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***(Feminist) Academics and Policy Makers in Italy:
a 'Marriage' in Crisis or Alive ?***

1. Introduction: social actors and participative democracy

"(Re)thinking equality and equal opportunity in a wider but more conservative European Union?" is the question that defines our conference. Yet we should not forget the context: Barcelona. It seems that in Spain a new gender pact among politicians, women's movement and citizens is at stake.

Since the beginning of his mandate, the Prime Minister Zapatero took into account gender issues as a demonstration of the respect of the will of the people and the awareness of an ongoing deep transformation of the traditional Spain society. In this way he wanted to distinguish his government from the cabinet of his predecessor, Aznar. Despite the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq, Zapatero's main political decisions concerned gender equality in political representation as well as gender identity and relations, that is the presence of 50% of women in the government – or more, as in the case of the Basque government – and the admission of marriage for gay and lesbian couples. In addition, divorce can be obtained more rapidly in terms of juridical proceedings. And it should not be forgotten that the son of the Spanish catholic king married a divorced woman; now they got a daughter and soon the Spanish constitution will be changed in order to recognize her as a legitimate follower to the throne what it's now only allowed for male heirs. Zapareto has attribute political and moral value to gender issues in order to support the idea of deliberative and participative democracy he supports: the will of people must be respected; all people have the same rights and a "decent society is that, which does not humiliate its members." (Zapatero, 2005)

Does my introduction seem to be too optimistic and a too simple answer to the central question raised at the beginning of this confertence? And can this view be shared with other EU countries? Indeed, equal opportunity and gender equality legislation in EU member states have became more homogeneous among the member States thanks to policies and directives issued by the European Union. But at the same

time the framework of equal opportunity has become more complex and fragmented due to the alternation of governments and coalition of different orientation and the changing relation between policy makers and women's movement. In this context, national diversities become more evident and persistent.

We can argue that in terms of equal opportunity, European Union becomes more conservative when the interaction between social and grassroots movements, differentiated groups of civil society, parties, elected candidates in different representative organisms, government and State machineries is interrupted, or previous liberal orientations are neglected, or preexisting laws are reformed or not correctly applied. A democracy is legitimate when on the basis of free elections and the respect of law claims of validity coming from bottom up (that is from social actors, who point out limits and inefficiencies of the political sphere) are recognized and fulfilled, as also the case of the women's movement has indicated.

Using as a background this normative issue, I would like to argue that a legitimate participatory democracy can better work when social actors with professional expertise and experiences in social movements have access to political decision-making, thereby connecting institutions with diversified groups of civil society in an innovative way. As a good illustration, I would like to consider the case of the changing meaning of equal opportunity as a pure formal top down concept depending from the State machinery thanks to the cooperation between femocrats, scholars, politicians and different "souls" of the women's movement.

In particular, I would like to focus my attention on the experience of the Ministry for Equal Opportunity in Italy between 1996 and 2001, when scientific policies acquired a specific cultural, political and institutional valence. Yet this kind of relationship seems to be very fragile and strictly dependent to the alternate of governments, political strategies and the strength of involved social actors. A reflection upon this kind of interaction is not only crucial for scientific and educational policies in all EU member States. It is a basic matter for whom wants to recognize equal opportunity, science and knowledge as core of a democratic and social European Union. My conclusion is that equal opportunity policies in educational and scientific domains can contribute to reinforce democratic institutions, the capabilities of individuals, economic and cultural

resources and the human capital in general only if the interaction between civil society, experts, politicians, State administration and institutions never stops in terms of reciprocal recognition and fair representation.

2. The changing meaning of equal opportunity in Italy

In order to counterbalance the optimistic view presented at the beginning of this paper, I would like to quote some paragraphs extracted from a document issued by the Committee on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* in 2005. Italy ratified the *CEDAW* in 1985 and every five years the government should present a periodic report. The most recent report was quite depressing for Italian women: the experts remarked the lack of women's presence and recognition in the political domain, public life and the labour market (CNEL et al., 2003; Dipartimento Lavoro et al., 2005; Arcidonna et al., 2005).

“Noting a decrease in the already low number of women in Italy's Parliament, experts said the limited presence of Italian women in the political arena was a clear sign of the gender discrimination that was contrary to the far-reaching terms of the Convention. (...) Regarding women's participation in the labour market, experts noted that while there had been an increase in the number of employed women, women continued to be segregated in lower-level occupations. (...) Regarding women's participation in public life, the report states that the low level of female participation in politics is undeniable. The last elections registered even fewer women elected to Parliament than the already low previous percentage. (...) Despite the fact that women have distinguished themselves for their commitment and ability in the most important sectors of socio-economic life, they are still at a disadvantage compared to men. (...) The shortage of female representation in the political arena is mainly due to deeply rooted cultural factors, including the image of women as weak and needing protection, the report adds. Another factor has strong political connotations, namely, difficulty in reconciling the female role in politics and work with family life. (...) The situation in the country's school system was linked to the situation in the labour market, another member of the delegation said. While there were a few more male pupils than female pupils in the schools as a whole, in the social pedagogy sector, the share of women was larger than elsewhere. In technical schools, males were prevailing. However, contrary to popular belief, in the traditional fields, like mathematics, chemistry and science, girls - in the minority - did better than boys. A pending reform of secondary and higher education intended to create equal opportunity for personal development. New curricula were being elaborated in Italy, taking into account gender equality issues. In fact, now was the opportune time to raise concerns as far as equality in the education sphere was concerned.” (UN, 2005)

Numbers and statistics support these worries and the necessity to develop new gender oriented policies: in Italy women do not seem to have real equal opportunity in the labour market, in politics and in the academia (ISTAT, 2001, 2005). Statistics (Dipartimento Lavoro, 2005) show in fact that in 2004 the percentage of employed men was 69.67%, while among women it was 45.03%. While in the past ten years number of employed women was increasing over that of men, starting from 2004 this trend turned over. Now the difference between employed women and men has become quite high: about 20-25%. The percentage of young women (between 15 and 24 years old) who have long term jobs is very low: less than 30%. Moreover, the numbers of women seeking jobs, mainly in Southern Italy, has decreased. If we compare these statistics at the EU level, we notice that Italian women have most flexible and precarious jobs: women with a standard occupation is only 22% (while men are at 43%). An Italian adult woman has 50% less possibilities to find a standard occupation than women in other EU countries.

