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THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE GAY & LESBIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT:
Some Observations about Europe with a Focus on Italy

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ABSTRACT: The emergence of new social movements focused on gay and lesbian issues during the past 25 years has been well documented in American society. The diffusion of a gay and lesbian socio-political movement in other Western cultures and many developing societies has been the subject of more recent inquiries. This article assesses the globalization of the international gay and lesbian social movement by focusing on Europe and Italy, in particular, and raises questions about the socio-political conditions that might be necessary for the development of a new social movement—one based on sexual orientation identity concepts rather than one based on age-structured or gender-structured relationships. Historical information about social and legal changes in Italy and in the rest of Europe is presented along with current issues facing the increasingly visible gay movement in Italy. What emerges is a portrait of a culture changing and questioning its relationship to traditional patriarchal, religious, and gender concepts while becoming interconnected with global gay and lesbian communities and issues.

It is no time now to conceal our homosexuality....Union gives the strength to come out openly, and gay groups in schools and colleges are also steadily on the rise, even in Italy....I believe the movement for the liberation of homosexuality is irreversible, in the broader context of human emancipation as a whole. It is up to all of us to make this emancipation a reality. There is certainly no time to lose.

—Mario Mieli (1977:227, 230)

In many Western cultures with visible and active gay communities (such as the United States, the Netherlands, England, France, Germany, and Australia), a politics of identity has dominated the social movements for civil rights and equality among gay men and lesbians. In addition, these movements have also challenged the dominant power arrangements in their cultures, such as questioning the tradi-
tional ways gender and sexuality are organized and discussed. In so doing, sexual orientation has also become re-conceptualized in non-erotic terms and as a way of living in what some term relatively “egalitarian” relationships (as opposed to age-structured or gender-structured patterns of same-sex relationships, despite such actual inequalities of age and income as exist within the relationships). Extending the meaning of homosexuality to include a social and political identity has led to the emergence of the concept of “gay” and “lesbian” as something that goes beyond sexual acts and to the organization of these identities in new social movements for socio-political change.

The rise of collective actions characterized by open, decentralized, and participatory organizational structures and focused on postmaterial ideologies and values is well-documented (see Morris and Mueller 1992; Melucci 1989). Many of these theorists argue that earlier explanations of social movements—such as the relative deprivation model, rational choice perspectives, or resource mobilization theory—have been supplanted by newer ones which emphasize movements based on cultural politics and quality of life issues, depend more on middle-class constituents, and challenge the larger economic and political structures of a society (Adam 1995). The appearance of new social movements in Europe, including Italy, beginning most strongly in the 1970s, has been attributed to a variety of social and political forces shared by many of the countries, but also to forces unique to particular ones (see Dalton and Kuechler 1990).

How new social movement theories apply to the gay and lesbian movement has also been subject to some debate. Adam (1995:178) argued that “new social movements theory offers only partial applicability to gay and lesbian mobilization” since gay and lesbian organizations represent more than a middle class movement, take on various structural forms in different societies, do more than protect existing living arrangements by innovating newer ones in a much wider range of arenas (such as the workplace, housing, religion, media, health services), and engage with the state more to modify moral regulations.

Many of these ideas are supported when looking at the changes occurring in some European countries. And one country that is in the midst of important social changes concerning gays and lesbians is Italy. This paper considers the globalization of the international gay and lesbian social movement by focusing on Europe and Italy, in particular, and raises questions about the socio-political conditions that might be necessary for the emergence of a new social movement based on sexual orientation identity concepts and for the diffusion of newer cultural forms of gender and sexual relationships.

For many gays and lesbians around the world, the United States’ version of the gay movement serves as one identifiable form among several models. Appropriating the symbols and language of the American movement (including rainbow flags, certain clothing styles, the words “Stonewall” and “gay”), international organizations and local gay movements have become politically interconnected and more visible as they attempt a restructuring of their cultures’ basic concepts and attitudes toward homosexuality. As Plummer (1992:17) stated: “same-sex experiences have become increasingly fashioned through the interconnectedness of the world....[T]he gay and lesbian movements house identities, politics, cul-
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Globalization of Sexualities, markets, intellectual programmes which nowadays quite simply know no national boundaries. Homosexualities have become globalized. The diffusion of the concept of a gay identity, the circulation on world-wide media (including the Internet) of expressive and symbolic gay culture throughout the world, and the appearance of organized social movements to effect legal and social changes illustrate some of this globalization.

Yet, not all countries share these technologies, symbols, and concepts; the globalization of homosexuality does not necessarily translate into one universal gay identity and politics. With globalization comes an emphasis on localism, a politics of differences that legitimizes local uniqueness, “neither trapping the unique in a global claim nor ignoring the global interconnectedness of the local” (Plummer 1992:18). The development of new social movements and their organizations, for example, varies from one society to the other, despite some shared similarity and goals, as is evident in the European industrial democracies (Dalton, Kuechler, and Burklin 1990).

However, there has been a noticeable “Americanization” of homosexualities, especially in its cultural manifestations. Altman (1982:217), an Australian political scientist, said about his travels in gay America and Western Europe during the late 1970s:

By and large Europeans seem more at ease with the possibility of homosexuality than are Americans, which might seem to reduce the need for homosexual self-assertion of the sort that is common in the United States. Yet there is no doubt that if we can speak of the homosexualization of America, we can also speak of the Americanization of the gay world elsewhere.

