

Essay:

THE INVENTION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY IN WEST GERMANY AND IN ITALY IN THE LONG SEVENTIES. AN ESSAY ON MEDIA AND VALUE CHANGE IN EUROPE¹

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Value Change in the Long Seventies: Still a Historical Contention?

Historical research generally considers the Seventies as a turning point in European history. The hypothesis that a value change took place during that decade arose out of research by the American political scientist Ronald Inglehart. Based on the results of a European Values Survey conducted in six European states (France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Britain), Inglehart claimed that Western industrialized countries were undergoing a *silent revolution* founded on an unprecedented value change that was moving the societies and especially the younger generations towards post-materialist and individualistic attitudes². This theory has been very thoroughly discussed by a number of scientists in an international debate lasting almost fifty years³. In the late Nineties, debate in the European Union regarding the European constitution and its values helped to revive the debate, and national historiographies frequently imply parallels and connections between the present and the past of the Seventies⁴. In the same decade the national transformation of Germany with its process of institutional unification also awakened interest in this debate. It was no accident that this transformational theory became prevalent, especially among the German academic community. Historians and sociologists confronted each other, challenging the validity of a theory that had caught the

¹ Essay zu den Quellen: 16 Abbildungen zum Thema Frauen und Sexualität in deutschen und italienischen Zeitschriften (Liste), in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2022, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-76972>>.

² Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*, Princeton 1977. Inglehart started disseminating the results of his research at the beginning of the decade.

³ The Italian and West German reactions to Inglehart worth recalling here are: Carlo Tullio Altan, *I valori difficili. Inchiesta sulle tendenze ideologiche e politiche sui giovani in Italia*, Milano 1974; Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *Werden wir alle Proletarier? Wertewandel in unserer Gesellschaft*, Zürich 1978; Helmuth Klages, *Wertorientierungen im Wandel. Rückblick, Gegenwartsanalyse, Prognosen*, Frankfurt am Main 1984.

⁴ Kiran Patel, *Der Streit um Werte und Normen. Die Präambel des Entwurfs des Verfassungsvertrags von 2003*, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte 2017, <www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-1711>; id., *Projekt Europa. Eine kritische Geschichte*, München 2018, p. 447-537. On correlations between the 1970s and the period after 1989, see for Germany Thomas Raithel / Andreas Rödder / Andreas Wirsching (eds.), *Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne? Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren*, München 2009, and recently Frank Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979. Als die Welt von heute begann*, Beck, Munich 2020, and for Italy Agostino Giovagnoli, *Gli anni Settanta e la storiografia sull'Italia repubblicana*, in: *Contemporanea* 1 (2010), p. 183-196.

attention of so many social and political actors during the Seventies, serving not only as a key for interpretation, but also actively influencing the historical development of Western society⁵.

Apart from methodological criticisms, the question raised by the present author is whether or not this theory of transformation can still be considered of utility to historians. The idea of generalized value change emerging from national surveys at the time would require detailed verification of transformations in mentality and behaviors in the West across numerous areas of human life, including work, family, sexuality, private life in general, gender relations, education, politics, etc. Historical research suggests that these same areas were influenced in individual countries by different combinations of factors, like the demographic and social fractures caused by two world wars with consequent decimation of the male population in many European countries, the prevalence of the young population after the baby boom, changes in social structures after the economic boom, the social impact of mass consumption and new media as popularization factors of the cultural change, and an acceleration in transnational and global dynamics. Furthermore, the theory includes an implication that the transformation of values and ethics might well represent more than just a developmental cultural change, and instead marked a moment of profound discontinuity in the continuum of modern history, when considered from a long-term perspective. This meant that ethical frameworks and cultural representations long accepted in the West were called into question during the late Sixties and throughout the following decade into the early Eighties, when the individualistic and neoliberal paradigm rose to predominance in Western culture, causing profound changes observable at different levels. This mutation stabilized ethical frameworks based on new conceptualizations, producing enduring effects, something without precedent in previous centuries.

An attempt will be made to verify this hypothesis in the following. This will involve an examination of sexuality, with a focus on women and their public representations in two western industrialized countries: the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Italy. These are so-called “ferne Nachbarn” (distant neighbors), two nations whose peculiar relationship has been represented in modern times as one of parallel development based on similar events, today in the current historical research linked by historical conjunctures that need to be examined

⁵ On the German debate see Rüdiger Graf / Kim Christian Priemel, *Zeitgeschichte in der Welt der Sozialwissenschaften. Legitimität und Originalität einer Disziplin*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 4 (2011), p. 479-508; Bernard Dietz / Christopher Neumaier, *Vom Nutzen der Sozialwissenschaften für die Zeitgeschichte. Werte und Wertewandel als Gegenstand historischer Forschung*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 2 (2012), p. 293-304; more extensively Bernard Dietz / Christopher Neumaier / Andreas Rödder (eds.), *Gab es den Wertewandel? Neue Forschungen zum gesellschaftlich-kulturellen Wandel seit den 60er Jahren*, München 2013. For a in depth analysis on the correlation between sociology and historiography referring to the theory of value change s. Fiammetta Balestracci / Christina von Hodenberg / Isabel Richter (eds.), *The Seventies in Europe. An Era of Value Change*, Oxford University Press, (upcoming).

through comparison in wider contexts⁶. Special attention will be dedicated to this relationship here from the perspective offered by two different but associated media: illustrated magazines and national surveys.

Sexuality and Illustrated Magazines in West Germany and Italy

In the history of sexuality this period is usually referred to as the “sexual revolution”. The concept was adopted globally as a political slogan among students of the late Sixties, and has been picked up by historiography to highlight the affirmation of greater freedom in sexual relations, especially among women, gays, and teenagers. Recently, many historians have begun to question the true impact of this “revolution”, underlining ambiguities in the liberalization process and drawing attention to differences in perception between generations, genders, and sexual orientations⁷. In Germany, studies regarding media, consumption, and sexuality after 1945 are quite well developed⁸, while in Italy the most widely investigated political actors remain the traditional political parties, the Church, and feminist groups, with few exceptions⁹.

This essay first addresses how the “sexual revolution” of women was represented by media in West Germany and Italy, two Western European countries struggling with very different recent pasts as regards sexuality¹⁰. This is approached by considering the roles played by

⁶ Christoph Dipper, *Ferne Nachbarn. Vergleichende Studien zu Deutschland und Italien in der Moderne*, Köln 2017.

⁷ Gert Hekma / Alain Giami (eds.), *Sexual Revolutions*, London 2014; Peter-Paul Bänzinger et al. (eds.), *Sexuelle Revolution? Zur Geschichte der Sexualität im deutschsprachigen Raum seit den 1960er Jahren*, Bielefeld 2015; on the perception of the 1968 generation see Karla Verlinden, *Sexualität und Beziehungen bei den “68ern”*. Erinnerungen ehemaliger Protagonisten und Protagonistinnen, Bielefeld 2015; Franca Balsamo / Marilena Moretti (eds.), *Le Sessantottine*, Torino 2018; recently Benno Gammerl, *Anders fühlen. Schwules und lesbisches Leben in der Bundesrepublik. Eine Emotionsgeschichte*, München 2021; Maya De Leo, *Queer. Storia culturale della comunità LGBT+*, Torino 2021, p. 141-191.

⁸ In addition to the selection collected in Bänzinger, *Sexuelle Revolution*, worth noting among the many others are Uta Poiger, *Rock’n Roll, Female Sexuality and the Cold War Battle on German Identities*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 3 (1996), p. 577-616; Eva-Marie Silies, *Liebe, Lust and Last. Die Pille als weibliche Generationserfahrung in der Bundesrepublik 1960-1980*, Göttingen 2010; Detlef Siegfried, *Time is on my side. Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahren*, Göttingen 2006; more specifically id., *Rote Lippen soll man küssen. Deutungen europäischer Schönheitspraktiken um 1960*, in: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* 2013, <www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-1624>.