Women in general (Tremblay & Galligan, 2005) but Italian women in particular confront many obstacles in holding public offices and in representative institutions. For example, the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies is 11.5% and only 8.1% in the Senate. Italy ranks the 84th place of the world classification about women in parliaments. Italian women are represented more in the EU Parliament: 19.2%. But in the EU classification lagging behind Italy is only Poland (13%) and Cyprus and Malta with no women!

What's really happening in Italy? Is gender discrimination increasing? Or does it continue to be perpetuated in all institutions and at the workplace? And if this is the case, what can be the role of equal opportunity policies and gender studies in order to promote gender equality and mainstreaming in all societal spheres?

Before starting my argumentation, I would like to briefly reconstruct the recent history of equal opportunity in Italy that can be mainly summarized into three main periods. It has been connoted by a complex and controversial political, social and philosophical dynamics between politics, institutions and women's movement, which has caused both progresses and backlashes over years.

I. 1950s and 1960s: equal opportunity as a fulfillment of constitutional principles

Since the end of the Second World War and before the impact of EU legislation over domestic governments (Liebert, 2003), the concept of equal opportunity was not used as it is now meant. From the viewpoint of institutional politics, gender issues were named *questione femminile* (female question). This issue referred to matters of marginalization and the necessity to reinforce the participation of women in public offices. In particular, *ad hoc* policies were aimed at developing a fair presence of women in all spheres of society and public life, in particular in education, politics and the labour market.

Italian women obtained suffrage only on 2nd June 1946, when – after the end of the fascist dictatorship – they were called to express their preference in a popular referendum about the possibility to choose either a republican system or a monarchy as well as to vote a constituent assembly (*Assemblea Costituente*) (Addis et al., 1996; Taricone et al. 1996). 12,700,000 voting people were in favour of the republican system, while 10,700,00 were pro-monarchy. A republican *Assemblea Costituente* thus initiated its activities with the aim to draft a democratic constitution. Only 21 women (nine belonging to the Catholic party, nine communists, two socialists, one of the “qualunquist” party), that is 4.1%, were elected. The majority of them were already politically engaged as partisans, who participated in the *Resistenza*, the national fight for the liberation of Italy from the nazi-fascist totalitarianism.

A democratic constitution came into force on 1st June 1948 and three articles did especially address to women: no. 3 about the principle of non-discrimination; no. 37 about the rights of the woman worker (and mother); no. 51 about the access of women to all public and electoral offices (this article has been modified in 2003 with the addition of the principle of “parity” referring to political election). In the constitution, women were implicitly pictured as vulnerable subjects (and victims) as well as mother workers referring to the family institution (Calloni, 2005).

But if we look at the legislation of the 1950s, we notice that any law devoted to women or in general to equal opportunity passed, even though women were “neo-citizen” with duties, but scarce rights and presence in education, politics and the labour market. Only in 1963 two laws voted in Parliament (no. 7 and no. 66) were expressly

devoted to women: the latter recognized the admission to women to all public offices and professions (before women were barred from entering the magistracy, for example); the former prohibited the dismissal of women if they married. The quick industrialization of the country induced processes of modernization, which changed the traditional organization of Italian society, the role of women and the labour market. Nevertheless, the gender regime in Italy remained based on *matrifocalism*; that is the centrality of the “mother” as worker and the center of the family, who permits the perpetuation of patriarchy (Calloni, 2003). However, even though family is central to Italian society, there was nevertheless a lack of provisions in family policies until recent years (Del Re, 1993; Bimbi, 1997; Saraceno, 2003). In these legislations there was no specific mention to women and science but only the generic indication to increase the educational and professional level of women.

II. 1970s and 1980s: the starting of a State machinery on equal opportunity

Without any doubt the meaning and the use of equal opportunity have changed over years, depending from national governments, supra-national institutions and social actors involved in organizations and movements.

In the 1970s a State machinery started to produce a series of legislation and policies on equal opportunity, fulfilling constitutional principles, employing agreements signed during UN world conferences and passing directives of the European Community. Legislations and provisions were mainly addressed to the labour policies and the necessity to increase the number of women in political representation. Moreover, innovative laws permitted the protection of maternity for women on the basis of the principle of the psycho-physical integrity and dignity of a woman worker as well as the right of a child to be cared by his/her mother. In 1970 in Italy divorce was permitted by law; in 1975 a new family code introduced the idea of parity of rights and duties for women and men among them and in respect to the children; in 1978 abortion was legalized (Calloni, 2001).

But from the late 1970s, an institutional meaning of equal opportunity was introduced thanks to international as well as European Union perspectives and agreements. For example, the first UN World Conference, organized in 1975 in Mexico City, was focused on “Equality, Parity, Development and Peace”. It ended with the *Declaration on*

the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace, meant as a World Plan of Action for the *Implementation of the objectives of International Women's Year*. It had broad consequences in all countries as well as in supra-national institutions. In 1976 a section devoted to equal opportunity was in fact established in Brussels by the European Commission within the Directorate General "Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs". The constitution of this section permitted the promotion and implementation of directives and policies on gender equality. The first directive on equal opportunity was issued in 1975 and concerned the principle of equal pay for men and women. In 1976 a directive had the aim to implement the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regard access to employment. In the following years the gender aspect became a crucial issue for the constitution of a EU socio-political "identity" in forms of gender mainstreaming.

The Italian State followed this international and EU trend, implementing platforms for actions and directives. The diverse programs for action on equal opportunity were thus received together with framework projects addressing research and technological development. Within this framework a *Commissione Nazionale per la Realizzazione della Parità tra Uomo e Donna* (National Commission for the Achievement of Parity between Men and Women) was established by Bettino Craxi, a socialist Prime Minister, in 1984 and chaired by a socialist senator Elena Marinucci.