He went on to describe the American disco music he heard on four continents and the adoption of American names for gay bars in Paris and newspapers in Melbourne, concluding that “It is possible that with time the American model of self-conscious gay separatism will become established elsewhere” (Altman 1982:217).

While many argue that indeed there has been an Americanization of homosexuality, Plummer (1992) warned against seeing the evolution of homosexuality in white, Western cultures as a blueprint for other countries and cultures to follow universally. Herdt (1997:150) similarly cautioned: “To recreate the totality of an identity system of gay and lesbian signs requires both the cultural context and the identity markers, and that re-creation is seldom achieved, except in the most ‘Americanized’ or ‘western’ gay bars and clubs of the developing world,” because of historical, political, and economic forces that affect sexuality and culture.

Since identifiable cultural differences may indicate the preservation of local versions of gay life, a more accurate way of analyzing the globalization of the gay movement, therefore, is to focus on the dialectic that exists between the Western models and the indigenous cultures. Describing the unique differences which may be concealed by what appears at first glance as shared cultural forms is an important project. As Herdt (1997:64) reminded us, “All kind of social practices can be combined, borrowed, appropriated, recombined, rejected, and ultimately
made over into an image that has the same appearance as another but is actually a different experiential and symbolic form.”

On the other hand, while cultural variations in the conceptions of sexuality and gender preclude a globalization of standardized gay and lesbian roles, mass communication systems and ease of rapid travel among countries create a more interconnected system of language, images, and culture (Herdt 1997). For Altman (1997:424), these similarities among different cultures might be explained more by “common urban and ideological pressures” than by cultural backgrounds. In his view, what has changed in the “developing” and “developed” Asian countries he studied is not the denial of race and nationality, but the emergence of a wider range of constructions of homosexuality, including “a definable group of self-identified homosexuals” who see themselves as part of a common global gay community (Altman 1997:424).

In addition, the international pandemic of AIDS has been another powerful force in the globalization of information about men who have sex with men. Murray (1992:36), for example, predicted that “Globalization of ‘safe sex’ campaigns (pushing condoms manufactured in the U.S.) may further disseminate ‘modern’ homosexuality.” For Herdt (1997: 151) “the AIDS epidemic is even more portentous of future social and sexual change, especially in developing nations” than the transition to modernity has been—something Altman (1997) found in Thailand where the language of gay identity and gay-defined HIV education were conflated on a flyer announcing a party at an AIDS conference.

Yet, epidemics and mass media are certainly not sufficient to produce global identities, gay subcultures, and social movements. Significant changes in economic, political, and family structures in a society are also involved with the shift from more traditionally age-structured to gender-structured to identity-structured (“egalitarian”) patterns of same-sex relationships (Greenberg 1988). Adam (1985:659) articulated this structuralist position when he wrote: “Of central importance is the transition to capitalism, which profoundly reorganized the significance of kinship and family, thereby opening new possibilities in personal bonding.” He argued that, in more rural precapitalist societies, kinship codes maintained age-defined or gender-defined relationships.

D’Emilio (1983) stated that only when wage labor became the primary means of making a living—rather than through an interdependent family unit—was it possible for homosexual desire to become the basis for personal identity and not just a behavioral pattern. Plummer (1995:92) extended these points when he said that shifts in material relations—“wage labour, shifting family relations of shrinking size and greater flexibility, the possibility of singlehood, the growth of urban centres and a declining birth rate”—and shifts in ideology toward a postmodern breakdown of all identity are crucial elements in the emergence of lesbian and gay culture and identity.

These same elements become salient for the development of new social movements which depend on these postmaterialist values. With less emphasis on economic growth and material values and more attention to non-economic quality of life concerns and self-expressive values, many citizens in advanced industrial democracies have mobilized to critique what they perceive as the ills of late mod-
ern society (Inglehart 1990b). Similar points have been made by Miller (1992:360) who listed four preconditions necessary for a modern-style (more “egalitarian”) gay and lesbian identity and community to emerge and become a socio-political movement: “a modicum of personal freedom and social tolerance; a level of economic development that offered some degree of independence and social mobility; a relatively high status for women; and a decline of the power of the family and religious institutions in defining and determining every aspect of an individual’s life.”

Murray (1992:36) stated that shared gay identity and collective consciousness have also been facilitated by the development of residential concentrations of homosexuals which, in turn, has depended on “the impersonal (bureaucratic) provision of economic opportunity and security.” A critical mass of people in delimited urban spaces, the mobilization of symbolic resources such as the media, welfare protection, geographic mobility, voluntary relationships less dependent on family of origin, and evidence that social change is possible are other factors involved in the development of a politics of gay identity (Murray 1996). In fact, Kaase (1990:98) suggested that for new social movements to become mobilized and continue, personal networks of communication, mass media, and “high interpersonal interaction density” among members of a value community must play central roles.

Hence, while some arguments can be made for the emergence of a more global gay identity and social movement, there remain specific structural conditions that work to maintain local variations and to resist globalization. At the same time, an international gay and lesbian social movement has occurred over the past decade that serves a salient function in globalizing a sense of gay community and political identity struggling for equality. As Herdt (1997:151) observed, “sexuality is increasingly seen from the perspective of identity rather than from the point of view of traditional social practices and roles.”