⁹ Possible exceptions, even if not focused on female sexuality, include Fiammetta Balestracci, *La sessualità degli italiani. Politiche, consumi e culture dal 1945 ad oggi*, Roma 2020; Lorenzo Benadusi, *Vedo nudo. Il dibattito su cinema e rivoluzione sessuale (1968-1970)*, in: Elio Francescani / Mariangela Palmieri (eds.), *The Other Side of the Seventies. Media, politica e società in Italia*, Soveria Mannelli 2019, p. 227-37; Maria Casalini (ed.), *Donne e cinema. Immagini del femminile dal fascismo agli anni Settanta*, Roma 2016; Natalina Lodato, *Il caso Duepiù. Il giornale che rivoluzionò le relazioni e i sentimenti in Italia*, Formigine 2013; Enrica Asquer, *Storia intima dei ceti medi. Una capitale e una periferia nell’Italia del miracolo economico*, Roma/Bari 2011. There is still not a single study in Italy on the impact of the pill.

¹⁰ Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950*, New York 1996; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany*, Princeton 2005; for Italy see Perry Willson (ed.), *Gender, Family and Sexuality. The Private Sphere*

illustrated magazines intended for conservative audiences of middle-class adult women and men of various ages, which officially were against cultural change and remote from politicized, progressive intellectual circles. This category of target readers was chosen because the argument purported in a substantial part of historiography is that the “sexual revolution” only involved young middle-class women¹¹. Journals with other target audiences might possibly be considered in parallel with the aim of placing national messaging within specific cultural and media systems.

Since the Sixties different discourses on sexuality had been promulgated through global and transnational means, such as international demographic policies, debate in religious communities, global youth countercultures, consumerism, medical knowledge, and feminist ideas. Obviously such a global phenomenon, with some transnational developments, assumed particular national orientations. Then, the period was characterized by a growing medialization of sexuality with a flood of images in visual media like women’s weeklies, TV broadcasts, and advertising, all alluding to sex with images of idealized bodies and nudity, profoundly conditioning the conception of sexuality¹². The generative power of images to drive sexual imagination helped to induce new sexual cultures and embodiments in the real world. This had controversial effects on the democratization process of the period, resulting not only in cultural pluralization but also new forms of standardization and commodification of sex¹³.

A comparison between the two media systems reveals some asymmetries.¹⁴ Generally, German media had a wider circulation and more readers. The most popular weekly in the FRG

in Italy 1860-1945, New York 2004; Anna Treves, *Le nascite e la politica nell’Italia del Novecento*, Milano 2001.

¹¹ Barbara Ehrenreich et al., *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, in: ead. (eds.), *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex*, Garden City 1986, p. 10-38; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*, New York 1994; Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. (eds.) *The Modern Girl Around the World. Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, Durham 2008.

¹² On evolving “mass media ensembles” for specific time periods see Axel Schilt, *Das Jahrhundert der Massenmedien: Ansichten zu einer künftigen Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001), p. 177-206. On media history see Christina von Hodenberg, *Writing the National and Transnational History of Mass Media and Television Audiences after 1945*, in: *Annali – Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts of Trient* 1 (2018), p. 93-116; Frank Bösch, *Mass Media and Historical Change: Germany in International Perspective 1400 to the Present*, Oxford 2015; Valerio Castronovo / Nicola Tranfaglia (eds.), *La stampa italiana nell’età della TV. Dagli anni Settanta a oggi*, Roma 2002.

¹³ On this topic see Bänziger, *Sexuelle Revolution*; on visual history see Gerhard Paul, *Visual history*, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 29.10.2012: <http://docupedia.de/zg/paul_visual_history_v2_de_2012>.

¹⁴ For this article, various popular German and Italian magazines of the 1960s and 1970s were evaluated. 16 exemplary selected illustrations were included in this article as sources (image citations), representative of many other covers, posters, articles or reports. The author requested permission for publication from the publishers of the magazines from which illustrations are reproduced. In addition, the author has asked the publishers to name the photographers and persons depicted in order to obtain their permission to reprint as well. Unfortunately, no publishing house was in a position to provide profound information. It was therefore not possible to obtain the consent of the persons named. In the interest of scientific freedom, the author and the editorial board of the thematic portal have nevertheless decided to publish this article and refer to the right of citation regulated in copyright law, which serves the intellectual discussion of already existing works.

is the conservative television listings magazine for families, *Hör zu*, with distribution reaching 4.3 million copies in 1969. In the same year the most popular Italian weekly, a catholic family magazine called *Famiglia Cristiana*, sold 1.6 million copies¹⁵. In the Seventies a television listings magazine called *TV, Sorrisi e Canzoni* overtook *Famiglia Cristiana*, selling two million copies in 1979. The German illustrated *Quick* and *Wochenend* magazines achieved a circulation of 1.4 and 1.6 million copies during the so-called *Sexwelle* (sex wave), while the conservative family magazine *Oggi* sold almost 850,000 in 1969. While the female weekly *Brigitte* for middle class German women distributed 1.4 million copies over these decades, the Italian magazines *Amica* and *Bella* sold only 400,000 and 450,000¹⁶. The Italian monthly *Cosmopolitan-Arianna* targeted professional women with an emphasis on sex education and sold 230,000 copies in 1976, while the German *Jasmin – Zeitschrift für das Leben zu zweit*, published from 1968 to 1973 with a similar target, sold 1.6 million. These asymmetries are even more pronounced if the sample is extended to other significant reader categories. In West Germany, the modern illustrated press for young people was very much interested in sex and sex education. The best known examples are *Konkret* and *Bravo*, which in the Seventies respectively sold 200,000 and 1.5 million copies¹⁷. The closest alternatives in Italy, like the magazines *Big*, *Qui Giovani*, and *Ciao 2001*, at the end of the Sixties sold around 400,000-500,000 copies, and reflected the lower level of attention paid to the topic in the national youth culture. This variance also partly reflected the different interests of the two student movements regarding sexuality, and partly the relevance of sex education in the two countries, something that will be discussed further in the following chapters¹⁸. The *Sexwelle* in Germany was generated by a national media system very much interested in sex education. Worthy of note in this respect is the West German docufiction, *Helga*, about birth and reproduction, promoted by the newly founded Federal Office for Health Education (Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung) in 1967. Other popular movies on this subject included *Das Wunder der Liebe*, inspired by the famous book by the national icon of modern sexology, Oswald Kolle, and the

Unfortunately, the quality of the illustrations does not meet the normal standard of the portal European History, for which all readers are asked to bear with us.

¹⁵ On *Hörzu* see Lu Seegers, Fernsehstars und „freie Liebe“. Zur Karriere der Programmzeitschrift „HÖR ZU“ (1965-1974), in: Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History 1-2 (2004): <<https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2-2004/4703>>. On *Famiglia Cristiana* and the other Italian magazines see Ugo Volli, I settimanali, and Laura Lilli, La stampa femminile, in: Castronovo / Tranfaglia, La stampa italiana, p. 251-311, p. 345-386.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, it was impossible to consult any of these Italian magazines.

¹⁷ On *Bravo* see Lutz Sauerteig, Die Herstellung des sexuellen und erotischen Körpers in der westdeutschen Jugendzeitschrift BRAVO in den 60er und 70er Jahren, in: Medizinhistorisches Journal 42 (2007), p. 142-179; *Konkret*'s readership is taken from internet and thus not verified and could likely be higher.

¹⁸ On the Italian youth magazines s. Marco Grispigni, S'avanza uno strano lettore. La stampa giovanile prima del '68, in Paola Ghione / Marco Grispigni, Giovani prima della rivolta, Roma 1998, p. 55-72; Diego Giacchetti, Tre riviste per i "ragazzi tristi" degli anni Sessanta, in: L'impegno XXII, 2 (2002), p. 97-101. On 1968 and sexuality see Sonia Levsen, Sexualität und Politik um 1968. Eine transnationale Geschichte?, in: Journal of Modern European History 1-17 (2019), p. 98-115; on the Italian case see Balestracci, La sessualità degli italiani, p. 61-73.

movie-series *The Schulmädchen-Report*, based on the book of the same name by Günther Hunold. In Italy in the early Sixties there was a more traditional series of pamphlets denouncing the backwardness of the national sexual morality. Only *Comizi d'amore*, a film by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1963, achieved reasonable popularity, revealing to a wide audience the fragmented and contradictory moral codes from Sicily to Milan. The most popular film in Italy was likewise the German *Helga*, listed in 1968 as the most viewed of the year. Other domestic efforts never received a comparable reception. Sex education remained a national concern and it was never introduced in schools, unlike West Germany where it was included in the school curriculum in 1968¹⁹.