But in this decade with the rising of an autonomous feminist movement (Ergas, 1986), discrepancies between institutional politics on women's issues, activists in political parties and feminists belonging to grassroots movement became more evident in ideological and political terms. Starting from the 1980s socio-political tensions increased in the Italian society, tracing deep breaks between civil society and the political sphere due to the affirmation of terrorism and later the increasing of political corruption, which led to the crisis of all political parties and the intervention of the *magistrature*. The position of women's movement was clear neither with terrorists nor with corrupted politicians. This implicated an increasing distance between institutions and civil society with effects also on equal opportunity theories and strategies.

In particular, a critique was addressed to the notion of equal opportunity considered as an empty and purely formal concept improperly used in institutional discourse. At the

same time, differences between various “souls” of the women’s movement became evident. A wing was closest to political parties and trade unions, supporting an emancipative idea of the double presence of women both in politics and the workplace. Other wings supported the idea of the liberation of women, as a practice totally different from traditional forms of politics. They developed the praxis of “self-consciousness”, constituted separated places and later conceptualised a theory of sexual difference. A sort of fracture between a top down formal model of equal opportunity and a bottom up concrete meaning of sexual difference, citizenship (Boccia, 2002) and rights (Pitch, 1998) emerged. This break was partly recomposed in the late 1990s with centre-leftist governmental coalitions and the constitution of a Ministry for Equal Opportunity, while the fracture became ones more evident with the victory of a centre-right wing coalition in 2001.

In the 1980s interesting considerations about the meaning and relationship between knowledge, practices and science emerged from the teachers’ movement, groups of feminist scholars and students who started to reflect upon a diverse way to conceive education, teaching and research. In particular, seminars and meetings were organized by academics, mainly experts in natural and technological sciences, who worked in male-dominated environment (this was also the root of many networks, as for instance the present association *Donne e Scienza*).

III. 1990s: A broader socio-political and cultural meaning of equal opportunity

Thanks to the ratification of international conventions (Commissione Nazionale, 1989), the implementation of EC directives, the institution of a Ministry devoted to equal opportunity and the collaboration between feminists and policy makers, in 1990s equal opportunity started to be closest to gender claims coming from bottom up. An institutional worldwide meaning of mainstreaming, empowerment and equal opportunity was connected to experiences of women’s movement and an innovative culture of gender studies.

In the 1990s State machinery continued to produce legislation on equal opportunity. The notion of positive actions was introduced in the Italian scenario (Greccchi, 1995) in 1991. Law no. 125 on *Positive action for realizing the parity between men and women at work* was aimed at promoting “women’s employment and

the realization of a substantial equality between men and women”, “removing obstacles, which factually prevent the realization of equal opportunity” (Article no. 1). This law was very important for two reasons: firstly it recognized women as active citizens and not as vulnerable social actors or victims, who needed protection and guardianship; secondly, it allowed for the establishment of bodies of experts and parity committees at the national, local and company level; it permitted the training and recognition of parity advisers, organizations, vocational training centers and trade unionist sections focused on equal opportunity.

Italian legislation concerning gender issues became *Europeanized*, even though the Italian debate and women’s movement maintained specific domestic features (Pompili et al., 2000). Indeed, the radical modification of an ideologically based feminism (through the dual schema of a class struggle applied to gender relations), the elaboration of the experience of women’s movement of the 1970s and the attempt to consolidate work, family duties and political engagement led activists and feminists to opposite choices in terms of political participation and representation. On the one hand, theorists of the sexual difference criticized the notion of quotas and equal opportunity policies as basis that permitted the perpetuation of patriarchal forms of politics. For instance, the philosopher Luisa Muraro argued that “An antagonism between the politics of gender difference and the politics of equality must be clear, that is, the abuse of equal opportunity and the claims of women. These political measures provided a world that is now once again determined by the mediations of men (parliaments, the Church, parties, universities, and so on).” (Muraro, 1989: 5) On the other hand, the presence of feminists and femocrats in centre-leftist cabinets contributed to the change of institutional frameworks and the development of a more complex approach to equal opportunity and mainstreaming (Ingrao et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the number of women in politics and decision-making (ASDO, 1996) did not proportionally increase.

Summarizing the recent history of equal opportunity in Italy from the viewpoint of scientific and institutional policies, we can argue that: in the 1950s and 1960s equal opportunity was meant as an application of the constitutional principle of equality between women and men in politics, education and the labour market with a domestic meaning. In the 1970s it acquired a broader international and European significance,

referring mainly to the principle of parity at the workplace and in labour strategies. Thanks to the critique of the feminist movement about the limit of traditional forms of knowledge in school and academia, in the 1980s equal opportunity acquired a more complex significance thanks to the reflection upon the meaning of research and scientific development as a matter concerning not only employment, but the development of human capabilities and gender mainstreaming as well. But only in the 1990's the issue of science, gender and politics became a key-issue in the public debate and institutional politics thanks to the collaboration between policy makers, feminists, experts and scholars.

3. Political institutions and women's movements: a precarious dynamic

Despite the critique of some theorists of the sexual difference theory, the 1990s are crucial not only for the development of equal opportunity policies and the institutionalization of gender studies in Italy. They are important because of the attempt to build up a bridge between renewed democratic political institutions and the different "souls" of women's movement. A crucial point was the constitution of a Ministry for Equal Opportunity and the introduction of the gender perspective in the academia.

Prime Minister Romano Prodi (future President of the European Commission and leader of the centre-leftist coalition called *Olive Tree*, which won the political election in 1996 for the XIII legislature) established a Ministry for Equal Opportunity by legislative decree on 12 July 1996. This decision was taken in order to apply the provisions contained in the *Platform for Action*, signed at the end of the Fourth UN World Conference (Beijing, September 1995) on *The rights of women and the girl child* (UN, 1996). As Minister for Equal Opportunity, Prodi appointed Anna Finocchiaro, lawyer and feminist. But despite the establishment of an *ad hoc* Ministry (without portfolio), the previous National Commission for Equal Opportunity remained in force (with a budget).