Using a socio-political theory that highlights specific social structural pre-conditions for the rise of a modern gay movement, and incorporating elements from new social movement theory, we can look to significant changes in economic independence, urbanization, relatively egalitarian gender roles, secularization, alternative family arrangements, and postmaterial values and ideologies. As Adam (1995:92) put it: “a complex set of socio-economic factors and political possibilities created the crucible in which homosexuality became organized into gay and lesbian subcultures in Western countries.” These changes—which occurred in American society beginning in the late nineteenth century but more forcefully in the years following World War II before the gay movement took its present shape—have been reflected globally in varying degrees, suggesting the reasons for the appearance of a new gay social movement in other countries.

What follows is intended to stimulate further research and to generate some hypotheses about the globalization of new social movements and identity politics by summarizing some of the historical and contemporary writings on Italy and on Europe in general. Since the primary focus is on the globalization of an identity-based social movement, it is not meant to be a comprehensive history or a complete record of the current changes facing Italy and the rest of Europe. This is a
review synthesizing and organizing mostly secondary sources with some analysis of information gathered from a few gay Italian publications, documents, and informants.

In order to understand the shifts toward a more identity-based social movement in Italy, it’s important to look at both the external structural conditions and internal forces that are creating a gay and lesbian movement in Italy. First to be considered are the external influences exerted by Italy’s connection to the European Union; then, the focus will be on the developing changes within Italian society.

The European Gay and Lesbian Movement: A Brief History

The emergence of visible gay communities and gay identities in Europe can be traced to various early movements, in particular to Germany in the late 19th century, Britain and the Netherlands in the early 1900s, and Sweden in the 1930s. Beginning in 1897 and continuing for about 35 years, for example, Germany was the site of several organizations and numerous publications focusing on sexuality and homosexuality (Adam 1995). During this period, an active and large gay, as well as lesbian, subculture developed in Berlin. Gay bars, restaurants, baths, dance clubs, drag balls, cafes, and publications thrived, especially during the 1920s. But attempts to generate a powerful national gay movement of collective liberation, rather than just an urban-centered personal lifestyle, were not successful.

Other European countries also had emerging gay communities between the world wars, yet not all developed as Germany had. Although an underworld of gay bars, nightclubs, and dances existed in France, and despite a flowering of literature and art by gays and lesbians, a social movement based on a collective political identity did not appear there during the years Germany was organizing its sexual reform movements (Adam 1995).

Like many other countries then, England’s laws prohibited same-sex sexuality, not homosexuals—similar to the numerous sodomy laws established in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Buggery or sodomy was punishable by death from 1533 to 1861, replaced by life imprisonment and codified in the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 (Jeffery-Poulter 1991). As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, a subculture of gay meeting places and so-called Molly Houses existed whose patrons occasionally resisted arrest when raided (Weeks 1990).

But it was not until the post-World War II years that a significant legal event for gay and lesbian people occurred in England—the publication in 1957 of The Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (“the Wolfenden Report”). It recommended “that homosexual behavior between consenting adults in private be no longer a criminal offense; that questions relating to ‘consent’ and ‘in private’ be decided by the same criteria as apply in the case of heterosexual acts between adults” (see Jeffery-Poulter 1991). The liberal recommendations of the Report focused on decriminalizing private consenting adult behavior between men, while strengthening laws about public displays of sexuality.
Since then, there has been substantial progress in Europe towards protecting human rights without, however, specific mention of gays and lesbians. The "International Bill of Human Rights" is recognized by most countries and encompasses the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the UN General Assembly; the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The Council of Europe also has prepared two major human rights treaties: the 1950 European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the 1961 European Social Charter (ESC) (van der Veen, Hendriks, and Mattijssen 1993).

Although these treaties do not explicitly negate rights based on sexual orientation, gays and lesbians have argued that equal treatment has not always resulted from these legal documents. Typically, since assumptions of heterosexuality are made in these treaties, requests for equal treatment by gays and lesbians must be specifically introduced, especially in cases dealing with private and family life, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, the right to marry and found a family, and the principle of nondiscrimination (van der Veen, et al. 1993). Although the European Commission and Court of Human Rights has not always ruled in favor of lesbian and gay rights in issues of family life and freedom of expression, it does recognize the right of gay men (lesbian cases have not come up) over 21 to a private life so long as it remains private.

By the early 1970s, after a decade of growing international political protest movements, including the rebellion at the Stonewall Inn in New York, gay liberation groups appeared, *inter alia*, in Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Mexico, Argentina, and Italy. A growing international network of gay media diffused ideas, symbols, and issues; a major social movement of international importance was underway, redefining the political, sexual, and social scene.

However, with this increase in a more political and powerful gay and lesbian visibility, there arrived a stronger resistance from others threatened by the emerging movement. While the rise of right-wing political and religious resistance was not as powerful outside America, a continuing campaign against gay people was still evident in Britain, Canada, and Australia during the mid- and late-1970s (Adam 1995). In addition, the 1970s was a period in many advanced industrial democracies of postmaterial value changes which emphasized collective identities along with the decline of more traditional hierarchical and neo-corporatist organizations, thereby creating climates conducive to the formation of new social movements (Inglehart 1990b; Wilson 1990). By the end of the 1970s, gay organizations in Western societies, as well as in some Third World countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, increasingly became more visible and political.

