and weak, rather than seeing them as equal individual citizens with rights to strengthen, promote, and protect" (Dona 2014:275-76).

The representation of women as weak also naturalizes their subordinate position to men. In short, the law does little to address the endemic sexism entwined into Italian social norms. Dona writes,

The text of the decree law does not address the structural causes of gender-based violence, limiting itself instead to more serious punishments for offenders. This type of violence is the result of the fundamental inequality between men and women, which has structural and cultural roots that relate to the asymmetric dynamics of power between men and women in various environments, including the political realm, the workplace, the family, education, and more. The government entirely failed to understand and confront this fact (2014:277).

This recent critique of the Italian state's inability, or unwillingness, to enact laws recognizing the underlying power asymmetry, and social biases, that favor men should sound uncomfortably repetitive and depressingly familiar. Feminist scholars have been waging this critique for some time. Nevertheless, Dona believes there is room for

optimism because the Italian government, known for its political sclerosis, took decisive action against domestic and gender based violence, and it did so without an unreasonable delay. She concludes,

... despite all of the weaknesses highlighted above, the government was successful in passing legislation on the subject of domestic and gender-based violence for the first time, and it managed this within a comparatively short time span. It can only be hoped that this first initiative will be the prelude to more structured and comprehensive action in this field (2014:281).

It seems, then, that Italian women need to “hurry up and wait” while the government decides how and when it will allocate resources to address the structural inequality underlying acts of violence against women. One would hope this includes resources toward men’s perceived loss of prestige and power as women continue to express a desire to be more autonomous, and participate in Italian society on more equal terms. Even if there is scant truth to the matter, men will be less receptive to change their perspectives if they believe women are overrunning them, and threatening their long-held privileges, if not their actual positions in the workplace (see Ruspini 2011 and my Introduction regarding recent education initiatives).

So what does this mean for Italian women? As Ortner and several other authors have argued, exercising agency on an individual level in the midst of “routine practices” can slowly chip away at the status quo. This suggestion is not meant to make light of the very serious danger women can find themselves in when faced with a volatile, violent partner who may not be dissuaded from his intention to cause harm. Still, Adela’s story, and others like it, suggests that possibilities for empowerment do exist, and that, even in coerced intimacy, women can use the experience to produce something that is valuable for them. In her research on Mexican transnational families, Hirsch strikes a similar tone.

With specific reference to older women, she notes, “For a woman, irreproachable compliance with her duties was a useful strategy to pressure her husband into treating her respectfully” (2003:117). Thus, perhaps as Italian women are, once more, asked to be patient whilst requests for appropriations go through the proper government channels, they can continue to do what women have often done when they lack institutional and state support. They can take matters into their own hands, and use whatever means are available to them, including intimacy, as “sites of alternative practices and perspectives” to create change (see Ortner and others in this chapter).

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, we're in a transitional situation. I think it will take another generation, perhaps two, to achieve equilibrium. – Adela

In the general elections held in February of 2013, thirty one percent of the officials elected to the Italian Parliament were women, an increase of ten percent and the highest since the founding of the Republic in 1946. Prior to this election, the proportion of women represented in Italian politics was one of the lowest in Europe (Dona 2014). Furthermore, a woman, Laura Boldrini, was elected as the President of the Chamber of Deputies. She is the third woman to hold this position. Irene Pivetti, the last woman to hold the post from 1994-1996 recognized the occasion by stating, “Perhaps next time the fact that a woman acts in this role won’t count as a piece of news any more” (Aimar 2013). In February of 2014, as Matteo Renzi, age 39, was sworn in as Italy’s youngest Prime Minister, observers both inside and outside of Italy noted a few more novelties,

With an average age under 48, the 16-member cabinet is one of the smallest and youngest in recent Italian history. Half its members are women, the highest proportion ever, underlining the image of a fresh start on which Renzi has built his reputation (New York Times 2014).

