

Hi, I hope you are doing well. My name is Amanda Armstrong-Price, and I teach histories of modern Britain and gender here at Fordham. I'm happy to have a chance to meet you all, and to share some reflections on the trans history classes I've taught at Fordham. For the Wednesday session this week, I've asked you all to read two texts, both of which focus on histories of trans and feminist organizing in Italy since 1967. In the presentation that follows, I want to contextualize these readings in relation to some of the other materials I've assigned in my trans history classes, and in relation to your other readings this week.

For Wednesday, we are reading an essay by Stefania Voli entitled "Broadening the Gendered Polis: Italian Feminist and Transsexual Movements, 1979-1982," as well as recently translated excerpts from Porpora Marcasciano's memoir, entitled *The Dawn of the Bad Trans Women: Stories, Fragments, and Lives of My Transgender Generation*. In 1979, Marcasciano got involved with a newly-formed organization known as the Movimento Italiano Transessuale (or MIT), and since then has been active in trans rights movements on national and transnational scales. Voli's essay tells the story of the Movimento Italiano Transessuale, which operated, in its initial iteration, from 1979 to 1982. The essay also outlines some of the feminist organizing efforts that were taking place at the same time in Italy. For the most part, these histories of trans and feminist organizing ran along parallel tracks, and Voli outlines some of the factors that prevented the movements from making common cause in the late 70s. She's also interested though in framing some of the political principles shared between these movements, and in sketching a more optimistic story of recent moments of trans/feminist collaboration.

As Voli notes, both feminist and trans movements historically have challenged gendered barriers to political participation and recognition. As she puts the point:

[W]omen have been excluded from full citizenship on the basis of their supposed lacks and shortcomings, while for transsexual individuals exclusion is justified by their excess; in both cases, however, the price was (and is) invisibility and lack of recognition or legitimacy in the public sphere and, thus, in History itself (242).

In her discussion of gender-based barriers to citizenship, Voli picks up on a topic that Lynn Hunt explores in her work on the French Revolution. Hunt explains how, despite a cascade of rights claims in the early years of the French Revolution, women's political agency ultimately was curtailed, and national citizenship was made into a masculine preserve, most dramatically in the fall of 1793, when the revolutionary government banned political clubs for Republican women, and put Olympe de Gouges under the guillotine.

In addition to the question of citizenship, Voli also draws our attention to questions of bodily autonomy and self-determination. As she says,

[T]he transgender political movement's focus on its relation with the "medical establishment" is more similar to the feminist struggle for reproductive freedom than it is to gay liberation. Transgender people, like women who want to terminate a pregnancy or gain access to contraception, demand the right to free, legal, competent, and respectful

medical services for a nonpathological need that is nonetheless often highly socially stigmatized (242).

Here, Voli draws our attention to a potential point of common ground between trans and feminist movements. In another reading I've taught this semester, Francisco Fernández Romero tells the story of how this common ground was actually forged in the recent, successful movement for abortion rights in Argentina. In 2012, trans organizers won a reform known as the Gender Identity Law, which ensured that a trans person could legally change their gender without having to demonstrate that they had undergone sterilizing surgeries. As Romero shows, this reform set the stage for transmasculine people's involvement in the recent abortion rights movement. The 2012 reform implicitly recognized the possibility that trans men could become pregnant, which helped organizers make the case that abortion rights were immediately pertinent for many trans people.

Let's turn now to a consideration of our second reading: that is, the excerpts from Porpora Marcasciano's memoirs. While Voli's essay outlines some of the public actions taken in the late 70s and early 80s by the Movimento Italiano Transessuale (the MIT), Marcasciano's work gives us a window onto the internal dynamics of this organization. And the picture she paints is not always pretty. She recounts incidents of interpersonal violence that occurred in this organizing space, and generally highlights some of the conflicts that undermined group cohesion. In contrast to her painfully honest portrayal of the MIT, Marcasciano draws a romantic sketch of what she refers to as the "little, contained, ancient" world of the femminielli – a world that, she says, already in the 1970s was "transforming into something else." Marcasciano details some of the rituals associated with this longstanding transfeminine subculture in Italy, including naming rituals, baptisms, and weddings.

Looking back on the 1970s from the vantage of the recent past, Marcasciano strikes a nostalgic tone. She suggests that, whereas gender transition used to be more of a communal, ritually-grounded process, now transition is more an individualized matter. Her narrative of decline has as its turning point the 1980s, when trans and other minoritized communities were devastated by what she terms the "black wave" of heroin and AIDS. "In the mid-eighties," she writes, "more and more of my girlfriends had that absent look that spells out addiction. We no longer focused on our body, we focused on destroying it" (131). Marcasciano suggests that, despite recent advances for trans rights in Italy and elsewhere, the communal spaces she moved through in the 1970s have not been reconstituted, and that in this sense, the AIDS crisis still weighs heavily on trans experience up through the present.

Her observation about the continuing significance of the AIDS crisis has significantly shaped the way I teach trans history. My class opens with readings from 1990 or so, when, at the height of the AIDS crisis, newly formalized umbrella categories began to be used by those trying to stitch together communities, provide mutual aid, and advocate politically for gender nonconforming people living with AIDS. This was the moment when the term *transgender* took on its contemporary meaning, and when the term *Two-Spirit* became an umbrella category around which Native LGBT people coalesced into a political force. I think I'll close here, though of

course there is much more to say about the histories that preceded, and that have followed from this defining turning point. I look forward to meeting you all on Wednesday, and to talking through together the Voli and Marcasciano readings.