After Prodi's Cabinet (ended in 1998), the following Prime Ministers (who also belong to the centre-leftist coalition *Olive Tree*): Massimo D'Alema (1998-2000) and Giuliano Amato (2000-2001) appointed Ministers for Equal Opportunity: Laura Balbo (a

professor in sociology and feminist) and Katia Belillo (activist and belonging to the *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*).

The centre-leftist coalition permitted the end of a radical polarization between Catholics and Communists, but also the possibility to reflect upon the changed role of woman as a “mother worker”, the reality of new families and the effects of women’s practices. Many feminists became officers in ministries or experts for specific projects. In this case, they strongly contributed to an innovative approach to equal opportunity and to influence political decision-making. Experiences, knowledge, professional expertise and communication skills became sharing values for rethinking institutional politics, developing projects, and giving access to excluded or self-excluded social actors.

When Silvio Berlusconi won the election in 2001 (XIV legislature), he maintained the Ministry for Equal Opportunity, appointing Stefania Prestigiacomo. Yet, the majority of femocrats and scholars who worked in the previous three cabinets left. A new break between government, activists, and feminist scholars became evident over years.

The political choice taken by the new coalition was very clear: to eliminate any trace of previous cabinets. This decision is also confirmed by a symbolic act at the Ministry for Equal Opportunity: the dismantling and destruction of the archive that collected materials put together in five years of the previous governments. It also meant the cancellation of a written memory of what was done before. Colleagues and officers told me that they were advised to go to the Ministry to bring urgently materials of their interest before the dismantling. This is one of the reasons why in order to draft the present contribution interviews of protagonists were necessary, because of the impossibility to consult many documents and to find them published in internet. Therefore, I am grateful to all colleagues, who passed me information and documents. Without them an exhaustive reconstruction of the experience of the Ministry for Equal Opportunity since its inception would be impossible.

As mentioned above, I think that this experience was an interesting one. It showed innovative forms of cooperation and the possibility to recompose the break between institutions, professional spheres, civil society and social movements. For this reason, I will analyze the attempts performed by femocrats, scholars and politicians in the three

cabinets of the coalition *Olive Tree* (1996-2001), starting from the establishment of a Ministry for Equal Opportunity. The interest in creating forms of participative and deliberative democracy was here stressed by transversal forms of interaction between ministries, researchers, officers and grassroots movements. Within this framework the scientific-cultural policies promoted signed a turning point that challenged but also improved a merely top down model of equal opportunity.

4. Innovative practices: toward new approaches to equal opportunity and scientific policies

Before starting my argument, I would like to underline the importance and impact that a new view of knowledge and meaning of scientific production from a gender perspective (Harding, 2003) have had on domestic governments as well as international organizations.

In the history of women's movement (Duby et al., 1992) education, politics and employment are three key-issues that lie at the basis of the idea and policies of equal opportunity and positive actions. In the last decade, the issue of women and science has become one of the most mainstreamed problems both at the EU (European Commission 2001) and national level. It stabilizes previous experiences while developing a new cultural sensitivity. But it does not only mean to promote the accession of women in education, to increase their presence in the higher education and to reinforce their role in the scientific hierarchy. It also implies the questioning of traditional methodologies, the proposal of new approaches to scientific knowledge, the reconceptualization of the goals of research, the evaluation of the university system and the significance of excellence (European Commission, 2004b; 2005b). A gender perspective has in fact created a crisis in the consolidated forms of patriarchal knowledge and evaluation systems. Science without gender is blind and poor.

This process has been reinforced from the beginning of the new millennium, when a Unit called *Women and Science* was formed in 2001 at the European Commission under the General Directorate "Research". Its mission concerns "gender, mainstreaming and research" and the interest in putting "gender equality in all policies". Research and reports on the situation of women scientists in both Western and Eastern

Europe (Etan and Enwise reports) (European Commission, 2000; 2004a) have showed discriminations and the persisting existence of the ceiling glass for women in top positions (European Commission, 2005a).

Without any doubt UN platforms for action (Finocchiaro, 1997b) and scientific policies devoted to gender issues developed by the European Commission have been very influential in all member states. Yet the Italian case – where the educational question and the transformation of the university are crucial points – presents specificities and original features that are important to be remembered and shared.

At this regard, despite the analysis of documents, I would like to report the self-presentations and voices of protagonists, quoting parts of interviews I did, in order to reconstruct experiences, difficulties and perspectives concerning equal opportunity in the scientific and cultural domain.

I would like to start, quoting a self-presentation of Anna Finocchiaro (the first Ministry for Equal Opportunity in the history of Italian society), done during an international conference in June 1997. In her paper she explained in a convincing way the shifting meaning of equal opportunity and women's agency, starting from her Ministry. She argued that:

“among all the changes that Italy has gone through in the last twenty years, the transformation of women's identity, desires, experiences and position in society are the most impressive and pervasive one. Women are seeking freedom, independence, personal development, and are no longer willing to be constrained in pre-defined social and family roles. Women's viewpoint regarding politics is transforming both the content and the practice of politics itself. The recognition of women's full citizenship cannot be the result of the co-opt of women into the so-called 'universal' citizenship. It is instead a process that can revolutionize the basis of citizenship, its nature and meaning. I was aware of this challenge. (...) I was aware that my task did not mean being 'women's representative' within the Cabinet, but opening the way to women's ideas and projects in all national and local institutions, and to women's perspective in government policies. (...) Considering in general women as a disadvantaged group does not correctly describe women's position in society. It does not help to understand the real disadvantages suffered by some women and how these disadvantages can be eradicated. By contrast, we have to focus our interest more on single individuals, who can be socially advantaged or disadvantaged, rather than on women's globally assumed to be a disadvantaged human group. This means to consider women as individuals, who belong to upper, middle or lower classes, to Northern or Southern Italy, to different age, ethnic groups and cultures. For this reason we require different and more targeted policies.” (Finocchiaro, 1997a)

In the same conference, the undersecretary of State at the Treasury Ministry, Laura Pennacchi, argued that:

“higher standard of capabilities demand policies aimed at higher standards of quality of life questions related to equality and equity acquire a new importance. In fact, these issues are not simply related to income, but mostly with different ways of living, i.e. with the possibility to have at one’s disposal social services which really permit and guarantee individual and collectively free and autonomous lives.” (Pennacchi, 1997)

Women can not be any longer considered as a vulnerable group or victims as it was done in the past. Reinforcing this perspective, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, head of the legislative sector, affirmed that:

“usually the feminist approach to the idea of social justice focuses on the concept of male domination and female oppression. I will follow a different approach, more consistent with the idea of women’s freedom. This approach, developed by the Italian feminism, underlines the importance of the symbolic level: women are already free of male oppression, since they can think about themselves as free women. This mean the *end of patriarchy*.” (Giammarinaro, 1997).