Without doubt, for most women, the last two years in Italian politics have been a welcomed change from the barrage of overt sexism they experienced at the hands of Silvio Berlusconi for nearly two decades. During that time, nearly naked show girls, or *veline*, became standard fare on television programming, former *veline* were hand picked by Berlusconi to serve as ministers of his cabinet, and young, underage wannabe starlets,

or future *veline*, actively lobbied *Papi*, as they often referred to Berlusconi, to be selected as special enough to attend his *bunga bunga* parties, be showered with gifts and money, appear on his television programs, and gain notoriety. The culmination of this conveyor belt of women as commerce was *Rubygate* in which the world at large was treated to the sordid details of Mr. Berlusconi's sexual escapades. While *Rubygate* is the most famous of Berlusconi's scandals, over the years he has been investigated, and found guilty, on several charges of corruption, none of which have produced any significant penalties for the former Prime Minister thus far. Hence, when Mr. Berlusconi resigned as Prime Minister during the Eurozone debt crisis of 2011, it is understandable that the majority of Italians, in particular women, breathed a collective sigh of relief, with some celebrating in the streets (Mitzman 2012; Pullella and Fonte 2011; Donadio and Povoledo 2011).

Nonetheless, as an editorial in the Economist points out,

Silvio Berlusconi has been the dominant figure in Italian politics for 17 years, more than a tenth of Italy's life as a nation. To attribute too much praise or blame to him for the state of Italy today is to exaggerate the power of one man, even a billionaire who has used his money to create his own political party, reached the country's highest elected office and then used it to preserve his interests. *If Italy is a patient with some peculiar complaints, Mr Berlusconi is more symptom than cause* (2011) (my emphasis).

This statement proves to be especially true with regard to the status of women in Italy.

Silvio Berlusconi's sexist and demeaning treatment of women was able to thrive, in part, because of a formidable undercurrent of patriarchy still present in Italian social norms today.

In this dissertation I have used the adult life histories of three Italian women in their early sixties to examine how perspectives on marriage, family relations, and work life are changing, and how the interweaving of a multitude of factors influences the types

of choices available to women. I chose Italian women in this age group as the subject of this study for two primary reasons. First, the fundamental organization of Italian society revolves around the family as the primary source of social and economic support. Women are the foundation of this support. Second, these women came of age during a transformative period in Italian history when traditional gender norms were challenged en masse on the streets and in the legislature. As I reviewed in my Introduction, anthropologists have long emphasized how the ethnographic study helps us understand how large-scale social, demographic, and economic changes manifest themselves in people's daily lives. Feminist anthropologists, as well as other feminist scholars have also proposed that the life history interview proves to be a useful analytical tool to examine the relationship between gender and social change, specifically with regard to women's evolving perspectives of themselves. As the Personal Narratives Group explains, "The personal narrative [life history], whether it reveals an acceptance of or a challenge to the given rules, also documents on the individual level the very process of reproduction or undermining of those rules" (1989:8). Very few observers of Italy would disagree that the naturalized, androcentric attachment to the "traditional concept of womanhood," as former Minister of Family Rosy Bindi put it, in the country's ideology has rendered women's *actual* life experiences nearly invisible. The life histories of these older Italian women, their retelling about how their lives, and their points of reference, have changed over the years provide valuable, and needed, nuances to the Italian ethos regarding older women, in particular.

In her augural speech as President of the Chamber of Deputies, Laura Boldrini proclaimed, "We have to take charge of the humiliation of women, who are subjected to

violence disguised as love” (Dona 2014:273). Although Boldrini was largely referring to the perceived increasing trend in physical violence, and femicide, against women in Italy²⁴, we can extend her call to action to the structural violence, the lack of institutional support and respect, that women endure as they attempt to meet the workplace and family demands that society makes of them. The overall low employment rate among Italian women is often cited as a symptom of this issue. In 2013, the female employment rate in Italy was 46.5 percent, twelve points lower than the average for the European Unions (EU28) (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014:123). In a recent report for the European Parliament, Annalisa Rosselli summarizes the state of affairs regarding women’s labor participation in Italy. She writes,

In terms of quality, the crisis has aggravated a situation already quite critical for women’s employment by accentuating structural weaknesses: lack of services for children and above all for the elderly combined with rigid work arrangements make it hard to reconcile work and family life; female unemployment rates are higher than male rates; career progress is difficult; and women are over-represented in atypical and precarious jobs. The percentage of women with a part-time job, which used to be far below the EU average, is now close to the average at 31%. More than half (54.4%) of the part-time work is involuntary (the average EU27 is 24.4%). In other words, full time jobs have decreased and part-time jobs increased (Villa 2013). The over-representation of young women amongst atypical workers, especially on contractual arrangements with limited or no protection, implies that many young women cannot rely on any income in case of maternity (2014:23-24).