One of the significant events was the formation of an international lesbian and gay organizational structure—the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). Since its founding in 1978 in Coventry, England, it has been an important force monitoring the lesbian and gay movements in each country in the world, representing their interests to international human rights organizations and
strengthening global solidarity. ILGA does not attempt to standardize gay lives and movements, rather it seeks to unite politically the societal pluralism that exists among the many lesbian and gay communities world-wide. According to ILGA’s Constitution (as quoted in Holtmaat and Pistor 1988:35), its aims “are to work for the liberation of lesbian/gay women and gay men from legal, social, cultural and economic discrimination” by providing information about applying political pressure on governments and international bodies for gay rights, by coordinating international political actions, by promoting unity and cooperation of gay people throughout the world, and to exchange information about gay liberation.

Other events occurred internationally that affected gays and lesbians during the 1980s. When AIDS was first identified among gay men in the United States in the early 1980s, a national infrastructure of gay organizations, magazines, newspapers, and neighborhoods, with economic and political clout, contributed to a response that was needed in the face of indifference and opposition from official political, media, and medical institutions. AIDS contributed to an increasing visibility for gays and lesbians both in the U.S. and internationally, resulting in most of the major social institutions having to address lesbian and gay concerns (Herdt 1997). The church, schools, media, health care and social service agencies, and the legal system were forced to reconsider fundamental assumptions about homosexuality and the structured ways these institutions perpetuated a heterosexist perspective (see articles in Levine, Nardi, and Gagnon 1997). To confront public and private institutions with the reality of the presence of lesbians and gays in everyday life, in the context of a major pandemic, became the focus of the lesbian and gay social movements of the 1980s both in the U.S. and in many countries around the world.

One example of these challenges to existing structures can be found in the legal institutions. Legislative battles to include “sexual orientation” in non-discrimination policies, legal recognition of “domestic partnerships,” and related gay civil rights support have happened throughout the 1980s in the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and the European Parliament, thanks in part to a growing visibility of international gay and lesbian organizations, such as ILGA.

Also, in the 1980s, the European Commission (EC) issued a landmark decision (the 1981 Dudgeon case) determining that laws in Northern Ireland and England criminalizing homosexual acts were not in concordance with the right to private life article of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). This view was confirmed in the 1988 Norris case about the Irish Offences against the Person Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act in Ireland (Norris 1993). In both cases, the Commission ruled that “the mere existence of a law prohibiting any form of homosexual contact in private use was an undue interference with the plaintiff’s private life” (van der Veen, et al. 1993:237).

However, depending on legal rulings from Strasbourg is not the ideal strategy for the recognition of equal rights for gays and lesbians in Europe. The focus of the courts has been primarily on the right to privacy about sexuality and, thus, it tends to ignore the non-sexual and more public dimensions of the lives of gay
men and lesbians. Efforts to reform attitudes and laws about adoption, marriage, and non-discrimination in the workplace and housing have not been as successful using the courts. But some change has occurred as a result of the moves to unite the European countries economically and socially.

Both the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament have been some of the most progressive voices in equal rights for gays and lesbians. In 1981, the Assembly accepted a recommendation from the lesbian and gay lobby to request that member states (1) ban all laws and practices that criminalize or medicalize homosexual acts between consenting adults; (2) make the age of consent laws the same for both homosexual and heterosexual acts; (3) eliminate discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation; (4) prohibit medical acts aimed at changing sexual orientation; (5) not restrict custody or visitation rights by parents based solely on sexual orientation; and (6) introduce measures to reduce prison violence (van der Veen, et al. 1993).

The European Parliament has also been involved with gay and lesbian issues. In 1984, it approved recommendations similar to the Assembly’s ones, as a result of a report on anti-gay discrimination prepared for the “Committee for Social Affairs and Employment about Sexual Discrimination and Labour” by the Italian member, Vera Squarcialupi. Since 1989, the EC has supported lesbian and gay exchange study programs in the Erasmus program. In 1992, an inventory on the social and legal situation for gays and lesbians was funded by the European Commission and prepared with the assistance of academic and human rights groups in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. The Commission has also supported a lesbian visibility project with the help of a Danish women’s group (van der Veen, et al. 1993).

Overall, the European movement for equal rights for gays and lesbian has been partially successful in the Strasbourg courts, albeit primarily in cases reaffirming the right to privacy in sexual matters. The efforts at law reform through the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament to meet the larger demands of non-discrimination policies beyond sexual privacy issues have resulted in more progressive outcomes, all of which contribute to the climate for reform in Italy. As van der Veen, et al. (1993:242) concluded in their review of the European movement: “Especially in view of the process of a unifying Europe, with more powers being given to supranational agencies, the question of continued investment of effort by the lesbian and gay movement in the European institutions becomes an issue of paramount importance.”

The Gay and Lesbian Movement in Italy

The emergence of the European Union (EU) and the concept of a European citizenship for its member countries, following the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, signals the potential for even more unified policies regarding equal rights for lesbians and gay men. Since Italy is part of the EU, these changes raise some important questions about Italy’s attitudes toward homosexuality and human rights and the rise of new political and social movements organized around gay identity.

The appearance of a gay social movement in Italy over the past 25 years should not seem so unusual given the impetus in the EU toward equal rights concerns.
However, with its roots in the Roman Catholic Church and its strong emphasis on traditional gender roles and ideologies of the patriarchal family (especially in the south), Italy often embodies the concept of heterosexual hegemony. Passerini (1996:145) succinctly described Italy as “a country of patriarchal traditions, imbued with the Mediterranean stereotype of a privileged relationship between the mother and the male child, on which Catholicism and Fascism had insistently played, in different ways, to establish their ideological domination.”