As we can notice, with Finocchiaro’s ministry key-words of the Italian feminist theory and practices arrived at the core of the State also in terms of scientific policies. Few months before these presentations, on 27th March 1997 a very important directive, called *Direttiva Prodi-Finocchiaro* on “Actions addressed to the empowerment of women, to recognize and guarantee freedom of choice and social quality to women and men” was issued by the government (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 1997).

The central point of this directive concerned the “ascertainment of the lasting marginality of women in top positions and decision-making in professions, companies, public administration, political institutions”. Therefore, the directive was based on nine strategic objectives: empowerment, mainstreaming, analysis of disaggregated data and their impact on social policies, professions and women’s entrepreneurship, policies of time and the labour organization, social policies for increasing employment, prevention and health policies, prevention and punishment of violence, cooperation and international relations. In particular, what can be of interest for our analysis is that the directive stated that it is necessary “to promote in sectors devoted to education and

training specific cultural courses aimed at acquiring a gender identity, education, solidarity and reciprocal respect between women and men”.

This statement opened a new season for equal opportunity, introducing gender mainstreaming in all educational sectors, from grammar school to the university and training courses, giving later the impulse for the establishment of gender studies and related courses and masters in the academia. Yet also in this case, a part of the radical feminist wing disagreed with the institutionalization of gender studies in male dominated institutions.

The first years of the Ministry for Equal Opportunity were so very intense, even though conflicts among the members were inevitable because of the presence of different political traditions of feminism. As Isabella Peretti (personal secretary to the Minister Finocchiaro, later responsible of the educational sector until 2001 and co-founder of the feminist cultural association *Generi e Generazioni*) remembers, in Finocchiaro’s ministry there were women with various political experiences and expertise. This made the interaction very active but also complex.

“Anna Finocchiaro chose her collaborators with different backgrounds: some of us were declaredly feminist activists, other women were more closed to the thematic of equal opportunity; others were more linked to institutional politics, trade unions, labour policies and legal studies. The debate among us was controversial but vivid. In the end the different logics could find a point of convergence, mainly in the documents we elaborated. The *Directive Prodi-Finocchiaro* can be taken as an example able to show how an institutional language and a feminist discourse can ‘get married’. A mediation between feminism and institutions can be brought in the hearth of the State. This directive became an important reference: the State machinery, commissions, movements, trade unions, etc. referred to the strategic objectives indicated in the document. If it was not able to produce changes in the mentality and institutions, at least it has been a vehicle that has permitted the circulation of a new kind of language, which had its roots in the Italian feminism. We were aware of our challenges. The *Beijing Platform* was a landmark. We started thus to develop our contacts at the international and EU level. We had a lot of meetings with different social actors, with feminist scholars and members of commissions. School, university and research were at the chore of our engagement, also because many of us had a background as researchers or teachers. At this regard, we established a working group, called *Polite*, which edited a book with the aim to provide information to those authors, who wanted to write books for pupils and children, avoiding gender stereotypes. Our interest was also to be continuously updated. We reviewed several journals and magazines in order to monitoring gender debates or related problems”. (Peretti, 2005)

Peretti remembers also that all political decisions were taken on the basis of open discussions. One of the key-issues was the valence of gender studies and the necessity of an institutional recognition. There was a constant confrontation with scholars, organizing seminars and conferences in Italy and abroad. A continuous transversal work was prompted with other ministries, in particular with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Social Solidarity (lead by Livia Turco) and the Ministry of University, Scientific Research and Technology (MURST). Among other initiatives, a working group on *Cultures of difference and women's studies in higher education* was established at the MURST, in collaboration with the Ministry for Equal Opportunity.

When Anna Finocchiaro was substituted by Laura Balbo in 1997, the majority of the feminist officers and femocrats remained employed at the new Ministry for Equal Opportunity, developing new strategies but – among others - trying to apply the strategic objectives indicated by the *Directive Prod-Finocchiaro*. Laura Balbo, now based at the University of Padua, was at that time professor of sociology at the University of Ferrara. She was one of the main theorists of the “double presence” of women (at work and in the family) (Balbo, 1991) and interested in anti-discriminatory policies (aspect that connoted also her Ministry). Being an academic, “I also knew very well the structure and the limits of the university system” (Balbo, 2005). As she remembers in a book about *In-actual reflections of a former Minister* (Balbo, 2002), she tried to “rethink politics also sociologically”. Balbo referred to research and expertise in social sciences in order to elaborate a different approach to institutional politics (to be in and out, to use networks and “immaterial resources”, to valorise informal relations and communication skills) as well as to develop the comprehension of the issue of equal opportunity, starting from the consideration of both traditional forms of marginalisation and new expressions of social inequality.

In this case, the collaboration between policy makers, experts and feminists became crucial for struggling discrimination and introducing gender mainstreaming also in the academia.