Through observation of public representations of female sexuality in the two media systems in a selection of comparable magazines, an effort will be made to understand how women's sexuality was depicted, what peculiar entanglement of national and international factors influenced the national moralities, what changes occurred relative to the past, what concepts and cultural codes this change was associated with, and finally whether it is possible to identify a value change of enduring effect. First, there will be an illustration of how new national surveys prepared the path for the reinvention of female sexuality immediately after the war.

Questioning Women's Sexuality in Postwar Europe: National Investigations and Global Trends

Until the end of the Second World War, European states assessed female sexuality according to official national statistics on marriage and fertility rates among women of 15 to 49 years, in other words simply as an issue of *marital reproduction*. During the decades under discussion here, the official statistics revealed a general disaffection of society towards this approach, since marriage and marital fertility had fallen significantly in many European countries²⁰.

The changes recorded in the Seventies in the FRG and Italy started long before. Fertility had started to fall in Germany in the late 19th century, and after WWI Germany had the lowest birth rate in Europe, Berlin in particular, with a surplus of 2 million single women. During the Weimar Republic, sex counseling on marriage and contraception was quite widely accepted, which partially explained the growing national trend of small families from the 1920s onward. Nazi policies on reproduction instrumentalized maternity for the racial integrity of the

¹⁹ Franz X. Eder, Die lange Geschichte der "Sexuellen Revolution" in Westdeutschland (1950er bis 1980er Jahre), in: Bänziger, Sexuelle Revolution, p. 25-59; Balestracci, La sessualità degli italiani, p. 173-177.

²⁰ The author consulted institutional statistics for Italy, West Germany, France, England and Wales, which confirmed this observation. For a good summary view of the matter see Simon Szreter, Falling fertilities and changing sexualities in Europe since c. 1850: a comparative survey of national demographic patterns, in: Franz X. Eder / Lesley Hall / Gert Hekma (eds.), Sexual Cultures in Europe. Themes in Sexuality, Manchester 1999, p. 159-194.

Volksgemeinschaft, without completely stigmatizing birth control and body manipulation²¹. The birth rate in Italy also started declining in the late 19th century due to urbanization and transoceanic migration, while contraception remained an elite option in northern and central Italy. The fascist regime clearly attempted to boost the patriarchal family with benefits for nuptiality and maternity. It introduced a criminal code in 1930 that, in line with the Catholic encyclical *Casti Connubi*, criminalized any form of contraception and biological intervention on the female body, including sterilization and abortion. An official alliance with the Church was established in 1929 with the Lateran Pact. Moreover, the fascist Italy maintained a distance from the international birth control movement, which contributed to suppressing sex education among the Italian population. Nevertheless, birth rates continued to fluctuate during the fascist period²². Both countries insisted on maintaining maternity and marital reproduction as the only accepted form of female sexuality in official representations, even more so after WWII when a need for stabilization in gender relations was generally sustained²³.

The widespread disorientation in the postwar period was instead interpreted by a new kind of statistics and discourse, promoted by independent social analysis actors in a large number of European states, supported by the experiences of several scientists who had visited the USA between the two wars, studying new polling and sampling methods. In the FRG the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach was established in 1947, and in Italy the Doxa was founded in 1946. They published the results of two national surveys on sexual behavior that revealed a different concept of female sexuality, respectively in *Wochenend* in 1949, and in *Oggi* in 1951. According to their results national cultural taboos, like sex before marriage in West Germany, and birth control and divorce in Italy, were already practiced or desired²⁴.

After the chaos created by the war, the first national surveys generally focused on sex in marriage, but in the Sixties the alarm generated by growing sexual activity among the youth diverted attention towards sex among young people. The first survey was commissioned in 1965 in the United Kingdom by the British Central Council for Health Education and directed

²¹ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 3-13; Ute Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte zwischen bürgerlicher Verbesserung und neuer Weiblichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1986; Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, Opladen 1986.

²² Emmanuel Betta, *From biopolitics to eugenics: the encyclical Casti Connubii*, in: *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* 1 (2018), p. 39-59; Massimo Livi Bacci, *Donne, fecondità e figli. Due secoli di storia demografica italiana*, Bologna 1980; Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, New York 2009.

²³ Maria Hühn, *Frau im Haus und Girl im Spiegel: Discourse on Women in the Interregnum Period of 1945-1949 and the Question of German Identity*, in: *Central European History* 26 (1993), p. 57-90; for Italy Stephen Gundle, *Feminine Beauty, National Identity and Political Conflict in Postwar Italy 1945-1954*, in: *Contemporary European History* 8 (1999), p. 359-78.

²⁴ For Italy Pierpaolo Luzzatto Fegiz, *Il volto sconosciuto dell'Italia. Dieci anni di sondaggi Doxa*, Milano 1956; for West Germany Ludwig von Friedeburg, *Die Umfrage in der Intimsphäre*, Stuttgart 1953. Both Luzzatto Fegiz and von Friedeburg spent a period in the USA between the wars.

by Michael Schofield²⁵. It was based on the sampling method of Alfred Kinsey, the American biologist investigating national sexual behaviors. Schofield's survey revealed no real growth of sex among the younger generations (14 to 20 years). Premarital sex was practiced only by 21 percent of the male and 11 percent of the female sample. A year later, the Italian journalist Claudio Risé (in subsequent years a psychologist) followed the British example to promote a survey among young people aged 16 to 24 years²⁶. His interpretation of the results was much more pessimistic. According to Risé, sexual relations between young Italians were in a state of crisis due to a lack of sex education and the backwardness of national legislation on contraception. He especially stigmatized the growing phenomenon of petting, a new practice that he defined as "an intersexual pattern of intercourse" that threatened traditional sex, marriage, and female and male gender representations. The majority of the Italian sample held the view that single women were always "unhappy", and that beautiful women were "bad" and "perverse". In other words, the ongoing cultural change was perceived as a threat.

In 1968, a German survey was published on the sexuality of students, conducted by the sexologists Hans Giese and Gunther Schmidt and involving students from twelve German universities interviewed in 1966²⁷. Here the majority of the sample was male (2,835 plus 831 females). The interviewees were in favor of premarital sex, partly thanks to widespread use of contraception, which was largely perceived as a preliminary step leading towards marriage, while love was the precondition for the new sexuality. According to the authors, there had only been a partial liberalization of traditional national morality among students, and romanticism offered the strategic mechanism for controlling sexual permissiveness. Centralizing love also enabled a normalization of female sexual power, which was widely feared and categorized as *unweiblich* (unfeminine) or *nymphoman*. The male interviewees were closed to this behavior among females, with significant differences emerging only between Protestants and Catholics. Female orgasm was repeatedly mentioned in different situations (premarital sex, masturbation, petting, penetration, etc.) in line with the results of the Kinsey Report, a study by the already mentioned American biologist who had previously demonstrated the multiple and analogous aspects of male and female sexuality. Giese's research also confirmed the findings of William Masters and Virginia Johnson, who in 1967 had publicly proclaimed that the female body was capable of pleasure²⁸. After an initially critical reception in postwar Europe, over the following

²⁵ Michael Schofield, *The Sexual Behavior of Young People*, London 1965.

²⁶ Claudio Risé, *Rapporto sul comportamento sessuale dei giovani in Italia*, Milano 1966.

²⁷ Hans Giese / Gunther Schmidt, *Studenten-Sexualität. Verhalten und Einstellung. Eine Umfrage an 12 westdeutschen Universitäten*, Reinbeck 1968; Vance Packard, *The Sexual Wilderness. The Contemporary Upheaval in Male-Female Relationships*, Philadelphia 1968, on youth sexuality in six Western states.

²⁸ The references are to S. Alfred Kinsey / Wardell R. Pomeroy / Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Philadelphia 1948; ead., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Philadelphia 1953 (translated in Italy and West Germany in 1954 and 1955); William Masters / Virginia Johnson, *Human Sexual Response*, Boston 1966 (translated in 1967 in both countries); see Dagmar Herzog, *The Reception of the Kinsey Report*

two decades Kinsey's research clearly became a catalyst for a new approach for investigating sexuality around the world²⁹. From the late Sixties onwards Western sexology, institutional medicine, and later Western feminists all appealed to Kinsey's and Masters & Johnson's studies on human anatomy and physiology to formulate new theories on female sexual pleasure, moving on from their resistance to Freudian psychology with its therapeutic fixation on vaginal orgasm³⁰.

