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**Chasing Sisterhood:
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Global Women's Activism (1949–1963)**

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Ma è per colpa delle cacche dei cani che abbiamo smesso di guardare in cielo?

Was it dog droppings that made us stop looking up at the sky?

This is the funeral epitaph of Ottavia, a young woman who, like the protagonists of this work, I never had the chance to meet, but whose story I came to know through those who grieved the pain of her untimely passing – an event that marked the final days of writing this thesis, spent in Naples as a guest of a dear friend. I dedicate this work to her, along with all the women, men, non-binary people, living beings, and their precious sensitivity, so often devalued in a world that moves too fast – a world that forces us to question the lack of *humanity* in an age where humans have never been so numerous on the planet. A dedication must also go to the Palestinian civilians who, in these days, are paying the price for unresolved international issues – issues that reduce their lives to little more than fluctuations in a market index. And to all those who have the courage to speak out and rise against injustice, with patience and resolve, striving – despite the undeniable contradictions and complexities of this world – for a more ecological future, in the broadest sense of the word.

This dissertation is an attempt to recount the commitment and effort of those who have worked toward the ideal of a better world, striving to navigate the complexity of their time in order to build a different, more just future – one grounded in active dialogue and mutual understanding. This was no easy goal for the activists at the heart of these pages, just as it was no easy task for me to painstakingly trace the red threads that connect their lives, separated by 20,000 *li*. A journey into often-silent

stories of women who, as forerunners of postwar diplomacy for human rights, undertook arduous paths in their attempt to sow the seeds of dialogue. Lives in motion, in that constant state of imbalance that drains time and energy from their loved ones yet brings fulfilment and awareness of how essential it is to nurture a tension toward dialogue – in the intricate effort to cultivate a good greater than oneself. I dedicate this work to these extraordinary women as well.

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Introduction: Reclaiming spaces to reclaim history

On 16-17 July 1942, French police and gendarmes, at the behest of the German authorities, organized a mass arrest of foreign Jewish families in Paris. According to records, 13,152 Jews were arrested, including more than 4,000 children. They were held at the Vélodrome d'Hiver (lit. 'Winter Stadium'; known as "Vel' d'Hiv") in extremely crowded conditions, almost without food and water and no sanitary facilities. Even though many Jews had been warned of the risk, women and children did not flee, hoping that only men would be targeted for deportation. This event marked the largest-scale Jewish mass arrest on French territory in history. In the week following the arrests, the Jews were taken from the Winter Stadium to the concentration camps of Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande in the Loiret region south of Paris and to Drancy. At the beginning of August, all those who were detained in the camps were separated from their children and deported. Every prisoner had their head shaved and had a forceful body search before deportation. The majority were taken to Auschwitz and killed there. In Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande, more than 3,000 infants and kids were abandoned. Nearly 38,000 Jews had been transferred from France to Auschwitz by the end of September 1942. Only about 780 of them were still alive in 1945. «The Vel' d'Hiv round-ups, organized by the French authorities and carried out by French policemen, became engraved in French national memory as a symbol of the responsibility of the regime and the French nation for the Holocaust of the Jews of France» (Yad Vashem).

Three years later, on 1 December 1945, the Stadium that had become the symbol of the holocaust was reappropriated by the *Comité d'Initiative Internationale Pour la préparation et l'organisation d'un Congrès International des Femmes* (hereafter,

Comité). The *Comité* hosted a huge women's group with more than 10,000 attendees, including foreign delegates who were introduced and invited to speak to the mass audience, to «inform and thank all the women in the Paris region who worked for the Congress without being able to attend it themselves» (FDIF 1946, 22).¹ The Vel d'Hiv meeting marked the culmination of the Congress, which was diligently organized by the women of Paris. This event is commemorated as the foundational moment that gave rise to an influential global political entity, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). As the name suggests, the WIDF was an umbrella federation, attempting at uniting women «de toutes les nations représenteront les différents aspects de leur pays, sociaux, religieux ou politiques» (Comité 1945, 5). The federation's gathering was envisioned as an inclusive event, together women from different territories, backgrounds, and classes, ranging from housewives to trade unionists, doctors, artists, diplomats, and politicians (Meyerowitz 1994, 143 in Pieper Mooney 2013, 52).

¹ The meeting gathered more than 15,000 women, as recalled by participant Vidya Kanuga in her autobiography (as cited in Armstrong 2016, 320). It is worth noting that while Armstrong refers to the Winter Stadium meeting as the “opening Congress,” it was in fact more of a closing salute or celebratory gathering, as indicated in the official proceedings. (WIDF 1946).



Figure 1. The WIDF's first Congress closing meeting at the Vel d'Hiv, and Eugénie Cotton (1881 - 1967), the federation's first president² (de Haan 2010, 560).

It is plausible that the *Comité* intentionally chose the Vel d'Hiv – nowadays still associated with the 1942 roundups – in an attempt to restore its original significance. A deliberate choice was made to confront the grievous recent past. Thousands of women gathered to claim to be protagonists and prove their willingness to establish WIDF founding principles, marking a watershed between the pre-, and the post-war. Anti-fascism was one of the milestones of the umbrella federation.³ This was hinted already at a former Congress called by the Union des Femmes Françaises (UFF) when

² The author does not cite the source of the figure. It was presumably taken from a later post-1967 publication on the congress, as it includes the exact dates of Cotton's presidency, which lasted until her death in 1967 (de Haan 2010, 555). It was certainly not published in the 1946 conference proceedings, which featured only a few half-length portraits of congress delegates.