A pivotal role was plaid by Francesca Cantù, professor of modern history at the University of Rome Tre and technical consultant to the Minister Balbo. Cantù knew very well the academic environment, the aversion to gender studies and the difficulty to

introduce gender mainstreaming in the university. Therefore, she started to develop links between ministries and academic bodies in order to translate into an adequate institutional language the spirit of the *Direttiva Prodi-Finocchiaro*. Indeed, it was aimed not only at supporting equal opportunity in general but at developing a new scientific culture and politics, where equal opportunity could be part of the governance, independent from political troubles and governmental changes. In this framework, the UN *Platform for Action* (Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, 2000a), directives and policies of the European Union (Dipartimento Pari Opportunità, 2000b) became important points of reference and dialogue.

Rethinking at her experience, in the paper on *Women in science: the Italian legislative and institutional framework for gender mainstreaming*, Cantù puts a question that is at the same time an answer:

“How to bring about a cultural and political change with regard to the appreciation of gender research and women’s promotion in science, was not a crucial point in the scientific and academic debate, in spite of (or perhaps, according to) the evident male predominance in that field. (Women have been increasing their level of participation in higher education and have carried out a significant ‘overtaking’. In fact, women now constitute more than half the student population; their percentage of spin-off I lower and female graduates outnumber male ones. They also perform better than their male counterparts in all academic fields and graduate summa cum laude more often than men (...). All this make the gender gap in scientific and academic careers even less legitimate (...). Women are less than one third of the academic staff in total and they advance to the top levels of the careers with difficulties: in 1999-2000 they were 41.3% of all researchers, 29.4% of associated professors and 11.5% of full professors” (Cantù, 2001).

Indeed, in the Etan Report (2000), in the survey *Figlie di Minerva* by Rossella Palomba (Palomba, 2000) and in the findings of the *Helsinki Group on Women and Science* (European Commission, 2002: 106), a discrepancy is evident between the majority of women in student population and a lower numbers among researchers and professors. The same data are confirmed by the *She Figures 2003*, edited by the Unit Women and Science of the European Commission (European Commission, 2003).

Yet the difficulty and challenge of gender mainstreaming is to perforate the chore of the institutional machinery and initiate a “new culture”. On the basis of this conviction, Cantù developed a link at the Ministry of Equal Opportunity with the *Conference of the Rectors of the Italian Universities* (CRUI) and the Ministry for

University, Scientific Research and Technology, in order to introduce a gender perspective in courses and university representation. This agreement - called *Protocollo d'intesa tra il Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità (presso la Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri) e la Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane* (CRUI, 1999) - became the starting point of a new approach to gender equality in the academy and the promotion of gender studies. In this way, Cantù gave a strong contribution for the recognition of gender studies in curricula as a fundamental matter for education, training and research, indicating it among the main objectives for university development and reform.

As Cantù remembers:

“On 18th December 1999, an Agreement was signed between the Minister for Equal opportunity and the Rectors' Conference, providing support for gender dimension in scientific research and gender equity in the development of professors' careers. A steady c-operation was formally established with the appointment of a new kind of rector's delegates, namely delegate for gender studies and equal opportunity. All the appointed delegates form a Conference that meets periodically with the aim at promoting gender research, specific evaluation criteria and incentives concerning women's participation in decision-making. (...)

The Agreement settles many operational objectives and binds the Rectors and the academic management to do their best to carry them out. Among the listed objectives we can highlight are:

- developing new interdisciplinary “curricula” in order to build up new competencies for evaluating and monitoring gender impact in different policy areas;
- improving the gender dimension in scientific projects, identifying the potential for a gender dimension in research;
- career guidance in order to avoid gender stereotypes and the dominating social models about women's role in family and society that abound in cultural and professional projects drawn up by young people;
- special support for women's participation in telecommunications and high-technology training courses;
- improving the international and European Union dimension of all these enterprises and activities, also considering the more ambitious target to address the co-operation in these fields towards the creation of European Union models and university degrees.” (Cantù, 2001)

This agreement was taken into account in the law reforming the Italian university, issued in 2001 (TreeLLLe, 2003). Gender studies has now become the topic of courses, masters, theses and various programs in the majority of Italian universities

(77 in total). Yet the institutional consistence of gender studies and scientific policies is still depending from the durance and interests of political governments.

5. Gender studies in the academia and in documentation centers

Many universities mention in their statue the importance of gender issues. For instance, the *Statute* of the University of Milano-Bicocca recognizes the gender dimension as a matter of non-discrimination (Article no. 3: the University “guarantees equal opportunity at any level”), the role of a Delegate of the Rector for Gender Issues and Equal Opportunity and the constitution of a Committee for Equal Opportunity. Article no. 15 states in fact that this Committee (composed by 9 members: 2/3 women and 1/3 men) has the goal “to carry concretely into effect the principles of equality and parity of treatment for all employees. (...) The Committee has the scope to individuate direct or indirect discriminations that are of obstacle to the realization of equal opportunity between women and men or other matters of discrimination, which prevent in particular the access to work, vocational guidance, professional training and career progression”. The Rector’s Delegate is also President of the Committee for Equal Opportunity.

In order to clarify duties, problems and perspectives of this new academic trend, I asked to Carmen Leccardi (professor of Sociology of Cultural at the University of Milano-Bicocca) to comment her double institutional role as a delegate of the rector for equal opportunity and president of the Committee for Equal Opportunity. Leccardi points positive and shadowed aspects of her role, which among other tasks imply the promotion of gender studies and the individuation of possible forms of discrimination or mobbing in the academia.

Leccardi thinks that this dual role can have positive aspects because it permits to a broader overview of the situation of gender issues at the university. In particular, it contributes to reinforce the dissemination and institutionalization of women’s and gender studies (Di Cori et al., 2001; Barazzetti et. al, 2002; Bimbi, 2003; Leccardi, 2004) (through courses, thesis, seminars, interdisciplinary researches, etc.) as well as to individuate discriminatory attitudes.