These concepts contaminated international debates regarding birth control, included by the World Health Organization in its Health Care Program in 1965, and contraception in marital love, which was discussed in the same period by the Vatican Council II and by the Commission created by Giovanni XXIII and then extended by Paolo VI after the invention of the contraceptive pill. In Italy in December 1966, following the French example and the latest directive of the World Health Organization, the socialist Minister of Health, Luigi Mariotti, appointed a group of experts to conduct a national survey on the use of contraception. According to their results, only 25,000 Italian women used the pill, and 44 percent of them were practicing Catholics³¹. In 1968 the Church published the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, confirming their condemnation of contraception, which remained illegal in Italy under the fascist penal code until 1971. A survey was commissioned the same year by the Associazione Italiana per l'Educazione Demografica (AIED), an organization founded in 1953 and affiliated with International Planned Parenthood. It revealed that only 150,000 Italian women were using the pill, still a very small fraction of the fertile female population (1.5 percent)³². In 1977, another survey by the Institute Claparede reported in *Oggi* revealed that only 5 percent of the Italian female population were taking the pill (1 million), still a small number compared to 33 percent of fertile West German women taking the pill in 1976 (4.2 million)³³. Artificial contraception had already been accepted by the British Church at the Lambeth conference in 1958 and by

in Europe, in: *Sexuality and Culture* 1-10 (2006), p. 39-48; Sybille Steinbacher, *Wie der Sex nach Deutschland kam. Der Kampf um Sittlichkeit und Anstand in der frühen Bundesrepublik*, München 2011.

²⁹ Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed 1949-1994*. From Mass Observation's "Little Kinsey" to the National Survey and the Hite Reports, London 1995. Even Hans Giese, a German advocate for Kinsey, during the 1950s was one of his strongest critics. S. Hans Giese (Hrsg.), *Die Sexualität des Menschen*. Handbuch der medizinischen Sexualforschung, Stuttgart 1955.

³⁰ Fiammetta Balestracci, The Influence of American Sexual Studies on the "Sexual Revolution" of Italian Women, in: Ann-Katrin Gembries / Theresia Theuke / Isabel Heinemann (eds.), *Children by Choice? Changing Values, Reproduction and Family Planning in the 20th Century*, Munich 2018, p. 145-161.

³¹ Estratti dalla Documentazione del Ministero Italiano della Sanità sul problema degli anticoncezionali, in: Pino Donizetti, *La rivoluzione della pillola. L'ultimo reportage di un medico dagli USA al Messico sino ai Caraibi per impadronirsi di tutti i segreti della pillola*, Milano 1967, p. 205-238; Nello Aiello, *La pillola di stato*, in: *L'Espresso* 2.4.1967, p. 9.

³² *La Pillola fa bene o fa male? E quando si prende? Risponde De Marchi, il pioniere della riforma sessuale*, in: *Tv, Sorrisi e Canzoni*, 23.4.1972, p. 28-31.

³³ Silies, *Liebe, Lust und Last*, p. 416. On Italy see the reportage of Sandro Mayer, *Il primo dossier sugli anticoncezionali*, in: *Oggi*, 26.3.1977, p. 39-40 and id., *Le italiane dicono perché non prendono la pillola*, ibid., 2.4.1977, p. 42-49. The Claparede Institute interviewed 886 men and 879 women aged between 17 and 50.

most of the Protestant world community. It was also generally permitted by the West German Evangelical Church and by several German catholic bishops, which could partially explain its more widespread use in the FRG³⁴.

Female sexuality was clearly attracting ever increasing attention during the Seventies, with new national surveys appearing in both countries. In the FRG, the Getas-Institut für Motivforschung, Gesellschaft für angewandte Sozialpsychologie Bremen carried out a survey on the sexual behavior of West German women aged 18 to 60 years, published in *Jasmin* in 1971 in eight episodes³⁵. Other surveys were conducted in the same period on expectant mothers and divorced women, with the same experiment conducted on the West German male population two years later and published in *Jasmin* in 1972. The survey was conducted in 487 small and larger country towns, involving 4,402 households, but only 2,261 of which made available. It involved women of different vocations, ranging from housewives and low level employees of limited education, married (78.1 percent), and evangelical (52.3 percent). The national composition recognized the presence of migrant women (13.37 percent Polish and Soviet, 5.26 percent from the DDR, and 3.65 percent other Europeans). West Germany reached 1 million migrants or *Gastarbeiter* in 1964, a phenomenon that in Italy occurred more than a decade later.

The first part of the questionnaire was on general issues: most of the sample thought that women alone should decide whether or not to have abortions, they accepted Ostpolitik but not communism or national socialism, and they did not advocate female virginity before marriage (31.87 percent against with just 17.02 percent in favor). Sex among young people was largely accepted, while double standards for men and women in family life and work were rejected. In the list of the most important things in life after health (at 86.84 percent), second was “being a good mother for your children” (77.6 percent), while “sexuality” came in at only tenth place with 25.02 percent. The second part of the survey was on sexual behavior. The questions were quite detailed, for example, where participants got information about male and female sexual organs, sexual intercourse, birth, and ejaculation. The most frequent answers were from sexual partners, medical texts, and sometimes mothers. Many of those interviewed indicated illustrated weekly magazines as important sources of sex education (*Jasmin*, *Quick*, *Eltern*, *Hörzu*, etc.). The most common form of contraception was the pill (22.93 percent) while only 9.07 percent used condoms, 7.56 percent Knaus-Ogino method, and 7.51 percent coitus interruptus. Most of the women interviewees had sex before marriage with their future husbands (62.6%), and one

³⁴ Simone Mantei, Protestantismus und sexuelle Revolution in Westdeutschland. Ein Schlaglicht, in Siegfried Hermle / Claudia Lepp / Harry Oelke (eds.), *Umbrüche. Der deutsche Protestantismus und die sozialen Bewegungen in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Göttingen 2007, p. 163-175; Leo Pyle (ed.), *La pillola e la regolazione delle nascite. Documentazione sul dibattito cattolico*, Milano 1965 (1. ed. 1964).

³⁵ Gisela Dallenbach-Hellwig et al., *Das sexuelle Verhalten der Frauen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: Gesis-Portal, Datenarchiv, Köln 1982; *Das sexuelle Verhalten der Deutschen Frauen*, in: *Jasmin. Die Zeitschrift für das Leben zu zweit*, 4.6.1971, p. 30-42 (first article).

third of the sample experienced their first sexual intercourse between 18 and 20. The majority of the women only had one sexual partner (42.04%). The survey went further with questions on the way sex was performed, noting frequency of orgasm, masturbation, petting, and even rare cases of same-sex experiences and group sex. Undoubtedly, the survey reflected national interest in this subject, increasing activity of national social agencies, and a growing trend among middle-class women of accepting female sexuality as a nonreproductive act, combined with a permanent interest in motherhood.