³ Many of the women who participated in the establishment of the WIDF came from the resistance front of the respective countries. Their vision of a just and peaceful world was based on the continuation of the anti-fascist coalition formed by the Soviet Union and the Western powers during the war (de Haan 2009, 245).

the WIDF was first conceptualized. Held in June 1945, five months prior to the WIDF foundation, the UFF's Congress proved the participation of various women's national organizations from many areas of the globe, spanning from the United Kingdom to Belgium, Yugoslavia, Spain, Italy, the Soviet Union, and China. Representative of this latter, the pianist Li Xianmin 李献敏 declared:

La lutte contre l'ennemi commun nous a unies, nous espérons fermement que notre union deviendra plus intime, la compréhension mutuelle plus complète, et nous nous associons à l'initiative de Madame Cotton pour la création d'une Organisation mondiale des femmes de tous les pays. Ainsi, nous unirons nos forces pour aider à construire une paix qui excluera toute injustice et toute agression dans le future. (Comité 1945, 14)

The common enemy, Li's mentions, is precisely fascism.⁴ Anti-fascism was cultivated alongside other related principles, notably preserving a lasting peace, assuring women's rights, and providing better conditions for children. These principles were seen as interrelated with one another and underpinned the federation's activities and goals (de Haan 2010, 548). The WIDF did have a significant connection with leftist ideologies, but, especially in its first phase, it aimed at including women from various political contexts.⁵ Li Xianmin herself as representing the Republic of China (ROC), at the time notably involved in the civil war between the Chinese Nationalist Party

⁴ This enemy is also explicit in the report's title: *Contre Le Fascisme, Pour La Paix et Le Bonheur, Réalisons l'Union Des Femmes de Tous Les Pays!* (Against the Fascism, For Peace and Happiness, Let Us Achieve the Union of Women of All Countries!) (Comité, 1945).

⁵ The WIDF's membership and leadership included a diverse coalition of women from various political backgrounds, including many who were part of or allied with Communist and anti-colonial movements in their respective countries (de Haan, 2009, 242-3).

国民党 (*Guomindang* more commonly transliterated as *Kuomintang*, KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party 中国共产党 (*Zhongguo Gongchandang*, CCP).⁶

This project wants to intervene at this crossing of histories, focusing particularly on those stories left at the margins. In particular, the study offers the field of Global Socialist Feminism a unique transcultural focus on Euro-Asian relations. It highlights an analysis of the All-China Women's Federation 中华全国妇女联合会 (*Zhonghua Quanguo Funü Lianhehui*, ACWF)⁷ and the Union of Italian Women (Unione Donne Italiane, UDI). These organizations represented the most significant leftist women formations in Asia and Western Europe, respectively, during the Cold War period. Their relations are examined considering their placement within a broader network that developed in the aftermath of World War II under the umbrella organization WIDF.

The study traces the trajectory of the initiation, development, and flattening of relations between these two women's movements from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. It considers a gendered periodization based on transnational relations, highlighting the most crucial moments for transnational exchange. This focus proves helpful in analyzing the reciprocity between *glocal* sociopolitical dynamics and the women's movement (Roudometof 2016, De Vito 2015; 2019; Cioci 2022). Specifically, it examines how women's activism impacted the gender framework and women's and human rights. The transcultural analysis points to the activists' strategies to develop

⁶ During the WIDF's first Congress, the Chinese Communist forces were still clandestine; by the time of the Second Congress in 1948, the ROC presence was replaced by that of representatives of the Chinese Women from liberated areas.

⁷ Until the 1957 congress named All-China Women's Democratic Federation 中华全国民主妇女联合会 (*Zhonghua Quanguo Minzhu Funü Lianhehui*, ACWDF).

transnational, transreligious, and translinguistic bridges, envisioned to bypass regional differences and translate local – often decolonial – struggles into the global arena. The study uncovers the variety within the global socialist movement, contributing to the challenge of the still-prevalent bipolar framework in Cold War studies. In order to deconstruct this framework, a contextualization of the WIDF network – within which both the ACWDF and the UDI operated – is first provided, along with a discussion of the related historiography.

Navigating the Tensions of Cold War Bipolarity

As early as the spring of 1947, the onset of the Global Cold War drastically curtailed the idealistic aspirations of the WIDF, which became polarized towards the Soviet Communist positions afterward (de Haan 2009). In March 1947 the USA implemented measures to counter the Soviet threat in Greece. Around the same period, from March to May, Communist Ministers in Belgium, France, Italy, and Luxembourg were forced out of their positions due to conflicts between their commitments to their national coalitions and directives from the Soviet Union. This occurred as Communists gained control in Hungary. In June 1947, the American Secretary of State, George Marshall, introduced a comprehensive plan for Europe's reconstruction. Despite holding the moral high ground, Communists quickly condemned “American imperialism” and advocated for the defense of national sovereignty. Capitalizing on a volatile socio-economic climate, the Communist Parties in France and Italy actively contributed to the initiation of major strikes during the winter of 1947.⁸ The bipolar

⁸ For a helpful summary, see CVCE 2016; for an in-depth analysis, see Arcidiacono 1993 and Martin McCauley 2021; and to link this context with the Women's movements, see de Haan (2009, 242-3).

dynamics affected the WIDF, resulting in progressive confinement into ideological and political stands. In the USA, the anti-communist campaign led to an intense persecution of communists and individuals, causing also the departure of many “non-Communists” from the WIDF (Saunders 1999; van Dongen, Roulin, Scott-Smith 2014). This process was very rapid. If at the 1945 Congress, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union were hailed as the «three great democracies» (WIDF 1946, 216) fighting together against fascism, two years later, the US became the imperialist enemy, while the USSR was considered beyond criticism.⁹

In accordance with its funding principles, WIDF activities focused on promoting peace between women and children’s rights under the premise of opposing initiatives from the American imperialist front. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, as well as military alliances and initiatives the USA and its allies promoted, were all interpreted as attempts to destabilize world peace and threaten women’s rights.¹⁰ These ideologically based endeavors also came with their trade-offs. Human rights did see a decline in the precedence they held in WIDF’s 1945; de Haan (2009, 245) reports how the WIDF second congress in December 1948 already showed this change in attitude. In the WIDF ranks, most of the non-Communist formations dropped out. The umbrella federation policies are reported to be decidedly pro-Soviet

⁹ The quote from WIDF’s Congress is reported in de Haan (2009, 245). The same author, however, stressed, in another work, that «it is very important to note that, although the Soviet Union had a strong position in the organization, the WIDF was more than an ‘Eastern European’ or ‘Soviet bloc’ organization, as very often stated or assumed. The WIDF united progressive (left feminist, anti-fascist, and pro-Communist) women’s organizations – some of them autonomous women’s organizations, others the women’s section of a Communist Party – from around the world, including Western and ‘Third World’ countries such as Australia, Canada, China, and Indonesia.» (2010, 555).