Leccardi argues that:

“This trend overcomes the meaning and practices of equal opportunity policies of the of the ‘first generation’ that was in the 1990s mainly connected to trade unionist claims. Equal opportunity of the ‘second generation’ has a broader significance and impact: they have become instruments for developing a new and more diffuse sensitivity towards gender issues and gender difference, which must be recognized, valorized and disseminated. Moreover, the development of innovative initiatives addressed to students can contribute to approach the ‘sensitivity of the new century’, adopting a new gender perspective. Indeed, the gender question cannot be any longer conceived merely through concepts elaborated by the women’s movement of the 1970s: the ideological dimension of the class struggle applied to the dynamic woman-man is no longer able to explicate complex forms of relationships and negotiations between sexes. There are now increasing forms of differences, hybridization among genders, diversity in sexual preferences and augmenting processes of individualization. Yet inequalities continue to exist, but the shape of their collective representation has changed. Moreover, next to positive aspects there are negative issues that have to do with existing gender stereotypes. Indeed, the existing legislation on equal opportunity is not able to face very diffuse mental attitudes and latent prejudices (which are supported by ‘common sense’) towards any form of claim connected to gender difference. This attitude is mainly expressed by middle aged male scholars, administrators and employees who continue to perpetuate discriminatory behaviors.”

Another crucial problem in the academia concerns the relationship among generations, the situation of students and the condition of junior researchers. They have different visions of feminism, have often precarious role in the university and do not belong any longer to a strong students’ movement. Lives are “parcellised” and more fragmented as patchworks. This factor also affects inter-generational relationships – between junior and senior academics – with related consequences. Therefore, if we want to understand in a more exhaustive way the ongoing debate on women, science and gender, we should investigate new forms of interaction between institutional places and informal networks.

For instance, Sveva Magaraggia (PhD. student at the University of Milano-Bicocca, junior researcher for a European project, involved in feminist movement and co-promoter of a network of young researcher in and out the academia) has developed with other colleagues a discussion list called *Prec@s*. At the center of this network there is the issue of “precariousness”, referring to gender identity as well as to labour uncertainty.

“This list has the goal to join different women, who are involved in the production of different forms of gender knowledge. Its goal is to comprehend the ambivalence of a labour market that has become more flexible and precarious. The richness of our network consists in showing a hybrid reality, where coalitions are based on affinity more than on a homogeneous gender identity. In common we have the wish to transform established forms of working. We are willing to hybridize our working places – and the academia in particular – with our passions. Our unity is based on the awareness of our multiple experiences, which cannot be reduced *ad unum*. We do not want to synthesize our ‘double presence’ (in my case at the university and in the movement of the movements) in one way, but let reciprocally interact them. But we need a stronger support from other women, who are in top positions in the academic hierarchy also because gender studies are still penalized in Italy and who is interested in it is marginalized.” (Magaraggia, 2005)

A stronger link between gender and generations became thus necessary for understanding the new condition of students and young researchers, if we aim to reinforce and renovate gender studies, improve scientific policies and strengthen fair institutions.

Despite problems and limits, at least gender studies seems thus to have become mainstreamed at the political and scientific level as well as feminist discourse seem to have been introduced and accepted in public discourse. This turn was possible, as argued above, thanks to a creative and challenging interaction between feminists, scholars, femocrats, experts and sensitive policy makers over years.

Yet memory (Passerini, 2003) and research on gender issues has not only been preserved and promoted by the academia. In fact, materials, books, publications, manuscripts, leaflets, posters, etc. firstly started to be collected and catalogued since the 1980s in *ad hoc* foundations, libraries and centers established and directed by women. Bookstores and associations have had a pivotal role for the production and development of feminist theories and gender studies. Even though with different stories and background, we can mention the *Libreria delle Donne* in Milan, *Libera Università delle Donne* (Milan), the *Fondazione Elvira Badaracco* with the *Unione Femminile Nazionale – Archivi Riuniti* (Milan), *Orlando* (Bologna), centers for documentation in Cagliari, Genova, Grosseto, Ferrara, Modena, Bolzano, archives of the feminist movement and on women’s history in Florence and Turin, and many other centers and bookstores in various Italian towns.

In this context it is worthwhile to remember the experience of the *Center for Documentation, Research and Women's Initiative* in Bologna. The Center is financed by the municipality of Bologna and supported by feminist activists and researchers. The library of the Center is the most important specialized library in Italy on women's history and gender issues, which collects all what is written by and on women. Synthesizing the specificity, the success of the Center and its length over years, Annamaria Tagliavini, director of the Center, argues that:

“The Center was able to establish in its 25 years of life a very effective way of working. In fact, it was able to put and maintain together the request of women's movement with the institutional reality, represented both by local governments and the university. The politics of being ‘in/ out’ to the institutions has been developed recurring to the system of conventions (contracts we sign with partners in order to finance the activities of the center, do not damage the autonomous cultural and political choices that are taken by the Association *Orlando*, which established the Center) as well as to a systematic and solid links with different groups and organizations that compose a diversified women's movement.” (Tagliavini, 2005)

Gender studies in society and in the academia have been accepted but their status remains unstable, depending from the turn over of administrations, cabinets and ministers. An institutional and socio-political awareness is thus not enough if any cultural framework supports new cultural sensitivities and scientific views. But this implies a radical change of society. If it does not change, backlashes are more than probable.

As an illustration of this trend, we can take as an example the present Minister for Equal Opportunity, Stefania Prestigiacomo (MP belonging to the liberal wing of *Forza Italia*, Berlusconi's party). She seems to have neglected experiences of the previous three Ministers and all staff was changed. This factor can be understood as a political decision aimed at demonstrating a break with the past. But *de facto* this decision stopped the collaboration between the Ministry for Equal Opportunity, feminists and academics as well as the confrontation with the multifaceted world of women's associations on issues of common concern.

This was the case of the *Commissione Nazionale per la Parità e le Pari Opportunità tra uomo e donna* (so renamed in 1990, law no. 164), which was based at

the Presidency of Ministers Council. This Commission, which had a budget, was suppressed by Silvio Berlusconi in agreement with Stefania Prestigiacomo, on 3rd July 2003 (legislative decree, no. 114). This decree transformed the previous autonomous National Commission into a consultative organism that has the task to elaborate proposals to the Minister and is governed by her at the political and administrative level. Indeed, Prestigiacomo has promoted laws for women but not in a productive dialogue with them. In some circumstances Prestigiacomo has assented to positions supported by women's movement, as it happened in the case of a referendum voted – and lost - in 2005 about the possibility to repeal a very illiberal and confessional law on *In Vitro Fertilization*. But also in this case motivations were far from the feminist language and debate.