This degree of openness was unknown among Italians. In 1973, the Shell company commissioned a survey from Doxa on the condition of women in Italy. [Image 1](#) shows the cover of the survey's publication³⁶. Meetings between Shell and Doxa started in 1971. 4,604 women aged over 16 and 1,930 men were interviewed in 135 Italian towns. Most women were married with children, they had high school diplomas and were employed in commerce or as artisans. Although not focused on sexuality, five chapters regarded relations with men, married life, sex, and social and medical issues such as abortion, divorce, and prostitution. Although 68 percent believed that recently there was more widespread acceptance of women in society, many of the questions revealed a general interiorization of the double standards in various areas. Starting a family was still the most important life goal for 70 percent of the women interviewed. Keeping a home, bringing up children, and sexual fidelity were considered largely female responsibilities. 60 percent believed that a sex life was important for men and 50 percent for women. 65 percent of the women thought that infidelity was a serious problem but forgivable for men and 42 percent for women. 99 percent knew about contraception, but only 66 percent used it, divided between 53 percent coitus interruptus, 44 percent Knaus-Ogino, 27 percent condoms, and 22 percent the pill. 41 percent of the sample believed that divorce was more harm than good for Italian women, and only 21 percent considered its introduction in 1970 as positive for women. Abortion was accepted only in very limited and serious cases, and 54 percent believed that the abolition of brothels in 1958 had been harmful. Even though 50 percent considered a sex life to be very important, the survey did not really explore this field beyond the questions already noted. It was clear that there were still concerns and taboos around sex, and the perceptual framework remained a marital, heteronormative lifestyle. It was obvious that sex education remained limited among middle-class women and that female sexual behavior had not changed much. A few years later in 1976, another extensive survey on sexual behavior among the population of Veneto, a northern Italian region, revealed a wider acceptance of divorce, abortion, contraception, and sex as an individual right. Only one third of the sample still believed that marriage was a social necessity. The age of first sexual intercourse had fallen to 18 years, and to 15 among students, with coitus interruptus and condoms still the most

³⁶ Shell, *La donna oggi in Italia. Inchiesta nazionale sui problemi della condizione femminile e sul ruolo della donna nella nostra società*, Genova 1973.

commonly used contraceptives, although many girls did admit using the pill. 59 percent of unmarried men and 42 percent of unmarried women had sex lives, but religious people, housewives, and female farmers were particularly likely to feel guilty about it³⁷.

Even though the actual sexual activity of Italian and West German women did not appear very different, the national discourses on sex education and the mentality of the two national samples seemed to diverge quite a lot. In the next section an effort will be made to verify this divergence by considering media representations.

Orgasm and Liberty of Dynamic Bodies: Female Sexuality Between Normalization and Neoliberal Values in West Germany

Female sexuality started to attract great attention in public debate from the late Sixties onwards, undoubtedly reflecting an ongoing social change. Women and their sex lives became central in public representations, with articles and columns on sex education and contraception, reporting on marriage and family crises, discussions on the reform of the criminal law, documentaries and semi-pornographic series on prostitution and orgies, all accompanied with pictures and advertisements. As Kinsey suggested, female nonreproductive sexuality and its functions was the core of the debate, while the reports by Kinsey and Masters & Johnson became popular media topics. Historically, the issue of female pleasure in itself was familiar, but what was new was the popularization of the message and its association with a growing presence of women in jobs, education and social spaces. This was associated with a flood of widely disseminated public images as the identity and role of women in society was transformed through visual discourse.

Several cultural responses can be identified in the public sphere. First, there was an attempt to *rationalize* the progressive sexual liberation of women as deriving from an increased interest in sex education in West Germany dating back to the Imperial era and Weimar period³⁸. There was also a national trend towards *normalization*, linking female sexual pleasure to love and tenderness in heterosexual relationships. A third approach was an *eroticization* of the female body and the signs of its sexual availability with the aim of restabilizing traditional gender relationships. Finally, the invention of dynamic new roles played by women in professional positions, clearly inspired by neoliberal American society, encouraged a *desexualization* of female sexuality, i.e. the deletion of any sexual significance of the female body aiming to invent new female characters and to legitimate new social roles for women. All these representations

³⁷ Giovanni Caletti, *Il comportamento sessuale degli italiani. Indagine su campioni rappresentativi della popolazione*, Bologna 1976.

³⁸ Elisabeth Heinemann, *Sexuality in West Germany. Post-Fascist, Post-War, Post-Weimar, or Post-Wilhelmine?*, in: Friedrich Kiessling / Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Mit dem Wandel leben. Neuorientierung und Tradition in der Bundesrepublik der 50er und 60er Jahre*, Köln 2011, p. 229-245.

often coexisted in the same magazine. Even though female sexuality was often commoditized, by the end of the decade several taboos had been dispelled.

Quick dedicated special attention to sex education, already being well known for Kolle's reporting during the Sixties. In December 1967, an article in the series "Aufklärung für alle" (sex education for all) described female and male bodies, illustrating genitals and the function of the clitoris for female pleasure with anatomical pictures, within the context of heterosexual relationships³⁹. Then in 1969 the columns "Das Tagebuch des Frauenarztes" (journal of the gynecologist) and "Ihr Problem – Unsere Antwort" (your problem – our answer) were started, here reproduced in [image 2](#) and [image 3](#), discussing women's intimate problems from the medical and psychological points of view. As can be seen from the two sources, invented personal histories were used to discuss particular topics, such as the pill, generally recommended, the benefits of masturbation, and how to achieve an orgasm. Subjective narratives were frequently adopted over the decades with the intent of surpassing the previously exclusive and authoritarian scientific approach to sex education. These appeared in all the magazines, not least in *Konkret*, where following Reich's example, student movement groups for sexual freedom published their personal experiences in the so-called "Sexpol-Protokolle"⁴⁰. Sex education was disseminated "in pills" right through the decade in advertisements for tampons and contraceptives (Ob, Mimossept, Tasmin, Patentex), including information on female intimate hygiene in connection with social and generational issues. This advertising encouraged the national idea that Swedish women were the most modern in the world, something that was strongly highlighted in *Quick* in the beginning of the decade with new columns, like the scientific advice of Dr. Christian Holm in "Besser lieben" from 1973, and "er sie es. Ratgebermagazin für die ganze Familie" from 1977. At the same time the editorial framework was consolidated, not only with the column "Was ist Normal – Was ist Pervers?" (what is normal – what is perverse?) presenting texts on female and male homosexuality in 1970 that to some extent stigmatized non heterosexual sex, but also by displaying eroticized exotic nude women that revived an old national imaginary dominated by the male colonial eye⁴¹. A new series "Alle Mädchen dieser Welt" (all girls around the world) the same year presented a roundup of cover images and articles representing nude girls from all over the world, in which the magazine started to superimpose another representation of female sexuality. Here it's presented a very small selection of this kind of cover with [image 4](#), [image 5](#), and [image 6](#). Through eroticization of exotic women's bodies, frequently from a

³⁹ Die vollkommene Liebe. Aufklärung für alle: offen, sachlich, ohne Heuchelei, in: *Quick*, 8.12.1967, p. 36-40.

⁴⁰ On Wilhelm Reich and the Sexpol-movement as a harbinger for the 1968 movement see Wilhelm Reich, *Der Funktionär des Orgasmus*, in: *Konkret*, 8.4.1969, p. 20-24.

⁴¹ On German national colonial imaginary see Pascal Eitler, *Sexualität als Ware und Wahrheit: Körpergeschichte als Konsumgeschichte*, in: Heinz-Gerhard Haupt / Claudius Torp (eds.), *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland, 1890-1990*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, p. 370-388.

pornographic perspective, *Quick* created distinct places for southern and northern women in the public imaginary, while in the real world the number of migrants in the country from the Mediterranean basin continued to grow. The magazine most committed to this style of representation was *Wochenend*, which over the decade invented personal stories about orgies, group sex, new series illustrating simulated violent sex. [Image 7](#) shows an example of this kind of narrative, presented through the column “Der Tag, an dem ich vergewaltigt wurde” [the day I was raped], alternatively offered also through the column “Jede Nacht in fremden Betten” [each night in another beds]. In the same direction went photo novels with exotic women, such as “Vera, Sklavin der Liebe” [Vera, slave of love] and “Mademesoille Ding-Dong”), here represented in [image 8](#) and [image 9](#), which completed a decade of voyeurism and fantasy sex for German families. This was a very popular trend that even *Konkret*, a left-leaning magazine critical of old sexual patterns, exploited to increase sales.

Like *Quick*, *Wochenend* also introduced pseudo-scientific contributions in parallel. From the late Sixties articles on the “sexual revolution”, the right to sex of mothers and single women, and “reciprocal orgasm” in marriage, in which the counselor Barbara Törwang, probably an invented Scandinavian pseudonym, recommended that love and sexual passion should go together, as it was the case in the article’s reproduction of [image 10](#)⁴², were published in alternation with voyeuristic intimate reports (“Wir sagen die ganze Wahrheit” [we tell the whole truth] and “Das Geheimnis der roten Laterne” [the secret of the red lantern]) on sexual life in West Germany and among powerful people. [Image 11](#) reproduces one episode of the investigation realized in 1967 on the prostitution’s market in West Germany, here precisely in Cologne, while in [image 12](#) a magazine cover of the same year announced a special report on the intimate life of the German actress Ira von Fürstenberg. In 1967, a series started called “Die Diktatoren und die Frauen” (the dictators and the women), depicting Mussolini as a “volcano” in love and his last lover, Clara Petacci, as a potential national traitor manipulated by the Nazis against the Italian dictator. The start of the article is reproduced by [image 13](#)⁴³. Other stories about Stalin, Peron, and Hitler among others, did not paint very progressive picture of female identity and sexuality.