While there has not been any state control of consensual sexual behavior or sodomy laws beginning with the first criminal code (The Codice Zanardelli) in 1889 and continuing through the Fascists’ Codice Rocco of 1931, and despite a post-war legal tradition asserting equality of the sexes, there are yet no legal or social protections for gays and lesbians (Germino 1991). In fact, tolerance of homosexuality was not very high: in a survey conducted in the early 1980s, 63 percent of respondents in Italy agreed that homosexuality can never by justified, compared with 65 percent in the U.S., 56 percent in Spain, 47 percent in France, 34 percent in Denmark, and 22 percent in the Netherlands (Inglehart 1990a:194).

Ironically, Italy has been one of the world’s most homosexually-identified countries historically. Indeed, during the 15th and 16th centuries, homosexuality was known as “le vice italien” throughout Europe (Rocke 1996). Aldrich (1993:222) argued that the fantasy of the homoerotic Mediterranean—from Ancient Greece and Rome, to the Italian Renaissance, and to late 19th century Italy—has been “the longest-lived cultural theme in the history of homosexuality in the Western world.” Its reign in the cultural imagination of gay people has, perhaps, been overshadowed only since the 1970s when “a new culture, that of gay urban America, triumphed over the old Mediterranean” (Aldrich 1993:223). Yet, even in this contemporary culture, personal ads in American gay and non-gay publications continue to demonstrate that Italians (and Italian-Americans) remain a part of the cultural imagination: no other white ethnic group was mentioned in the personals as frequently as Italians (Tricarico 1994).

Although the history of the Roman emperor Hadrian and his young male lover, Antinous, might indicate a public acceptance of same-sex romance in Imperial Rome, it was a period of age-stratified and class-stratified relationships. However, beginning in the 12th century and until the 18th century, attempts to punish sodomy, often by death, became law in many Italian city states (Boswell 1980). Yet, in the 13th and 14th centuries, a circle of love poets in Perugia and burlesque poets in Siena continued to write of the naturalness of homosexual love; Boccaccio included homosexual themes in the Decameron; and Dante spoke kindly (“you were a radiance among men”) about Brunetto Latini, a noted 13th century author, who was placed in Circle Seven in The Inferno among the sodomites (Dall’Orto 1990).

Whether subcultures organized around sexual practices existed or not is highly debated by historians. Dall’Orto (1990) argued that, despite growing hostility toward homosexuality, by the 15th century there may have existed a homosexual subculture in such cities as Perugia, Venice, Florence, and Bologna. Ruggiero (1985:137) found that by the mid-fifteenth century, a homosexual subculture in Venice “became more socially diverse and thus more visible and threatening.”
especially among the upper social classes. Apothecary (barber) shops, schools of gymnastics and music, pastry shops, and various dark areas near churches and bridges became locations for homosexual activity. In Venice, the "Signori di Notte" arrested 35 sodomites in 1407, including 14 from noble families; and in Florence, the "Uffiziali di Notte" monitored and punished (often with fines) homosexual acts (Rocke 1996; Ruggiero 1985). So well known was Florence for homosexual conduct that the Middle High German word for "to sodomize" was "florenzen" (Rocke 1996). On the other hand, a pattern of age-structured homosexual relations—which probably existed for most European men who continued to engage in heterosexual relations and marriage (Rocke 1996)—does not necessarily signify the existence of a separate homosexual subculture, certainly not one as we know it today.

During the early Renaissance period, capital punishment became rarer and a new libertine movement (based in Padua), while not approving of homosexuality, nevertheless led to a "live and let live" attitude—one that significantly viewed homosexuality as a "taste" or "sickness" rather than a sin (Dall'Orto 1983). It was not uncommon, therefore, to find a significant growth in literature and art with homosexual themes. The works of Caravaggio, Cellini, Michelangelo, and Bazzi (known as "Il Sodoma") are often used to suggest that a relatively more tolerant view may have existed in the 15th and early 16th centuries in Italy. Yet, as an Englishman traveling in Padua in 1608 wrote: "beastly Sodomy [is] rife here as in Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Venice, Ferrara, Genoa, Parma not being excepted, nor yet the smallest village in Italy" (quoted in Aldrich 1993:172). However, as Saslow (1989:105) proposed, "the Renaissance planted the first seeds of a new identity and social status for homosexuality, and of a new self-awareness and self-expression on the part of those who found themselves marked off by this role."

Attitudes began to change significantly, and during the 17th and 18th centuries in Italy, a type of "repressive tolerance" toward homosexuality may have emerged, an attitude prevalent in many Catholic countries today (Dall'Orto 1990). This "repressive tolerance"—one in which the state relinquishes social control of sexual expression to the Church—also might explain why, in the 1800s, Italy regained its image as a society accepting of homosexual behavior, so long as homosexuals remained discreet. Rocke (1996) also found that a more gender-structured pattern of same-sex relationships appeared in many parts of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Aldrich (1993) described the 19th century attraction of Italy and the Mediterranean in the literary works of such northern Europeans as August von Platen, Walter Pater, Lord Byron, John Addington Symonds, A. E. Housman, Oscar Wilde, and, of course, E. M. Forster whose novels typify the ideology of repressed northerners finding their romantic and erotic souls in Italy. The paintings by Hans von Marees and the famous photos of Sicilian peasant boys in Taormina by Wilhelm von Gloeden also exemplify the interest in the homoerotic Mediterranean. However, since these images are never from the perspective of the locals, they suggest an important social class and "colonial" dimension to this attraction.
Undoubtedly, the obsession with Italy among northern Europeans is best captured in the classic story of unfulfilled homoerotic desire, *Death in Venice*, written in 1911 by Thomas Mann and later made into a film by Luchino Visconti and an opera by Benjamin Britten, each of whom was well-known for his relationships with other men. For Aldrich (1993:4), the setting and the plot of all three versions are "a paradigm of homosexual desire and a clear itinerary in European gay history," that is, "the Northern man drawn to (homosexual) romance, companionship or sex in the South"—even if it is not with an Italian.