There is a deep incongruity between laws that are meant to encourage women to work,

²⁴ In an interview with the Huffington Post Italy, Linda Laura Sabbadini, the head of the Department for Environmental and Social Statistics at the National Institute of Statistics (Istat), and one of the contributors to the report on violence released in 2006, criticized the attention paid to the number of victims of violence. She states, “I do not believe we are facing a resurgence [of violence], but that does not mean the situation is not serious. The number of homicides against women has literally been steady for years, while the number of men killing men has dropped in the last 20 years. It is like being in a permanent danger. We must understand that this is a structural phenomenon, which means that dealing with it is even more difficult.” (Dona 2014: n.15; Eduati 2013)

especially mothers, and the actual practices that employers engage in to dissuade them from doing so. This disconnect is emblematic of how women are valued in Italian society as a whole. For instance, rather than incur the cost of paying for a woman's maternity leave, there has been an increase in the practice of hiring young women of childbearing age on the condition that they sign an undated letter of resignation, *dimissioni in bianco*, that can be used to dismiss them should they become pregnant. A law to outlaw this practice was passed in 2007, and then repealed by the Berlusconi government in 2008. Some measures to deter the practice were passed in 2012, but critics argue that the new measure places the burden of proof on the employee (Rosselli 2014:23; Pasquino 2012).

In Italy, it seems women are penalized for being women. Without doubt, there have been positive developments with regard to women's participation in the labor force and in government since the feminist movement of the 1970s, and certainly, since Berlusconi left office. Before addressing these developments, I want to draw attention to the continuing pervasive undercurrent of patriarchy that tinges every aspect of gender relations Italy. As the example above demonstrates, women in the workforce are penalized for electing to have children. Once women have children, they are penalized for being mothers. As it stands, the percentage of women that have not gone back to work after giving birth increased from 18 percent in 2005 to 22 percent in 2012 (Istat Rapporto Annuale:85). The long-standing practice by the Italian state of depending on families, in particular women, to provide care services and social protection for kin has made it difficult for women to participate in the labor market.

Concurrently, it has also served as a disincentive for the development of public and private care services for children, the disabled, and the elderly. Since the majority of

working women are already employed in family, health, and public services, the expansion of the service sector could potentially increase women's labor force participation (Rosselli 2014:26; Dona 2014:282). Istat reports that the proportion of women who were laid off work in 2012 increased to 27 percent compared to 16 percent in 2005. Although there was a decrease in the percentage of women who have left work voluntarily (53 percent, down 15 percentage points compared to 2005), they continue to cite time needed to spend with their children as the main reason. The most at risk of leaving, or losing a job, are new mothers who work under fixed term contracts (46 percent in 2012), a significant increase compared to 2005 (36 percent), those with low educational qualifications (30.8 percent, compared to 12 percent of graduates), workers in the South (30 percent) and private sector employees (25 percent in 2012, almost twice as much as those who work in the public sector or are self employed) (Istat Rapporto Annuale:127-128) (my translation). With specific reference to how the Italian state has failed to address the plight of working women and mothers, Valentini writes

We instead, as we know, have chosen a very Italian model; to ignore it, unload the issue on families, and at the same time act as if, out of the house, the woman is the same as any other worker, just a little bizarre and unreliable for her strange propensity to have children. So, the lack of services, as well as sharing [the responsibilities of] care work, is all about an attitude of indifference and a substantial rejection of the problem. The basic model has remained one of full-time dedication [to the family], created for the famous male head of the household, devoted only to the firm because behind him he has a woman who looks after him [my translation] (1997:119).