¹⁰ This is clear from the WIDF peace treaties, such as Peace Pact between the Five Great Powers. The call for the institution of a Peace Council within the UN through an APPEL aux FEMMES du MONDE ENTIER lancé par le COMITE EXECUTIF (20-24 juin 1951) en soutien de la campagne pour un PACTE DE PAIX entre les CINQ GRANDES PUISSANCES, and LETTRE ADRESSEE par le COMITE EXECUTIF de la F.D.I.F. à l’O.N.U., sur le rapport de la Commission de la F.D.I.F. en COREE (APPEAL to the WOMEN of the WORLD launched by the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (June 20-24, 1951) in support of the campaign for a PEACE PACT between the FIVE GREAT POWERS, and LETTER ADDRESSED by the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the F.D.I.F. to the U.N., on the report of the F.D.I.F. Commission in KOREA)(ACUDI, DNM, 8, 40). For a broader discussion, see chapter 1. (ibid.).

by then. As proof of this, the WIDF decidedly stood with the USSR against Yugoslavia, expelling the local women's federation after the Tito-Stalin split. Furthermore, de Haan stresses how the US local women's federation, the Congress of American Women (CAW), was affected by these dynamics and was persecuted by national authorities – by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) – accused of being (allegedly) Communists as early as 1949 (de Haan 2010, 548-555).

However, the WIDF attempted to maintain its diverse makeup since, starting in the 1950s, many anti-colonial women from the global South began to join the Federation (de Haan 2012, 17). Among the most telling cases is that of Indonesia. By 1965, Indonesian Gerwani had become the most prominent Communist women's group outside of the Communist front. This organization fell apart due to a smear campaign that focused on sexual defamation, which was conducted by the military under the leadership of General Suharto (de Haan 2010, 567).¹¹

Overall, recent studies focusing on peripheral and minor actors, micro-spatial contexts and biographies have shed light on the continuous impact of the WIDF network beyond the constraints of Cold War politics (Artwińska, Mrozik 2021, de Haan 2023b; de Haan 2015; Armstrong 2016; Betti 2020b). As pointed out by de Haan (2013, 180), human rights *never* completely faded from the WIDF agenda.¹² This awareness has gained increasing traction in recent scholarly debates, with the activities of leftist women activists operating across the bipolar and patriarchal structures of Cold War power becoming a central focus of what is now termed Global Socialist Feminism

¹¹ See also the biographical account of Umi Sardjono, among the key activists of the Indonesian women federation Gerwani (McGregor, Rahayu 2023).

¹² I drew on the emphasis found in de Haan's 2013 article (180), where she highlights that, for example, in the context of the third WIDF Congress held in Copenhagen in June 1953, the core agenda was focused on women's rights.

(GSF). This emerging historiographical approach has contributed significantly to dismantling the long-standing stereotype of socialist women as mere instruments of the Communist front. The term GSF is used in this thesis to point at the network of activists who worked within the socialist state institutions and thus recalling this term definition provided by recent scholarship:

[...] socialist women's organizations and their vast international networks of progressive women seeking to win state power, [...] women working within the corridors of power, women who fastidiously embedded women's rights in the constitutions and legal codes of their respective countries while simultaneously building global solidarities to support and expand their commitments to both socialism and feminism. (Armstrong 2021)¹³

Despite – and in part because of – the need to navigate a patriarchal and politically polarized landscape, socialist feminists demonstrated remarkable strategic acumen. They skillfully engaged in political struggles across local, national, and international arenas, effectively operating within and across multiple levels of activism and governance.

While an increasing number of studies are enriching the broader historical understanding of this previously understudied actor,¹⁴ the intertwined histories of the GSF movement during the first two decades of the Cold War remain insufficiently explored. In particular, the dynamics of the WIDF's work – as revealed through the

¹³ Armstrong, Elisabeth. "The Internationalism of Socialist State Feminism." In *Global Socialist Feminism*, <https://www.globalsocialistfeminism.com>. Accessed July 25, 2021.

¹⁴ See for instance the recent studies by Andeweg and Kurvinen (2024), de Haan (2023b), Armstrong (2023), Kim (2023), McGregor, Dragojlovic, Loney (2021), Ghodsee (2022); Artwińska, Mrozic (2020); Betti, Papastephanaki, Tolomelli (2022a.)

interactions among its local branches – still warrant in-depth analysis, as stressed recently by Francisca de Haan (2023a).

This dissertation centers on the interactions and exchanges among women activists within the transnational women's network of the Socialist world. In particular, it examines the relationship between ACWDF/ACWF and UDI activists as a lens through which to explore broader exchanges between East Asia and Western Europe. The bilateral dimension is considered the first reading level, serving as a standpoint for studying glocal interactions.

Across worlds: communist women as diplomats and activists

The thesis analyzes the policies aimed at protecting women's rights – and, consequently, human rights – within the context of the international socialist women's movement that emerged in the postwar period, alongside its related political debates, propaganda, and mass actions. The organization of this movement soon assumed a markedly transnational character. The subject is examined in relation to the key stages that marked its development – from its inception and expansion to a critical moment of reorganization within the WIDF, triggered by the emergence of tensions among its affiliated federations. This multi-voiced debate is explored through the lens of the relationship between two women's federations from geographically and politically distant regions: the ACWDF, a united federation promoted by the state party CCP, and the UDI, the principal leftist women's federation in Italy. The analysis begins with the events of the late 1940s – specifically 1949, the year in which the

ACWDF was officially founded – and continues through to 1963, when the relationship between the WIDF and both the Italian and Chinese federations reached a breaking point, resulting in a necessary distancing.