But it wasn't until the 1970s that the homosexual in Italy became more than a symbol for artistic expression and fetishistic desire. In 1971, a "Manifesto for the Moral Revolution: Revolutionary Homosexuality" was mimeographed in Amsterdam but addressed to the Italian public, and the collective organization FUORI! (Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano, or Italian Homosexual Revolutionary Unity Front) was founded in Turin. The first street demonstration for gay rights occurred on May 1, 1972 in Rome's Campo dei Fiori and the formation of OMPO (Organization of the Political Movement of Homosexuals)—a descendant of the earlier R.O. (Homosexual Revolt)—resulted in monthly information bulletins (Consoli 1979).

Also formed in 1972 was A.I.R.D.O. (the Italian Association for the Recognition of Homophile Rights) which aimed to "promote homophile moral, social, and civil evolution; make public opinion sensitive to the right of homophiles to freely express their affections and sentiments; help homophiles deal with the legal, medical and psychiatric establishments" (A.I.R.D.O. 1976:1). In Rome in 1976, Massimo Consoli opened Italy's first gay archives and Mario Mieli published *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique* in 1977, one of the first important theoretical and political books about the repression of a universal homosexual desire and "why the liberation of homosexuality is indispensable to human emancipation as a whole" (Mieli 1977:217).

In the post-World War II years, Italy's politics were heavily affected by a strong Communist party and by control of a centrist government led by the Christian Democrats. Influenced in part by these groups, by the activism of the late 1960s in Paris and the United States, and by anarchist and Marxist intellectual writings, Italian leaders of various new social movements were questioning some of the basic structures of capitalist society which contributed to sexual oppression (Passerini 1996). According to Tarrow (1990), however, the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s emerged in a social and political context that allowed for a closer working relationship between established political parties and the newer radicalized leaders.

Despite arguments made by many theorists that new social movements tend to work outside official state structures (unlike the more traditional labor and agrarian movements and neo-corporatist organizations which were typically sanctioned by the state and worked within the framework of the political parties [Dalton, et al. 1990]), the Italian movements of the early and mid-1960s "first appeared as an insurgency within the party system—a heritage that they never fully transcended" (Tarrow 1990:251). The parties of the Left in Italy often served offstage roles in "the origins, the dynamics, and the ultimate institutionalization
of the new movements" and provided the space for them to act (Tarrow 1990:254). The coalition government was centrist, the Christian Democrats were situated more in religious than business values, and the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) had not been delegitimized as it looked to expand among the rising middle class.

As in other societies with an emerging identity-based movement, Italy—especially in the north—was also experiencing a postmaterial value change in the 1970s that focused on individual freedom and quality of life concerns: family ties were loosened, church attendance declined, and student movements against the authority of the university increased (Tarrow 1996). But many of these concerns were being expressed within the system of the established political parties, particularly those on the left.

It was in such a climate that women began to organize, at first within intellectual circles and established Church and political organizations, unions, extraparliamentary parties, collectives, and consciousness-raising groups (Tarrow 1996). Despite the 1948 Constitution of the Italian Republic which declared the equality of the sexes, contradictions in the laws highlight "the dissonance between women's equality (or at any rate a tendency towards their equality) in the public sphere, and their subordination in the private sphere" (Passerini 1996: 146). Such were the conditions that led women to organize and seek reform of family law, abortion rights, and divorce. Working within the political party system, the women's movements were able to effect significant social change by creating laws establishing equality and individual freedom and by setting the stage for the emergence of identity movements centered on challenging the traditional ideologies of family, sexuality, and gender.

As a result, divorce was permitted in 1970 and confirmed by referendum in 1974; other major changes in family law were passed in 1975; women were legally given parity with men in the workplace in 1977; abortion was legalized in 1978 (and free through the national health care system); and Roman Catholicism in 1984 was declared no longer the "state religion" (Di Scala 1998). With free preschool care, generous paid leave for pregnant women and mothers of young children, more women were able to work outside the home, attend higher education, and enter professions in greater numbers. And with these reforms came a critique of traditional gender roles, in particular among the intellectual middle classes in the urban metropolitan areas of the north (Passerini 1996).

From 1951 to 1983, there was a 20 percent increase in urban middle class jobs and an increase in participation in non-Church and non-political associations, leading Parker (1996: 119) to conclude that "Italy is witnessing the steady abandonment of 'strong' or party-based political activity in favour of a much weaker, more varied and dynamic form of social self-realization." In addition, Italy (again, mostly in the north) became economically more advanced, people became more independent and mobile, and, by the early 1990s, had the lowest birth rate in the world (Di Scala 1998). In short, the preconditions necessary for the emergence of a modern-style gay identity and new social movement—that is, one based on sexual orientation identity rather than on age-structured or gender-structured same-sex relationships—were in place.
However, this does not mean that an Italian gay movement would mimic those of other Western developed countries. For one, trying to organize Italian gay and lesbian people into identity-based political movements is a difficult task. In a culture which rewards conformity, continues to view sexuality as a private matter, and practices “repressive tolerance” toward homosexuality, mobilizing people into activism takes some effort. This is supported by Gartner and Segura’s (1997:156) study of a decision-theoretic model of political mobilization in which they concluded that “The marginal costs of group mobilization are higher for invisible than visible groups....Sympathizers are less likely to support invisible groups for fear of incurring societal repression for being identified as a member.”