Hörzu was more interested in representing young modern women and discussed the crisis of marriage, the use of the pill, and the changing female identity without displaying women’s bodies. Sometimes there was discussion of sex education on TV, for example, on 6 February 1975 a conversation was presented from the ARD channel between the feminist Alice

⁴² Barbara Törwang, So lernen Frauen besser lieben, in: *Wochenend*, 5.7.1967, p. 24-26; Das Geheimnis der weiblichen Sexualität, in: *ibid.*, 12.7.1967, p. 24-26; Was ist Frauen in der Liebe erlaubt?, in: *ibid.*, 2.8.1967, p. 24-26; Sollen Mutter noch Geliebte sein?, in: *ibid.*, 9.8.1967, p. 22-23; Lohnt es sich noch Jungfrau zu sein?, in: *ibid.*, 7.10.1967, p. 24-25.

⁴³ Benito’s Liebe war wie ein Vulkan, in: *Wochenend*, 14.3.1967, p. 3-7; Ein Dokumentarbericht von Tilo von Tannheim nach Informationen von Enrico Sordi; Die Liebesbriefe von Clara Petacci, in: *ivi*, 29.3.1967, p. 12-19, with following articles on Mussolini’s other love stories.

Schwarzer, author of *Der kleine Unterschied* (the small difference), and the conservative Esther Vilar, author of *Der dressierte Mann* (the drilled man). However, the commodification of female sex in advertisements was accepted.

Jasmin presented yet another point of view. The magazine criticized Oswald Kolle for his advice on marriage, described in terms of erotic techniques, while celebrating the American sexologists William Masters and David Reuben, with the serial publication of the latter's bestselling book, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, starting from 1970. *Jasmin* made sex education as one of its main goals, starting with "Lexikon der Erotik" in 1968, a scientific encyclopedia published in series, and "Lexikon der Pille" in 1970. The magazine did try to widen its theoretical scope in space and time by recalling Freud and Iwan Bloch in 1969 regarding female "erogenous zones" and sexual capacity, and with a report on the British social reformer Havelock Ellis and his life. However, it remained clear that the real focus of interest was the new American sexology⁴⁴. In his book, Reuben claimed a correspondence between male and female genital organs and referenced Freud's theory, arguing that the difference between clitoral and vaginal orgasm existed only in this theory, and that in reality only the first was real⁴⁵. In October and November 1970, the magazine dedicated two articles to the orgasm of women and to onanism⁴⁶. Achieving pleasure seemed almost a social duty for many married German women at the time, but they were often disappointed by marital intercourse and onanism was described as a precondition for happiness in marriage. By publishing the results of surveys on female and male sexual behavior in 1971 and 1972, promoted by Getas Institute of Bremen mentioned above, *Jasmin* qualified itself as one of the magazines most committed to sex education in the early Seventies. A series called "Das sexuelle Verhalten der deutschen Frauen" (the sexual behavior of German women) was published in eight theme-based articles, discussing sexual violence, women in sexual intercourse, onanism, and the representation of women's sexual types, with a separate edition dedicated to lesbians and lovers of group sex. The series revealed that sex was important to 55 percent of the interviewees – although masturbation was still rejected by 74 percent and petting was mostly unknown –, that single women had more sex than married women, and that women born after the war were more informed about sexuality than older generations. *Jasmine* tried to pluralize the public representation of female sexuality and identity by not accepting marriage as the only possible horizon and shifting more attention to the divorced, singles, lesbians, and widows, and allowing women to tell their own stories⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Das Geheimnis der erogenen Zonen, in: *Jasmin*, 3.2.1969, p. 30-33.

⁴⁵ Alles, was Sie schon immer über Sex wissen wollten, in: *Jasmin*, 13.4.1970, p. 106.I-106.VI.

⁴⁶ Der Orgasmus der Frau, in: *Jasmin*, 26.10.1970, p. 59-64; Onanie. Das letzte Tabu der modernen Frau, *ibid.*, 9.11.1970, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Warum glückliche Frauen (manchmal) langweilig sind, in: *Jasmin*, 13.8.1971, p. 71; Frauen, die in der Liebe anders sind, *ibid.*, 27.8.1971, p. 41-45; see also the series of articles by Monika Held in *Brigitte*, contesting the approach of famous national columnists on sex, such as Kolle, Frau Irene and Beate Uhse, and presenting

The RALF-Report was published in 1978, partially reproduced by *Quick*, as the first investigation into West German sexual life after Allensbach's surveys. It underlined the importance of fidelity and sexual tenderness for German women, increasing the centrality of partnership and love in public narratives. The *Quick* "Partnerschaft '80" series discussing marriage and other relationships, including homosexual love, is one example. At the end of the decade Oswalt Kolle published articles on the sexuality of 20 and 30 year-old women, proposing that for the youngest generations sexuality had become an important part of life, and that for many of them orgasm was a common experience with or without penetration, as demonstrated by the *Hite Report* by the American sociologist Shere Hite on the sex lives of American women. Kolle sustained another national conception about female sexuality by celebrating women in professions, on the look out for partnerships and greater freedom⁴⁸.

From the late Sixties *Brigitte* started to propose a new imaginary, displaying pictures of thin young women in dynamic geometric poses and providing women with a new metaphor for sex. A picture in 1968 was especially iconic, showing a girl with New York in the background suggesting faraway travel and women always ready to depart⁴⁹. This representation made no allusion to reproduction, maternity, or sexual pleasure but instead gave the idea of an active individual ready to go to the Western capital of the capitalist production. This imaginary recalled Marcuse's theory about advanced industrialized Western societies. Following Freud's theory, Marcuse argued that in this kind of society the "reality" or "performance principle" conflicted with the "pleasure principle" and repressed "eros" through work and productivity. The German-American philosopher theorized the "irrational rationality" of advanced industrialized society, which oppressed human instincts causing unhappiness⁵⁰. The representation of active desexualized bodies ready to go to New York perfectly expressed this concept. The same ideological inclination was expressed in advertisements depicting naked bodies in wilderness settings often with textual allusions to freedom of body and spirit.

The discourse became more clearly differentiated after 1971, when Ursula Lebert started the columns "Die Freiheit der Frau" (the liberty of women), symbolized with the Statue of Liberty, the most famous American woman. The opening discussion reflected on the real possibility of women enjoying freedom in society in terms of homes, relationships, careers, and

women's personal experiences: Gespräche über Sexualität, in: *Brigitte*, 19.9.1979, p. 208-219, followed by other five articles, especially Orgasmus – was ist das?, *ibid.*, 17.10.1979, p. 146-153. On the topic s. Peter-Paul Bänziger et al. (eds.), *Fragen Sie Dr. Sex! Ratgeberkommunikation und die mediale Konstruktion des Sexuellen*, Frankfurt/Main, 2010.

⁴⁸ Oswalt Kolle, *Die Sexualität der Frau von heute*, in: *Quick*, 4.12.1980, p. 30-39, with a focus on women in their 20s, and in the following number in their 30s; *id.*, *Die Sexualität der ledigen Frauen*, *ibid.*, 17.12.1980, p. 52-58; *id.*, *Die Sexualität der Frauen in der Schwangerschaft*, *ibid.*, p. 52-56; see Shere Hite, *The Hite Report. A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality*, New York 1976 (translated in Italy and West Germany in 1977).

⁴⁹ Gina Angress, *Brief aus New York*, in: *Brigitte*, 12.3.1968, p. 75-80.

⁵⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Boston 1955.

sexuality, recalling Simone de Beauvoir's "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient" (one is not born a woman, one becomes it) and Anne Koedt's text on female orgasm, the first feminist counter to Freud's theory⁵¹. This was the period when feminism first started to develop influence on a popular level. Freedom was presented as a controversial issue, comprising rights and the different social conditions of married women, singles, childless women, widows, etc. In 1975, Lebert interviewed Alice Schwarzer about her last book, which defined sexuality as the primary form of oppression for women, since so many reported catastrophic experiences⁵².