A fundamental premise of this analysis is that, in the context of socialist and communist women's organizations, the promotion of human rights must be understood in relation to the historical and political context in which it was situated. In this sense, the promotion of human rights subsumed the promotion of women's and children's rights, which were not advanced as primary and autonomous causes, but rather as part of a broader political project carried forward by communist organizations. These organizations conceptually distanced themselves from the movements that had defined themselves as explicitly feminist in the liberal and socialist milieus of the 1920s. It is therefore crucial to recognize that these federations operated within a framework where the concepts of "woman" and "femininity" were shaped by a Marxist-Leninist political discourse. Within this framework, "women's work" – that is, work within and in dialogue with the affiliated political organizations – was conceived as part of a broader political action that cut across all aspects of society (Eyferth 2012; Casalini 2005; Betti 2019). It is in this sense that the political actions of socialist women and their advocacy for women's rights must be understood: inseparable from the promotion of human rights in a broader sense, and therefore from broader efforts – coordinated with other political actors – for the promotion of the rights of children and workers, as well as policies in defense and protection of peace (Wang 2015; Tambor 2021; Turco 2022). In particular, in a postwar horizon, the issue of peace emerged as a priority around which the policies of the international women's federation coalesced. The period was marked by the aftermath of the Second World War and by the

numerous ongoing wars of independence linked to the irreversible processes of decolonization.

Chasing sisterhood explores the discourse on human rights within the cross-cultural relations between Italian and Chinese socialist women activists from a multilayered perspective, taking into account the various key actors that shaped this dialogue. At a first level, the thesis considers the connections between these two organizations within the broader network of the international socialist world in which they were embedded. First and foremost, attention is given to the international platform of the WIDF, which coordinated the international and transnational actions of women's organizations. In addition to the WIDF, the analysis includes other international entities that played a role in building a socialist front for the promotion of human rights, children's rights, and peace. Chief among these was the World Peace Council (WPC), which aimed to coordinate socialist-aligned peace movements and closely collaborated with the WIDF, particularly in the early years following its founding in 1949. Relations with the WPC were developed in coordination with the broader political front of the communist world, with particular attention to international political events and in alignment with the positioning of the respective political parties – namely, the CCP in China and the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) in Italy, as well as the PCUS more generally on the international level. In this sense, one cannot overlook the proximity between the political line of national and international women's organizations and their respective political parties of reference.

The actions of women's organizations, however, cannot be viewed as merely unidirectional – as traditional historiography has long maintained – disregarding objective

interpretations that could assess the real involvement of the activists in pursuing both the concrete goals and the higher ambitions of socialist and communist ideologies aimed at achieving equity and equality (Bonfiglioli 2015; 2020; de Haan 2010; 2015). Such interpretations tend to obscure the heterogeneity of the movement and its participants, as well as the effectiveness of their actions, which in many cases had a significant impact on women and children and on the broader conceptualization of human rights (Bonfiglioli 2014; Betti 2020b; 2024a; 2024b; Ghodsee 2004; 2015b; 2019; Wang 2017; de Haan 2016; 2023).

The complexity of these relationships is unpacked in the chapters of this dissertation. This focus proved to be effective in enriching the historiography of reference for a set of reasons. Firstly, because it enlightens the perspective of secondary or minor actors, it is beneficial for the still prevailing bipolar bias of the Cold War scholarship. Despite their “minor” status, within a bipolar framework, the ACWDF and the UDI represented the most significant leftist women’s formations in the countries of reference, closely related to their party of reference, namely the CCP and the PCI. Both being the most influential leftist political formations in their respective contexts (Samarani 2014a; Samarani, De Giorgi 2011).

At a second level, the availability of historical sources supported this choice. Recent scholarship has stressed that in the European context, the availability of sources on the transnational women’s movement was affected by Cold War dynamics (de Haan 2012; 2016). Historians have stressed how the study of the WIDF is affected by the absence of any archive of the federation (de Haan 2010). For this reason, the present research concentrated on first hand documents preserved in national and local archives of the organizations affiliated with the WIDF. After the dissolution of the

USSR and other communist regimes and parties, including the PCI, the story of these political entities has been subject to influence by the perspective of the winners. The conservation and availability of the documentary heritage of these entities have also been subject to political influences, resulting in a lack of will and subsequent employment of financial resources to carry out preservation, organization, and opening to the public. As a result, this process relied upon foundations, NGOs, and the voluntary work of former politicians and activists. This is also true for the UDI, now an NGO relying on voluntary work.¹⁵ Additionally, in the case of currently existing socialist states, this documentation is subject to censorship due to internal political issues related to the legitimacy of the country both domestically and internationally. This is also true for the People's Republic of China (PRC), where the Cold War is still considered ongoing, and historical issues related to the most controversial years of the conflict are subject to restrictions. This is also valid for the documents pertaining to the ACWF, as highlighted by Wang Zheng (2017), and proved true also for the present research. Thus, the analysis of the sources pertaining to the ACWF preserved in other archives, albeit partial, can contribute to filling the gap in the historiography of the official image the Chinese women's federation displayed at a transnational level through the analysis of the official image the Chinese federation displayed in the transnational context. Subsequently, the UDI archival sources, among the most comprehensive and well-preserved, greatly contribute to reconstructing the GSF transnational movement.

¹⁵ The local branches of the UDI underwent the same process. The bigger branches, such as the Bologna and Siena ones, organized their documentation within the historical preservation activities of the NGO. Other branches managed to organize their documents and donate them to local archives, as in the case of Taranto; in other instances, the documents were preserved by individuals and nowadays are still missing, as in the case of the Venetian branch of the former federation.