Thus, in Italy, so long as people did not call attention to their sexual behavior, they could do what they wished, even within the charade of a traditional heterosexual marriage, and did not need to organize politically. As Dall’Orto (1990:624) described it: “the Mediterranean culture of homosexuality has long permitted a certain phase of homosexual experimentation to young heterossexuals in order to safeguard the virginity of nubile girls.”

For generations, men were able to maintain a heterosexual role by remaining in the dominant position sexually, regardless of the sex of their partner. To be masculine is to be “on top;” to be “on the bottom” is feminine. Men who engage in penetrative sex are heterosexual and masculine, while those penetrated are either women or un finocchio. These traditional gender differences, labeled machismo in many Latin and Mediterranean societies, usually need to be contested before a gay movement can develop, as Adam (1995:95) claimed: “With a sexual semiology defined far more by gender than by sexual orientation, a gay world and identity are much less likely to develop.”

But this mentality began to undergo significant changes in the 1970s and 1980s when concepts about women’s roles, sexuality, birth control, abortion, and the family were being challenged in Italy by the growing feminist movements “that brought women’s issues forcefully to the nation’s attention” (Di Scala 1998:314). It is not accidental that the earliest Italian gay movements “echoed many of the practices of feminism,” took a trans-class approach while still critiquing economic oppression, “drew upon the tradition of left intellectual culture,” and sought coalitions with the women’s movement (Passerini 1996:153).

The maintenance of gender-structured identities in same-sex sexual acts also began to be questioned by an emerging population of men and women who had been tourists during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the openly gay communities in London, Amsterdam, Berlin, San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. There, they were able to learn about more “egalitarian” relationships between same-sex partners whose identities did not have to mimic the traditional categories of masculine and feminine. There, they witnessed the power of identity politics, explored gay urban ghettos composed of residential and commercial spaces owned and operated by lesbians and gays, and experienced the power of mobilizing to change the legal and social customs of a society. There, they learned what it meant to be “gay” and “lesbian”—concepts so different enough from the words and labels of their own language, that the English word “gay” began to be used in Italian.
However, local cultural norms have to be accommodated for the movement to become visible, organized, and relevant. To politicize identity in a country which has not experienced an openly anti-gay movement or an AIDS epidemic related to same-sex behavior (and where medical costs are covered by the state) required much effort on the part of those who were motivated to seek change. For many in Italy, affirming a gay identity is a political act, not a lifestyle choice, thereby making it more difficult to mobilize larger numbers of people into a new social movement. Since there is a cultural resistance to discussing one’s personal life publicly or adopting an identity at variance with the dominant social and religious norms of Italian society, organizing into political communities based on gay identity is not easy in Italy.

Furthermore, with a strong ideology of the family \textit{(la famiglia)} which defines many of one’s social ties and loyalties, it is also not common for people to leave home before marriage and live a single life apart or far from one’s family, especially in cities where apartments are scarce. This limits the “personal networks of communication” that are important for the continuity and mobilization of new social movements that do not depend on already existing interest group media outlets and organizations (Kaase 1990). And the differences in social norms and economic conditions between the north and south make it even more difficult to mobilize gay movements in much of southern Italy where families are larger, fewer women work outside of the home, and poverty rates are much higher than in the north (Di Scala 1998).

Ironically, it was in the south where two Sicilian 17-year olds killed themselves to protest the way they were shunned for trying to live openly gay lives that led to some important changes. Recognizing the need to provide support services to those struggling to understand their sexuality, a civil rights section of the Italian Association for Culture and Recreation (ARCI)—Italy’s leading recreative association connected to the Socialist and Communist parties—was founded in Palermo in 1981. This lends credence to Tarrow’s (1990:267) argument that new social movement theorists need to consider that, in Italy at least, “rather than suffering either debilitating preemption or corrupting cooptation, movements often act in uneasy coalition with elements in the old party system.”

By 1985, ARCI Gay became a nationwide organization of 15 chapters. Today, over 25 chapters are united through a central organization housed in a building in Bologna called “Il Cassero” at Porta Saragozza which was donated by the city government (PCI) to the local gay organization on June 28, 1982—the anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion in New York (Solfrini 1994). ARCI Gay is dedicated to promoting gay civil liberties and supporting legislation recognizing same-sex couples, non-discrimination, and individual privacy. It also has become Italy’s leading organization devoted to AIDS education and prevention. In 1989, ARCI Gay Donna (now called ARCI Lesbica) was founded in Verona by a group of women to focus on some of the unique social and health issues lesbians face in Italy. Today, all the top leadership is required to be gender co-equal, a significant achievement in a patriarchal culture, but one typical of the organization of new social movements which reject the more hierarchical neo-corporist structures (Dalton, et al. 1990). In 1994, the official name of the organization was changed to
ARCI Gay-ARCI Lesbica (Solfrini 1994), although in 1996 the two groups separated.