The magazine promoted a reconceptualization of female sexuality that suggested contrasting but not opposite ideas: free sexuality on the one hand, and a symbolic elimination of sex on the other. Sexual pleasure was thus not the sole ideal at the time in this area of public opinion, and there was also an erasure of sexuality through productivity and dynamicity, clearly inspired by the American neoliberal society and its counterpoint, the conceptual wilderness, as part of the quest to reinvent the lives of women.

“Libera e bella” in the Nuclear Family. Italian Women and the Domestication of Sexual Pleasure⁵³

The late Sixties also marked a turning point in Italy for the representation of female sexuality in the media, characterized by a *popularization* of sex and increased nudity. Sex education became more important, which certainly represented a significant development for the country. In 1965 Paolo Liggeri, a Catholic priest, a popular personality and founder of the first marital counseling center in Milan in 1948, started a magazine column called "Risponde il sacerdote" (the priest replies) in *Oggi*, renamed in 1968 "La parola al confessore" (the confessor speaks out), in which he gave advice on marital relationships and sexuality. In 1968, Liggeri spoke out in favor of female desire and pleasure even after menopause⁵⁴. The same year *TV, Sorrisi e Canzoni* started the column, "Mi dica, dottore" (tell me, doctor), a forum for gynecological discussion between readers and a doctor. However, it is significant that *Famiglia Cristiana*, the most widely sold Italian weekly at the time, never adopted this approach. Nevertheless, over the decade this distinctly Catholic publication did sustain a debate in favor of marriage without children based on marital love, as suggested by the pastoral *Gaudium et Spes* and by the most recent Vatican Council. It still rejected divorce, abortion, premarital sex, and criticized the sexual liberation of young people with articles against the precocious sexualization of young

⁵¹ Ursula Lebert, Die Freiheit der Frau, in: *Brigitte*, 15.1.1971, p. 70-74; Anne Koedt, The myth of the vaginal orgasm, in: *Notes From the First Year*, 1968.

⁵² Nur Last, keine Lust?, in: *Brigitte*, 29.8.1975, p. 74-75 (= *Die Freiheit der Frau*); Wie groß ist der kleine Unterschied? Interview to Dr. Goetz Kockott, *ibid.*, 2.1.1976, p. 64-65.

⁵³ The phrase "libera e bella" was the slogan of an advertising of a hair spray for women circulating in Italy in the early Seventies.

⁵⁴ La rivincita degli anni maturi, in: *Oggi*, 17.10.1968, p. 37-41.

girls. The word “orgasm” appears to never have been mentioned during the decade. The Catholic Church was clearly engaged in this subject but with a limited degree of openness. Nudity was completely censored in the magazine. Somewhat more was displayed in the other two magazines, but decidedly less than in the West German conservative press. The word “orgasm” appeared in *Oggi* in 1970 with reference to married women, with one declaring that she never achieved it⁵⁵. In 1973, in a discussion about the difference between clitoral and vaginal orgasm, the columnist referred to American women who were striving for equality in sex⁵⁶. It was only in the middle of the decade that a series by Germana Monteverdi finally focused on the sexual pleasure of Italian women⁵⁷. In her fourth article titled “The first night”, alluding to the national tradition of first intercourse on the first night of marriage, the doctor being interviewed defined orgasm as the third of four acts in intercourse, and as the “peak”, clearly referring to Masters & Johnson’s theory⁵⁸. He then distinguished between physical and psychological virginity alluding to the habit of young girls of having extra-genital sex “from kisses to petting”⁵⁹. Female pleasure and sexual acts by women were thus accepted but intercourse was still seen as an initial test for marriage. The following articles in the series were dedicated to sterility, pregnancy, and birth. In a sex education insert published the next year (“Guida pratica di educazione sessuale”), female orgasm was first discussed in different contexts, such as pregnancy, in relation to male perception, etc. The next edition focused on sex at different ages and the false belief in a difference between vaginal and clitoral orgasm, which was explained with pictures regarding human anatomy, here reproduced by [image 14](#) (Il figlio diventa adolescente) and [image 15](#) (L'apparato genitale femminile)⁶⁰. However, in the same edition of the magazine, Don Liggeri said in an interview that pre-marital sex was unacceptable because it was forbidden by the Church. The attempt to rationalize sex in Italy in this class of publications frequently involved *domestication* within traditional cultural norms provided by the Catholic code. In the same period, in several interviews Luigi De Marchi, one of the first activists for the reform of the Italian penal code on contraception, and the Italian translator of Wilhelm Reich, and William Masters on his latest book on homosexual sex, presented a more open approach to sex, even though homosexuality was still described as a condition requiring therapeutic intervention⁶¹.

⁵⁵ Moglie sexy o moglie casta?, *ibid.*, 19.5.1970, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Ha detto orgasmo, contessa?, *ibid.*, 26.4.1973, p. 19-21.

⁵⁷ Germana Monteverdi (ed.), *La donna dal ginecologo*, *ibid.*, 2.4.-7.5.1975, in seven episodes.

⁵⁸ In their famous book on human sexual response, the two American biologists claimed that sexual intercourse consisted in a cycle of four acts: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution.

⁵⁹ Monteverdi, *La prima notte*, in: *Oggi*, 23.4.1975, p. 32-33.

⁶⁰ Cesare Capone, *Così si fa bene l'amore*, in: *Oggi*, 31.2.1976, p. 99 and 105 (= Guida pratica di educazione sessuale).

⁶¹ De Marchi's interviews, *Non ci sarà subito il boom della pillola*, in: *Oggi*, 29.3.1971, p. 108-109; *Vizi e peccati degli italiani di oggi*, *ibid.*, 6.8.1977, p. 23-27; *100 mila ... e mai più mamma*, *ibid.*, 28.10.1978, p. 45; on Masters: *Tutti sesso e famiglia*, in: *Oggi*, 1.6.1979, p. 101-105.

Tv, Sorrisi e Canzoni focused on the topic in 1972 with a series of articles on the Italian “sexual revolution”, which according to the author was real only for women. There was a sequence of interviews with Luigi De Marchi and other specialists on general issues like sexuality, the pill, abortion, and contraceptives⁶². De Marchi criticized the persistence of taboos, especially in southern Italy, and the bourgeois culture that repressed the sexuality of girls before marriage. Quoting Alex Comfort, he declared himself in favor of “sexual freedom” despite the risk of a new standardization of sex. The position of the Church in this debate was mentioned either as a passing comment or a counterpoint to De Marchi’s ideas. It was remarkable how De Marchi had developed from the *bête noir* of the Italian intelligentsia, tried in 1965 for his public declarations on contraception, to become an authoritative reference for the conservative press in the Seventies. By inviting him to discuss sexuality, the magazine declared its endorsement for the cultural changes underway. The national process of decriminalization in these issues certainly helped popularize renewed discussion on sex and contraception, with a focus on social conditions and age. According to Claparede’s survey in 1977 the younger generations appeared more in favor of the pill but only among the upper classes, with working class men expressing concern about female infidelity. Apparently, the sexual repression of Italians was more influenced by national taboos like infidelity and fears about possible harmful effects of contraception rather than religious and ethical, which concerned only 2.4 percent of the population. Claparede’s survey also noted that because sterilization was forbidden in Italy, many Italians went to Switzerland to achieve it. Finally, *Tv, Sorrisi e Canzoni* was also reluctant to name the “orgasm”, which first appeared in 1972 when Professor Giuseppe Valle, a gynecologist in Rome, distinguished between women who achieved orgasm because they had received sex education, women who experienced pleasure but did not achieve orgasm (the majority), and women who never achieved orgasm, were frigid, and faked it to please their partner⁶³. The delayed introduction of a new vocabulary was paralleled with a delay in advertisements with messages about sex education, which only appeared in the late Seventies.