As mentioned, the relations between women's organizations are studied in light of their development from the aftermath of WWII and their evolution until 1963. 1949 represents the starting point, in line with the official creation of the ACWDF, and the 1963 World Women congress attests a major reconfiguration of both the WIDF-ACWDF and WIDF-UDI relations. The fourteen-year period considered is marked by major turning points. In particular, the year 1953 proved crucial for the enhancement of the transnational exchanges of the Chinese Federation, opening also to "capitalist" countries after the end of the Korean War (Samarani, De Giorgi 2011; Meneguzzi Rostagni, Samarani 2014a). Until 1956, this fostered bilateral contacts with the UDI and other women's federations. The study of this crucial period proved important in analyzing whether these more direct contacts concretely impacted the reciprocal conception of women's activism in the medium and long run and in which ways. Due to the internal closing to foreign and particularly "capitalist" influence, contact with capitalist countries was drastically reduced in 1956. This is reflected in the official sources of the ACWF. Nonetheless, the WIDF remained a valuable area in which to maintain contact with the outside world. The study investigates how these contacts changed in relation to priorities in the GSF movement as the late 1950s to the mid-1960s were marked by crucial re-orientations, particularly decolonization. Interestingly, the UDI and the ACWF reached a major turning point within the WIDF after the 1963 World Congress of Women, resigning from managerial positions within the international federation.

Through the in-depth analysis of the specific case study on the interactions between the ACWDF/ACWF and the UDI on key issues within the movement, the research highlights the positive, transformative, and transcultural value of women exchanges during the period considered. The guiding question of this thesis is: What insights

can an analysis of the transcultural relations between Italy and China within the global socialist women's movement from 1949 to 1963 provide regarding the movement's impact on the advancement of women's rights and human rights? From this central question, several supporting questions emerge: On what foundation and through which strategies did socialist women develop their political networks in the postwar period and the early years of the Cold War? How were the relationships forged by socialist women during the Korean War developed within the broader context of human rights and women's diplomacy? What is the significance of the transcultural exchanges between Italy and China for advancing feminist agendas? Finally, how did the women's movement address the crisis of international socialism in 1956, and what strategies were employed to preserve the role of women's organizations as defenders of human and women's rights? These supporting questions will guide the focus of each chapter. By analyzing the different perspectives on topics such as peace defense, women's and mothers' rights, children's rights, and the social and political role of women, considered in the first decades of the Cold War period as universal values and thus thread between women situated in different areas of the Cold War polarization. As mentioned above, they represented minority voices in the historiography of the Cold War; nevertheless, they were the largest communist groups within their respective geographical areas. The research weighs the value of transnational exchanges as a vehicle for the re-signification of the issues in question within the broader feminist panorama. Furthermore, by emphasizing the value of interactions between groups from two geographically, culturally, and politically distant countries, the research helps to deconstruct the paradigm of the impermeability of the "iron" and "bamboo" curtains, highlighting how – despite being mediated by ideological rigidities – the exchanges between Socialist women activists proved to be bearers of seeds of change, albeit not developed in the immediate term but in the medium to

long term. The analysis ultimately enriches academic knowledge by highlighting documents belonging to underrepresented political agents.

Women's Transnational movements in the Cold War era

Within the New Cold War historical framework, recent studies have pointed out how focusing on interactions and exchanges can unveil the powerful dynamics lying behind the Cold War “divide.” In other words, studies on minor actors – here meant actors that were not central in the bipolar conception historiography of Cold War dynamics – considered that they didn't possess as much power as major actors as the USA and the URSS. This focus can help deconstruct the polarized paradigm of Cold War Studies and enrich it with innovative perspectives stressing the value and richness of these exchanges. By considering the impact of the national and political realm of reference, socialist women activists are analyzed from a transcultural angle, taking into account not only the specificity of each local cultural dimension but also the resignification in the act in the reciprocal encounter, broadening the conceptualization of their complex identities by including and prioritizing the categories of gender, class, and race. The work explores the effects of transcultural interactions among socialist women's activist's political action during the first two decades of the Cold War in the medium and long term. Addressing how their interactions and exchanges shaped their overall vision of womanhood and women's agency in diachronic and synchronic way, appropriating and re-shaping the traditional women's related sphere in continuous negotiation within the transnational women's movement and the political formations of reference. The dissertation claims that GSF activists proved attentive interpreters of socialist universalistic ideals and agents of intersectional practices

whose actions were aimed at transcending inequalities. This work is an effort to retrieve their gendered role in committing to advancing women's and overall human rights. By doing so, the dissertation does not ignore the impact of their political orientation, which remains in the background, but rather seeks to evaluate their role in light of the broader impact of their feminist actions.

A transcultural focus on GSF interactions reveals how local battles shaped the feminist transnational arena and strengthened localized struggles by relating them to an international scope. Additionally, translating and sharing local federations' contents, strategies, and tactics in their struggles enriched the broader feminist political environment with their collective experiences. This is clearly illustrated, for example, in the presentation of the results achieved in China regarding equal pay, marriage and divorce, and the protection of women workers, as displayed in the pamphlet *She Also Owns the Good Earth*, published by the UDI following its first delegation to the PRC in 1955.

This study stresses how the exchanges of ideas and the shared utopia in transnational Socialism provided a crucial network for creating and implementing women's rights globally in the long term. This is demonstrated by the 1953 Declaration of Women's Rights, which the WIDF later recognized as a precursor to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (de Haan 2018, 237).