However, there remains some debate among lesbians about the most effective way to create change in Italy. According to Borghi (1995), the visible lesbian population is organized in two ways. One consists of separatist groups (such as “Collegamento Lesbiche Italiane” in Rome, “Le Aliene” and “Visibilia” in Bologna, and “Nitroglicerina” in Perugia) that are historically connected to the feminist movement of the late 1970s and 1980s and whose arguments focus on women’s studies theory, women’s bodily practices, and women’s history. The other lesbian groups include those who favor the (male) discourse of civil rights and legal issues (especially relationships and parenting) and emphasize coalition-building and strategic alliances in such organizations as ARCI Gay and ARCI Lesbica and the “Amando(r)la” in Florence (Borghi 1995).

Other evidence exists of the alliance between established political parties and new social movement groups, especially with leftist and centrist parties. In 1992, the city government in Rome donated a building to house OMPO, the gay organization and archives founded by Massimo Consoli, and Niki Vendola became the first openly gay man elected to the Italian Parliament, running as a candidate of the PCI in Rome. Since July 2, 1994, when about 10,000 people marched in Rome in the country’s first gay pride parade led by Mayor Francesco Rutelli, increasing numbers have continued every summer in other Italian cities, including the more conservative Naples in 1996. And the appearance of several bars and shops concentrated on one street in Milan—the Via Sammartini, advertised in Babilonia, Italy’s major gay magazine, as “the gay street” (and using those English words)—may indicate the start of a gay economic infrastructure.

Despite these signs of a growing public visibility of gays and lesbians, and despite guarantees in the Italian Constitution that all citizens are equal before the law, violence against gay men has continued. Franco Grillini, president of ARCI Gay, estimated that every year in Italy between 150 and 200 men are murdered due to their homosexuality, including the highly publicized murder of a Papal aide in January 1998 (Tagliabue 1998). Policies favoring heterosexuality also continue to prevail. In 1995, for example, the Association of Italian Medical and Dental Surgeons voted to restrict artificial insemination only to “normal couples” unable to have children, thereby excluding lesbians and single women. Concern about this issue, as well as about civil unions (“marriage”), has resulted in a “tightening of alliances among lesbian groups and a surge of lesbian political activity” (Borghi 1995:6). The uneasy relationships between the government parties and the social movements are evidently not over as these movements attempt to strike a balance within the unique structures and ever-changing politics of Italy. What Offe (1990:233) said about new social movements, may help clarify what is happening now in Italy:

They represent a non-reactionary, universalist critique of modernity and modernization by challenging institutionalized patterns of technical, economic, political, and cultural rationality without falling back upon idealized tradi-
tional institutions and arrangements such as the family, religious values, property, state authority, or the nation.

But in a society that relies so heavily on traditional structures of family and religion, one wonders in what ways the gay and lesbian movement will eventually mobilize and what shape it will take (see Clark 1993).

Conclusions

In order to understand how gay movements become globalized, it is important to assess a society’s structural changes in the family, the church, the law, and the economy, as well as concepts about masculinity and femininity. The socio-political changes in Italian culture throughout the last two decades illustrate how these—along with the media-diffused American-style gay politics and identity—have contributed to the emergence of a gay and lesbian movement. This is evident when looking at the shifts toward relatively “egalitarian” gay-identity relationships which vary from earlier forms based on status differences of age, class, or gender roles.

In addition, what is becoming globalized about the international gay and lesbian movement is the creation of a political self based on sexuality and community. This resonates with the theoretical debates surrounding what constitutes a new social movement and its emphasis on cultural and quality of life issues. Gay political identity can lead to social differentiation, resulting in the formation of value communities and the development of social institutions in which a gay or lesbian identity can be discovered, enacted, and maintained, thereby setting up conditions conducive to the rise of new social movements (Kaase 1990).

The creation of openly gay organizations, neighborhoods, and infrastructures in Italy is a relatively more recent phenomenon than it has been in some other European countries. Research about these changes, regional variations, and the cultural and economic conditions historically and today that have contributed to the shifts from age-structured to gender-structured to modern identity-structured same-sex relationships needs to be undertaken in order to comprehend fully the complexities of sexual and cultural changes over time in Italy.

Social institutions—gay and non-gay ones—are shaped in part by the globalization of mass media (including the growing influence of computers and gay/lesbian Web sites), international travel, and political trends toward unification of social and economic services. In Italy, the availability of national gay newspapers, magazines (Babilonia), and Internet sites (www.gayitalia.com); bars and saunas; archives and political organizations contributes to the institutionalization of a gay movement and identity. While preserving some of the local flavor and customs of Italian life (such as a cultural emphasis on la famiglia and alliances with established political parties, especially on the Left), these institutions also depend in part on connections with similar international organizations, thus creating a dialectic between the local and the global.

As many Italian gays and lesbians become increasingly impatient with those who maintain heterosexual marriages while engaging in homosexual acts sub rosa, and impatient with the refusal of the state to guarantee equality under the
law, they further the globalization of gay political identity and consciousness. As they continue to challenge the traditions of gender roles, family arrangements, and religion through new social movements, Italian gays and lesbians move one step closer to living open lives based more on equality than on lives of furtive sexual encounters that depend on differences in status and gender roles. And it is this change, perhaps unlike any other, that unites the Italian gay movement with the international gay and lesbian socio-political movements. Uncovering the inequalities linked to the privileges and assumptions of hegemonic heterosexuality in society’s core social institutions is becoming one of the common goals of lesbian and gay people mobilizing in many different countries throughout the world.

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