This national trend also explains the rather late transformation of *Cosmopolitan-Arianna* in 1973, into simply *Cosmopolitan*, the Italian edition of the American magazine, after 1976. Orgasm was mentioned in the Italian *Cosmopolitan* right from the opening editorial and the sexuality of single career women was identified as the core topic of the magazine. Numerous American articles promoting female sexual satisfaction were translated and published during the decade. In 1975, the “Cosmoguida” was also included, a sex education insert focused on female sexuality and under the guidance of the most famous Italian sexologists, Willy Pasini

⁶² Corrado Corradi, La rivoluzione sessuale in Italia, in: *Tv, Sorrisi e Canzoni*, 23.4.1972, p. 28-32; 30.4.1972, p. 32-34; Meglio oggi o meglio ieri?, 7.5.1972, p. 30-34; Credete davvero di non avere tabù sessuali? Provate a leggere qui, 30.4.1972, p. 36-37; L’aborto: un problema drammatico di oggi. Come la pensa il sessuologo Luigi De Marchi – e come la pensa la Chiesa, 7.5.1972, p. 35-37.

⁶³ Intervista a un ginecologo di Roma, Prof. Giuseppe Valle, in: *Oggi*, 7.5.1972, p. 32.

and Giorgio Abraham, heads of a sexual dysfunction clinic in Geneva, outside of Italy⁶⁴. In 1977, the Italian *Cosmopolitan* followed the example of the *Hite Report* and promoted a survey based on 5,960 questionnaires completed by women aged 17 to 34 and mostly single. The results confirmed the most important of Hite's discoveries, that many Italian women did not achieve orgasm but nevertheless enjoyed penetration. After many years of media propaganda about the "duty" of female orgasm in Italy, the USA, West Germany, this began to be questioned first by women and then by the media.

Apart from *Cosmopolitan*, while education about female sexuality increased in terms of number of articles in the selected press, it still occupied a limited space and was mostly contextualized within heterosexual and marital boundaries. During the Sixties, women were profusely depicted as wives and mothers in cover stories, from the Seventies onwards pictures of young, slender, dynamic girls, alone, in couples without children, or in groups pluralized the national representation of women and indirectly the idea of their sexuality, especially in messages of freedom addressing the younger female generations, as here shows in [image 16](#) a Benetton's advertisement of 1972, the popular Italian fashion design grounded in 1965, which was a leading label in this kind of women body's representation during the Seventies. Standardization of the young female body normalized through promotion of the nuclear family, or alternatively of the new arrival, the *couple*, were prominent in the national media campaigns of the decade. The eroticization and commodification of the female body through images, very much present in other publications, on television, and in the national cinema of the period, did not feature in this category of visual media, which carried only a certain number of advertisements that associated the female body with products and alluded to the sexual act. This might also explain why neither the exoticization of female sexuality through presentation of foreign female bodies, nor the association of sex and violence were features in this section of the Italian popular press.

Conclusions

The media undoubtedly contributed enormously to the reinvention of the public representation of women's sexuality and bodies after WWII in Europe. It is also evident that the redefinition of female and male roles in society resulting from the war had made it necessary to rethink gender relations and human sexuality beyond the confines of marriage, even though national states tried to recompose the old social patterns. The *Kinsey Report* and later the clinical research of Masters & Johnson provided postwar Europe with a new scientific basis for implementing cultural change, based on American polling and sampling methods. Positive transatlantic relations and the "irresistible" attraction of American culture played a fundamental

⁶⁴ La Cosmoguida, in: *Cosmopolitan-Arianna*, May 1975, p. 67-82.

role in transforming sexuality in the second half of the 20th century. The initial surveys of male and female sexuality in marriage, followed by investigations into youth and female sexuality were all inspired by those methods and results. Italy and West Germany provide two different examples of this process. Newly established social agencies in both countries promoted investigations under the influence of national cultural factors and global trends. As a result, the reinvention of female sexuality was influenced not only by national cultural projects on sexual morality, but also through adherence to global policies of birth regulation directed by lay or religious bodies. The Vatican, Protestant Churches and the World Health Organization all played their part, influencing debate in European and Western countries. The invention of the contraceptive pill in the late Fifties and its spread in the following decade boosted the ongoing process of change and disrupted national and international debate. Sex education certainly played a bigger role in West Germany than in Italy for dealing with these developments. It helped to placate national public debate, and probably helped the younger generations to approach new forms of contraception with less trepidation. Furthermore, contraception was legal in several German regions and condom vending machines were quite common. It is also possible that the tradition of body manipulation in 20th-century Germany contributed towards acceptance of contraception on a personal and collective level. This might explain the greater openness towards female sexuality in German surveys, and on the contrary perhaps the greater hesitancy of Italian women towards the pill. Sterilization was never considered a real option by Italian women because it was still condemned by the Catholic Church, and it remained a very minor public issue. No references to Nazi policies were identified as regards this subject in the selected German media, confirming the theory of Dagmar Herzog that the reconceptualization of sex after the war occurred without confronting the Nazi past, and instead by challenging the reactionary morality of the Fifties.

National surveys on sexual behavior were published regularly by the selected magazines, becoming one of the most popular mediums for the new sexuality. Female sexuality, criticized or otherwise, was clearly no longer represented only as a reproductive marital process. Heteronormativity was the usual framework, although in Germany same-sex relationships and group sex were not censored. Much has been written about the role of mass media in social change. Media reflected and simultaneously transformed society, but very little is known about the individual reception and interpretation of messages. They clearly participate in creating the cultural atmospheres that characterize historic periods and social evolutions. As already noted, visual media and illustrated magazines played a central role in both countries after the war, especially in the public representation and transformation of sexuality. This means that pictures decisively challenged textual discourse, even in conservative publications. Taking into account the differences in the media systems of the two countries, the sexual pleasure of women was discussed in the selected media, although with less conviction in some magazines. In both

countries a trend can be observed towards normalizing, defusing, and controlling the change in line with national cultural directives. Rationalization through sex education was more incisive in the FRG, while the Catholic influence in Italy led to an attempt to domesticate the scientific discourse and the impact of consumption, with the *Famiglia Cristiana* criticizing the sexualization of young girls. The Americanization of national sexual morality was surely the salient feature of the period in both countries, but in Italy Catholicism obviously constituted a barrier limiting the American avalanche. It is also clear that the political battle between the Church and the parties influenced the debate more in Italy than in the FRG.

The idea of sexual liberation for women instated “freedom” as a central value in Western debate, influencing both national contexts. While sexually free women in Germany could appear eroticized, exoticized, or even desexualized, in Italy they were still depicted within the nuclear family and marriage, couples, or friendship groups, while eroticization was marginal in the analyzed context. Nevertheless, the present author sustains that this representation of freedom and the pluralization of female identity helped overcome the fascist ideal of woman within the patriarchal family. However, apart from a few references to the fascist criminal code, the conservative Italian press failed to confront the recent fascist past. At the same time, it might be postulated that the failure to elaborate the Nazi past in Germany could partly explain the popularization of violent sex, while the extreme visual eroticization of the female body in the German press could be attributed to a wider use of visual media and the absence of strong Catholic censorship.

Ultimately, the observations that emerge from the media prove that the “sexual revolution” did occur in Western society beyond small progressive circles. The popularization of a new female sexual identity was a truly unique event in modern history. The reinvention of the female body and sexuality in public representation changed the mentality of mainstream society long-term, with effects that stabilized over the following period. Marriage and maternity remain central public interests in European culture, but women’s sexual freedom and alternative female lifestyles are no longer taboos. Considering the national trends in marriage and birth, and the interruption of the last war, it might appear more accurate to speak of a progressive evolution rather than a “revolution”. However, the long Seventies clearly represented an acceleration in the process. This acceleration converted secondary or forbidden female conditions into acceptable ways of living. As the comparison of the two national media systems revealed, there were different interpretations of the ethical changes. In each context the sum total of ambivalences that emerged failed to hinder the reinvention of female sexuality in nonreproductive terms. In this respect there was no outstanding contrast between Italy and West Germany. However, the differences between the two countries are more relevant than the similarities, and a comparison should probably be made with events in other European countries before coming to a conclusion on the relationship between them.

Fiammetta Balestracci, The Invention of Female Sexuality in West Germany and in Italy in the Long Seventies. An Essay on Media and Value Change in Europe, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2022, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-29029>>.

16 Abbildungen zum Thema Frauen und Sexualität in deutschen und italienischen Zeitschriften (Liste), in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2022, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-76972>>.