Women activists' practical organizing in socialist countries came earlier and quicker than those among Communist women in the West, pushed by the need to establish new communist principles on which to base society. This corresponded to an (at least initial) earlier aperture towards women's rights at a formal level (constitution and

laws), collating Socialist countries as avant-garde in promoting and defending women's rights. Before the dynamics of the Cold War inflamed and the socio-economic internal situation encountered major difficulties, these formal rights were attempted to be implemented nationwide (Evans 2021, 95-115; Hershatter 2018, 219-250). The top-down implementation, however, led to a discrepancy between what was formally permitted and what transpired in practice (Hershatter 2011). This emerges in relation to the analysis of the process underlying the marriage reform and healthcare reform, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, respectively. Nevertheless, contemporary accounts emphasized how this process was presented to the international audience as free of criticism and achieved almost homogeneously throughout the country in the early 1950s, as displayed in chapter 3. This sanitized reading is part of a purely political promotion of the modernity of the Chinese socialist state within the context of the cultural Cold War. Like the USSR, the PRC wanted to be "the ambassador" for women's and human rights (Foot 2010; Sluga 2013). While Chinese narratives certainly had propagandistic and political intents, they undoubtedly impacted the general imagination of the time. Forster (2021) has highlighted how China's international positioning in the 1950s and 1960s – presenting itself as a nation committed to peace, and specifically to a just peace – was instrumental in its broader goal of gaining recognition for the Communist nation within the United Nations. An example of this strategic posture can be seen in the signature campaigns of the 1950s, which helped cultivate China's image as a peaceful state. This falls within a wider process of self-promotion which, in a more bellicose sense, served multiple purposes for the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC): most notably, fostering bloc thinking among its population and enhancing its prestige within the emerging Cold War international order (Forster 2019).

Nonetheless, transcultural aspects of these narratives on a transnational level have not yet been given sufficient weight. This is one of the major additional objectives pursued in this work by studying how Chinese propaganda was reinterpreted within the analyzed Italian movement, exploring and analyzing the Chinese narrative and visual discourse and comparing it with the Italian one, highlighting convergences, differences and contextualizing them in the environment of reference. Another level of analysis, still largely neglected, concerns the ACWF's role in mediating the demands of women from so-called Third World countries seeking to represent them. Undoubtedly, this role was functional in occupying a prominent position on the international political stage.

The research considers the crucial role played by the ACWF in implementing women and human rights effectively inside the country and propagandizing them outside by developing concrete strategies for implementing those policies. The tactics employed by the Chinese activists were explained in the contents of the delegates' speeches at the WIDF and prove how – beyond representing a utopia – the attempts for the practical implementation of women's rights among the masses were a helpful source offering practical suggestions on how to plan and implement strategically women's rights among the masses (see Chapter 1). The fertile ground for listening to and sharing such propagandistic narratives encountered progressively more difficulties in the mid-1950, especially concerning two main events: the WIDF exclusion from the UN in 1954 (Kim 2023a, 36; de Haan 2010, 550) impacting on the federation scope and the crisis experienced in the global communist movement after 1956 (Canfora 2008; Lendvai 2008). Overall, these events led to the WIDF becoming increasingly isolated from international diplomatic arenas and internally divided into strategies to cope with this isolation, contrasted by a growing basis of newly independent countries

(Castledine 2008; Gradska 2020). Italian activists and others found themselves face-to-face with the gap between these narratives and the reality they envisioned.

To fulfill the Socialist dream/aim, communist countries and parties put efforts into creating a transnational infrastructure that could involve more and more people in their cause. In line with the national restoration processes, this project made marginalized social actors such as women more visible. Following their right to citizenship, they became the objects of interest for parties' organization and expansion and, simultaneously, actors of social change.¹⁶ Although these actors were granted an unprecedented protagonism and space to express their stances, they were also required to adjust their agenda to the political directions of the parties of reference. This bias became evident after 1947 and became particularly pronounced in the latter half of the 1950s, in line with the growing polarization of the Cold War. This shift followed the crisis of global Stalinism and its policy of "socialism in one country," which contributed to the gradual dismantling of the communist international front. This process accelerated after the watershed events of 1956, including Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Hungarian Uprising (Claudin 1975; Canfora 2008; Lendvai 2008). The federations of the socialist milieu also demonstrated vulnerability to these changes. Mainly, by the 1960s, women socialist women activists showed their engagement in the competition regarding the treatment of women (Kadnikova 2011). Recent studies have

¹⁶ This was the case not only for the Communist parties. Considering the Italian case, the postwar biggest party, Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy, DC), also prompted catholic women to be represented by a women's organization called Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF). See Tambor (2014) and Pojmann (2013) for the Italian case. On expanding women's organizations in the Postwar context in relation to the renewed link between women and democracy, see chapter 7 of Garner (2010, 158-78).

stressed how the process underlying this shift was not simply a top-down reproduction of the political rivalry but instead revealed to be complex and varied (Foot 2010).

At the national level, the ACWF underwent significant restructuring at the 3rd National Congress in 1957. Aligning its efforts with substantial national economic and political policies of the second Five-Year Plan, the ACWF launched the Great Leap Forward (大跃进 Da Yuejin, GLF) in 1958. The USSR's disapproval of the GLF led to further political friction and progressive isolation of the PRC from its former primary partner and closest allies (Shen, Xia 2015, 283-306; Friedman 2010). In response, the PRC shifted its focus to developing relations with regional partners and former colonized and decolonizing countries, which were left aside by the USSR politics of political coexistence (Mozingo 2007; Jackson 1995; Shinn, Eisenman 2012, 17-55). Nonetheless, I argue that this shattered dream provided what Rosa Campbell (2023) called “productive confusion,” namely a push for rethinking and recasting personal and local reality undergoing the process of otherness, prompted by the shift of perception provoked by the encounter with an openly contrasting and conflictual reality of the other, that can be reconducted to the self. This occurred with the emergence of clear emancipationist stances within the UDI after its 5th Congress in 1956. (see Chapter 4). Without confrontation with the limits of the Socialist dream, Western feminists would not have been able to confront the necessity to reshape their understanding of women’s cause and re-envision women’s struggle.