She continues, “ ‘Oh how I would love to have a wife’ I have often said, only half-jokingly, like so many other working women. And this is exactly the situation.”

If trying to stay employed and raising a family appears to be an almost insurmountable task for most women in Italy, holding on to a position of power and

responsibility in public office can be potentially life threatening. In May of 2013, a month after being elected as speaker of the lower house of Parliament, Laura Boldrini sat in front of her colleagues and read some of the pernicious emails she had received since taking office. All of the emails were sexual in nature and many threatened rape, sodomy, torture, and murder. In an article about Boldrini's speech, Nadeau details some of the content of the correspondence. She writes, "'You need to be lynched, bitch,' one hater wrote. 'You live less than 30 kilometers from my house. I swear I am going to come and find you'" (2013). She continues,

Many of the disturbing letters also included doctored pictures that superimposed her face on bodies of battered or dead women. Boldrini also pointed to a number of online websites in which she is depicted in horrifying scenarios—including one, which has been removed by a network administrator, which showed her face on a bleeding body that had been stabbed multiple times. Despite the threats, "I am not afraid," Boldrini told Parliament. "I am not afraid to fight a battle against these fanatics to make this stop.

Referencing the sexual harassment that typically accompanies being a female politician in Italy, Boldrini asked her colleagues, "Why is it when a woman holds prominent public positions, she is targeted by sexual aggression?" Boldrini and other ministers have also publicly raised the link between sexually explicit and racist threats that extremists are fomenting in the country. Again, Nadeau provides the details of a recent example, writing,

Since Letta [who was replaced by Matteo Renzi as Prime Minister in 2014] appointed Italy's first black minister, Cecile Kyenge, who also happens to be female, as minister of Integration, a barrage of politically incorrect statements have been made against her. Mario Borghezio, a European parliamentarian with Italy's xenophobic Northern League, went so far as to term the new Letta administration a "bongo bongo government" because of Kyenge's inclusion, making a play on words referring to Silvio Berlusconi's "bunga bunga" sex scandals. Kyenge, an eye doctor who came to Italy legally from the Democratic Republic of Congo when she was 18 to study medicine and now enjoys full

Italian citizenship, has also been the subject of online harassment similar to that experienced by Boldrini, with references to her as a “Congolese monkey” and “Zulu” with her face superimposed on bodies of African indigenous women (Nadeau 2013).

With the passing of legislation in 2013 that implements punitive measures to address violence against women, the Italian Parliament demonstrated that it is taking the matter seriously. However, activists, observers, and scholars have raised concerns about the lack of attention, and financing, that has been given to prevention and education. Journalist Concita de Gregorio notes,

Making punishments harsher is not enough, naturally, and might not work ... good laws are those that try to identify and follow a trajectory. They are those that try to define the parameter of what civil culture should hold to be lawful and just. They are not those that are born from the aim of containing the damage of widespread behavior, criminal and unlawful, but those that have the ambition to change the rules in the minds and hearts of citizens before they end up in the tribunals” (2013; Dona 2014:278).

Dona adds, “To summarize, the text proposed by the government punishes without educating and therefore does not seem sufficiently ambitious in forcing cultural changes and undermining the rigid gender roles and stereotypes of a patriarchal societal model” (2014) (also see Chapter Three).

Therein, of course, lies the crux of the matter. The feminist movement of the 1970s did institute some very important juridical changes with regard to women’s rights and gender equality. The larger question that feminists, and a concerned public in general, find themselves asking is how to change a culture that viscerally relies on patriarchy as its primary social reference. More to the point, how can the Italian state, which has historically depended on the family to care for its own, and for women to carry the burden of care, enforce *de jure* policies that support gender equity in a social structure

where de facto practices regarding women are at best condescending and at worst misogynistic? For instance, how do you convince male bankers that a female guarantor for a loan need not raise the borrower's interest rate by default (Alesina, Lotti, and Mistrulli 2012:46)? Most importantly, Italy, as already noted, is a country where women are viewed as a professional liability for having children, yet not given much incentive, opportunity, or support to expand beyond a constrained view of motherhood (Istat Rapporto Annuale 2014; Rosselli 2014). So, how do you convince men that women in powerful positions, in politics and in the private sector, are not a threat to their masculinity, but rather a benefit to their families, and society as a whole (Ferrara 2008; Del Boca, Mencarini, Pasqua 2012)?