Regarding the issue of women and science Prestigiacomo is mainly applying EU indications but without following the spirit of the *Directive Prodi-Finocchiaro*. Yet some mainstreamed initiatives on women and political representation have been organised in universities. This is the case of the courses on *Women, Politics and Institutions. Training courses for promoting equal opportunity in decision-making centers of politics* (Ministero per le Pari Opportunità, 2005) financed by the Minister in all Italian universities. These courses are addressed to all interested women, students, women engaged in local governments, administrators, trade unionists, employees, housewives, etc. This initiative has been very successful and important, meeting the interest of the audience and the commitment of the organisers engaged in gender studies. Gender awareness has become part of the individual identity but it needs to be empowered by different forms of knowledge, teaching and research. This experience has also indicated specific expectations of Italian women, who are underrepresented in all elective political offices (Guadagnini, 1987; 2001).

Indeed, Prestigiacomo main interest seems to be women's political representation. At this regard, Prestigiacomo has proposed the modification of two articles of the Italian Constitution in 2001 and 2003 (Title Fifth and article no. 51), in order to introduce the principle of parity and positive actions in political election. The following phrase was added to art. no. 51: "The Italian Republic promotes equal opportunity for men and women by means of appropriate provisions". However,

differently from the French case on parity, this decision was taken from top down and never really discussed by and with women in public arenas.

Provisions for increasing the low number of women represented in political offices – from local administrations up to the national and European Parliament - were needed also because all political attempts done in the last decade were unsuccessful. In 1995 the Constitutional Court judged as anti-constitutional political quotas (sentence no. 422) (Beccalli, 1999), which permitted to women to have a higher representation in Parliament in the XII Legislative (1994-1996), reaching 17%. At the present, in the Chamber of Deputies women are 11.5% and only 8.1% in the Senate. In order to incentive the election of women and to develop positive actions in representative organisms, in October 2005 women MPs promoted some amendments to a bill aimed at reforming the electoral system, shifting from a majoritarian to a proportional representative one. Three proposals – which were named *quote rosa* (pink quotas!) - were presented in Parliament by two MPs belonging to left-wing parties and the Minister Prestigiacomo. A proposal foresaw 50% of women and 50% of men in all lists; another one indicated at least a presence of 30% of women. Because these two proposals were rejected, Minister Prestigiacomo tried to find a compromise: her proposal foresaw 1/3 of women in all lists and the payment of a penalty in the case that this rule was not followed by interested parties. Any transversal agreement was found among women MPs. Vice-versa, also the last amendment was rejected due to a sort of coalition transversal of all parties: 452 deputies were against, while only 149 voted pro. At this regard there is a very easy and simple question: how can a male dominated Parliament be favourable to women? The time of suffragettes seems to be back....

4. Conclusions: towards participative and deliberative democracies

How should I conclude my paper: with positive or pessimistic features or both? Summarizing, I can argue that democracy works when social actors contribute to the democratization of all spheres of society, empowering daily experiences and professional skills. Yet this process is often blocked, depending on the different governments, who are more or less interested in gender issues, despite existing

legislation. Therefore, legislation and norms on equal opportunity become more radical and effective when experiences of feminism and social movements are able to find innovative and diverse forms of “institutionalization”, indicating a deep transformation of the society that is taken into account by the institutions. The connection between supranational norms, domestic legislation and feminist practices and theories can contribute to change a merely formal and top-down principle of equality and equal opportunity. Therefore, equal opportunity runs the risk to become top down formalities far from the claims of validity expressed by interested social actors in the public arena, if a strong link between policy makers and civil society ruins.

Quoting the title of my paper: (*Feminist Academics and Policy Makers in Italy: a 'Marriage' in Crisis or Alive?*) I can say that in general a marriage is always in trouble... and should be constantly re-negotiated. Sometimes it can be better, in other cases it is worst. It is a “chemically instable compound”. Like in the case of Goethe’s novel, a stable equilibrium can be reached only if there are *elective affinities* among elements and parties. Vice-versa they dissociate. Gender studies has won the battle with the fortress university with the recognition of courses, curricula, masters, education and research. Yet the battle of women scholars for concrete equal opportunity and social justice in the academia has been reframed by fairer legislations but there are still struggles to fight for.

Despite the fact that existing legislations recognize gender studies and equal opportunity, nevertheless their existence is still very fragile. In fact gender studies is not yet strongly culturally institutionalized, in counter-tendency to a broader and stronger valence it has in the civil society and informal networks. Therefore, gender studies is still too much dependent on institutional and governmental changes.

Without a continuous confrontation with culture and society, gender studies becomes blind but also institutions without a gender perspective are sightless towards societal questions and knowledge issues. Yet the question is not only to create specific conditions in order to make permanent the institutional recognition of gender studies. It is a matter of public discourse with a determined public identity, independent from the legal status and policies of equal opportunity. But the system has not yet a gender culture or consolidated praxis. Indeed, we need new ways of producing scientific

practices and knowledge, developing forms of more interactive and innovative ways of teaching and researching. We should enter the heart of institutions, the political core and the domain of the scientific decision-making without forgetting the roots of our actions: from bottom up. New challenges for rethinking scientific policies are needed also in order to substitute obsolete forms of academic knowledge and evaluation.

Gender studies is born as a radical critique of society and established dogma. The risk consists now in the fact that the institutionalization can bring gender studies to be a “normal discipline”. Courage is needed in the academia, in struggling against stereotypes and dogma. “In a number of different countries, solving the problems tackled has called for exceptional courage and organizational skills, since in some cases the women concerned were flying in the face of established dogma (Levi-Montalcini, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine, 1999: 54). In science revolutions were performed by women and men, who were able to see and foresee a different and possible world, showing the mendacity of previous systems, enlarging knowledge and promoting well-being and justice for all human beings.

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