From dichotomy to the emergence of women’s voices

The literature consulted for the research about a variety of historiographical streams relevant to the topic, including works related to the New Cold War studies, the *Global*

Socialist feminism historiographical stream, studies pertaining specifically to the Postwar generation of the feminist movement in the Italian and Chinese contexts; materials on the transnational relations between the leftist movements and on the bilateral ones between Italy-PRC on the long run and specifically in the 1950s-1960s. It includes methodological works about global, transnational, and transcultural approaches, decolonial and intersectional feminism, and microhistory and ego-documents.¹⁷

This research fits within the broader body of academic studies related to the Cold War and the reassessment of internationalism embedded in the feminist and pacifist dynamics of the time. Gaddis (1997, 2005) and Westad (2001) were among the leading scholars who, with the availability of new archival resources and methodological tools, argued that the concept of the Cold War as an opposition between two blocs divided by an Iron Curtain is a misconception. If, in general, the Cold War signifies the intricate transformation of the international system, primarily driven by the United States and the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1991, New Cold War Studies began to contend that it also encompasses the vast projections of power, violence, ideology, and discourse through which concepts and consensus about modernity, national security, citizenship, and global relations were created, disseminated, reshaped, and sometimes rejected across various national, social, and geographical contexts. An increasing number of scholars focusing on areas outside the Global North, including Kim (2023a, XV) and Frazier (2014, 4), have argued that the so-called “Cold War” was, in fact, a hot period. What was, and still is, “cold” is the Global West’s tendency to ignore the wars beyond European and American borders that were ongoing

¹⁷ Reference works in these respects were those of Mbembe (2001), Mignolo (2010) and Armstrong (2023).

throughout the world. This perspective brought to light the inherent colonial bias affecting the understanding of the Cold War and often overshadowing interpretations of the “Cold War” that diverged from this narrative, such as the official PRC stance, which views the Cold War as not yet over (Liu 2019). The Study of women’s history has also benefited from this new interpretation of the Cold War, unveiling the political bias undermining this bipolar conception (de Haan 2010). In this field, this political bias obscured not only political formations orbiting around the Eastern front of the Cold War, but also triggered a snowball effect on formations belonging to non-aligned countries or transnational formations, thus including a wide range of actors not explicitly aligned with the Western bloc (Bonfiglioli 2021), and for the analysis of post-socialist “Missing other” contexts (Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, Koobak 2021). This new focus enabled scholars to cast new importance on phenomena such as Global Socialist Feminism action in progressing actions for developing human and women’s rights (Bonfiglioli e Ghodsee, 2020).

Women Studies during the Cold War

These approaches have also informed the study of the women’s movements in the Cold War period. Despite the internationalist aspirations of many women’s organizations, tensions around inclusion persisted. Pre-war organizations such as the International Council of Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance were often dominated by European and American women, limiting the participation of women from the Global South. McGregor (2016) notes that these organizations began to include Latin American, African, and Asian sections only after World War I, but their inclusion was often superficial. The WIDF, the other hand, is highlighted as

a more inclusive platform that actively supported anti-colonial women activists, particularly in the immediate postwar period (Armstrong 2023, Kim 2019). Despite the contradictions characterizing the WIDF related to its political orientation during the most inflamed years of the Cold War (Gradska 2020, 2022), its role in representing for the first time decolonial voices is critical in rethinking feminist history.

This awareness has led to a rethinking of feminist chronology in contemporary world history crystalized in the identification of two so-called “feminist waves” of the 1920s and 1970s, conceived respectively as the birth of modern feminism and the moment of enlargement of this debate on a wider social level. As a result, the period from the late 1930s, to the late 1960s, was envisioned as characterized by a reflux in terms of women’s activism and thus neglected by historiography until recent times. The interwar period has long been envisioned as a return to domesticity and a rollback of women’s rights. Recent studies have pointed to the rigidity of this definition, paving the way for a more punctual analysis of the period at a transnational level by including new sources and actors.¹⁸ Many works have included the standpoint of international organizations. Recent studies have stressed how that period was crucial for a re-reading of humanitarianism integrating gender and sexuality as key lenses for its study.¹⁹ At the international level, recent studies have retrieved the work that women’s organizations created at the turn of the Twentieth century, stressing the continuity of their actions in the interwar period.²⁰

This perspective ignores the transcultural impact of the ideas elaborated in the early 1920s on the *long durée*, as cultural means re-shaping of people’s reality, ultimately resulting in changes throughout the world in terms of political participation, work

¹⁸ See, for instance, the British case study by Bingham (2004).

¹⁹ Just to mention two recent ones: Moeller, Paulmann, Stornig (2020); Cicci (2024).

²⁰ In these respects, see Rupp (1996; 1994; 1997), Offen (2009), Janz and Schönflug (2014).

conception, and social roles. When it comes to the national and international participation of women in politics and the translation of women's issues in legal rights in particular, the Postwar and the first two decades of the Cold War have proved a particular importance.²¹ Historians as Chiara Bonfiglioli (2015) and Molly Tambor (2014) have stressed the problematic nature of the concept of wave, calling for the study of the so-called "lost wave" of international feminism in relations to the generations women's moments of the first two decades of the Cold war period.²² As a consequence of granting the right to vote to women in many countries, they also related to the decolonization process; during that period, women's mass entered the political sphere at a formal level.

Peace, Human Rights, and Feminism: The WIDF

The WIDF also serves as a significant subject in the study of Cold War diplomacy, international feminism, and human rights activism. Over the past few decades, scholars have re-evaluated the role of the WIDF, emphasizing its influence on peace efforts, women's rights, and cross-cultural exchanges. Hereby I will examine the contributions of key scholars in this field, that explore the connection between peace, human rights, and feminist activism.