In recent years, the Italian Parliament has taken measures to guarantee the increased participation of women on the boards of directors of state owned companies, as well as those listed on the stock exchange. In 2011 it introduced a system of gender quotas “meant to change the rigid structure of senior management that locks out the participation of women” (Dona 2014:283). By 2012, 20 percent of the boards of these companies were to be composed of the least represented gender, with an increase to 30 percent by 2015. The law carries hefty fines for those companies that don't comply. Since its implementation, the number of women on boards of directors in Italy has grown from just 6 percent of listed companies in 2009 to 17 percent in early 2013 (Dona 2014:282). In April of 2014, Prime Minister Renzi appointed three women to be the heads of the boards for an oil company, the largest public utility, and the postal service (Povoledo 2015). Observers praised the Prime Minister's commitment to leveling the playing field, but also commented that no woman had been nominated to become a chief executive,

where day-to-day power is actually wielded and generously compensated (Povoledo 2015).

In retelling their life histories, particularly with regard to their evolving perspectives on marriage, their families, and their work lives, Ester, Graza, and Adela provide an on-the-ground perspective of how social change happens, specifically with regard to changing perspectives on gender. Not always by choice, in Italy, the private sphere still appears to be very much the woman's domain. Clearly, change is sometimes painstakingly slow. On the other hand, it does happen. In Italy, facilitating a meaningful social transformation in gender expectations must include different, and socially valued, interpretations of masculinity, especially among men. As Ruspini observes,

Overcoming the problematic aspects of gender traditionalism and familism cannot be achieved without the shared involvement of *both* women and men. There cannot be gender equality - equality in rights, in access to resources, to public facilities, and decision-making processes that respect gender differences – without the participation of men, that is, without a change in the way of feeling and thinking about men themselves (2011:68).

Making women visible in institutions of power, such as the quota system discussed above, is a step in the right direction. However, it is not sufficient. As I briefly reviewed in my Introduction, facilitating and encouraging the visibility of more men in non-traditional roles, such as providing primary care for children, and encouraging them to speak out against gender based violence, is equally, if not more important (see Ruspini 2011).

In summary, in this dissertation I explored changing perspectives on marriage, family relations, and work life among older Italian women. I used the experiences of three women in their early to mid sixties, who came of age in the post World War II era,

to examine the extent to which the social developments, and legal reforms, of the period succeeded in altering social and cultural values. This was a time in Italian history that opened unforeseen educational and work opportunities for women, and raised questions about the fundamental organization of Italian society, especially with respect to women. Today, these same women continue to negotiate changing social patterns regarding family life, work life, and post-retirement aspirations. They are doing so amid a long-term economic crisis, a demographic reality characterized by long life and low fertility, and against an undercurrent of male chauvinism that has had detrimental repercussions for women, and Italian society as a whole.

Interestingly, even as the structure of the Italian family conforms to accommodate evolving patterns of family formation, as well as life course expectations, the ideal of the woman as the primary provider of care in the family, and in Italian society at large, remains unfalteringly stable. As I have demonstrated in my study, the reasons for this are a complex interweaving of familial, social, institutional, and statal factors that also intersect with deep-seated biases regarding gender. It is possible to argue that Ester, Graza, and Adela couldn't have taken action sooner because the stakes were too high. None of them made enough money to support themselves and their children. Moreover, although social practices regarding marriage and relationships were changing, breaking up the family was not to be taken lightly.

Today, while the family still remains a cornerstone of Italian society, it is more accepted that it is becoming increasingly blended with different types of associations that may not feature marriage as the centerpiece. There is more of an acceptance that parents may not grow old together, especially if a woman who has carried the burden of care for

her children, as well as her husband, decides that she has had enough, which appears to be case with many women I encountered in this age group. By doing this study through the use of life histories with a select group of women, I was able to draw attention to how these factors come together differently for every women, yet simultaneously highlight common themes that challenge the continued emancipation of Italian women.

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