In the context of the already introduced Early Reinterpretations of Cold War Cultural and Ideological Conflicts, Rosemary Foot (2010), argues that despite violations, both Eastern and Western powers during the Cold War maintained a focus on human rights,

²¹ For some recent works focusing on the role of international women associationism at a transnational level, see Ghodsee (2019), and Garner (2010).

²² Bonfiglioli (2014; 2015); de Haan (2016); Tambor (2014).

because civil society, including women's organizations, pushed for human rights reforms and kept these values central to governance debates. Even if focused during the 60's, Foot's study offers a valuable framework for understanding how the Cold War context shaped geopolitical struggles and civil and political rights activism, with organizations like the WIDF playing a prominent role in this discourse. At the same time, Celia Donert (2013) explains that one of the reasons why communist regimes, particularly in the Soviet Union and Central Eastern Europe, embraced international women's rights activism was because it was a part of their broader political agendas. Her work underscores the transnational nature of women's rights movements during the Cold War, particularly emphasizing the Soviet call for "World Peace" and anti-imperialism campaigns in the 1950s. Donert's contribution highlights how feminist and peace activism was used as a diplomatic tool during the Cold War, and how women's rights were sometimes subordinated to broader ideological concerns. More intensively focused on WIDF, Francisca De Haan (2010) also provides crucial insights into the role of socialist women in advancing international women's rights. De Haan argues that the WIDF and other women's organizations made significant contributions to global feminist movements, particularly within the United Nations, through their advocacy for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Her research reflects the multilateral and cross-political collaboration among women from various systems during the early Cold War, a period often overlooked in human rights scholarship.

The Cultural Struggle

To contextualize the environment in which the role of women's international organizations was so crucial, it is important to introduce the role of cultural products and media in shaping Cold War narratives. This has been extensively explored by scholars such as Frances Stonor Saunders (1999). Her work, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, explores how the CIA and Western powers used cultural products as vehicles for ideological influence. Although her work focuses primarily on Western strategies, it has influenced further research on how cultural mediums – such as literature, media, and art – played a part in shaping peace and human rights discourses. Will Norman (2015) revisits Saunders's work offering a critique that expands the understanding of Cold War cultural politics and emphasizes the non-neutrality of cultural products in ideological struggles. Building studies on these topics, Jacques Rancière (2009, 2013) discusses how aesthetics and politics intersect in global struggles, arguing that cultural exchanges are central to shaping societal values. His theories on the "redistribution of the sensible" provide a framework for understanding how feminist and human rights discourses transcend geopolitical boundaries. His work helps scholars situate organizations like the WIDF within broader cultural struggles that extend beyond formal diplomatic channels.

Transnational Associationism in the Postwar and Cold War Period

The postwar period, particularly during the Cold War, witnessed the emergence of transnational associations that organized across national borders, bringing together diverse social and political movements. These movements, heavily influenced by leftist and communist ideologies, created new spaces for emerging social categories

to assert their political subjectivity. Transnational associationism during the Cold War, particularly in the leftist/communist domain, is central to understanding how organizations like the WIDF became crucial players on the global stage. Again, on this topic Francisca De Haan (2012, 2013) has contributed greatly to the exploration of the WIDF's history and its political agenda, particularly its anti-imperialist and anti-colonial efforts, which often aligned with Soviet ideological positions. De Haan argues that the WIDF, despite Cold War tensions, maintained a focus on women's rights and peace-building through its transnational networks. Yulia Gradszkova (2020, 2021b) emphasizes how the WIDF played a strategic role in representing women's rights within the socialist and communist framework, especially in countries in the Global South. Gradszkova points out that the WIDF was actively involved in cultural Cold War battles, using women's rights as a tool to promote the achievements of state socialism. Elisabeth Armstrong (2016, 2023) further supports this by detailing the WIDF's efforts in anti-colonial activism, noting how its fact-finding missions in Asia and Africa highlighted its commitment to international solidarity and the fight against imperialism. This transnational activism, however, was often seen through the lens of the broader Cold War divide, as Helen Laville (2002) and Jadwiga Pieper Mooney (2013) argue, the WIDF's efforts can be seen as part of a Soviet "peace offensive." In her exploration of international women's associations, Kristen Ghodsee (2014) addresses the Second-Third World alliances fostered by the WIDF. Ghodsee stresses the importance of these alliances in challenging Western feminist narratives, which often excluded women from socialist countries, especially in the Global South. Leila Rupp (1997, 82-104) provides a comparative analysis of how the WIDF differed from more liberal feminist organizations, noting that the WIDF's connection to communism marginalized it in Western feminist historiography.

To contextualize the Italian environment specifically, Wendy Pojmann (2011) analyzes this dynamic in her study of Italian Catholic and Communist women's organizations during the Cold War. Despite their ideological differences, she explores how these groups cooperated on key issues such as peace, family, and women's rights. Giulia Cioci (2020) highlighted how women's movements in Italy, particularly the UDI, played a significant role in reshaping feminist politics in the context of both national and international associationism. Cioci points to the UDI's shift in the 1960s away from the strict Marxist-Leninist model to a broader, more inclusive conception of women's struggle.

The works of Wang Zheng (2017, 2010, 2005) proved fundamental and among the few present to date to contextualize the role of the ACWDF/ACWF beyond the patriarchal logic in light of its impact in shaping a women-centered agenda within the CCP politics. In recent years, more works have added fundamental pieces to this story, most notably that of Manning (2023). Others have also considered the crucial role of the Chinese federation in the broader regional and international network. Calver (2023) has done so for the interwar period; Katharine McGregor and Elisabeth Armstrong (2016) both emphasize the role of women in Asia and Africa in framing colonialism as a form of fascism, linking their struggles for national liberation with broader global movements for women's rights. Suzy Kim's (2020, 2023) analysis of North Korean and Asian women's networks has also stressed the pivotal role of Chinese women's transnational relations on the regional level. Nasser (2021, 2023) also analyzed the relations between Chinese women and Indian women. Concerning Sino-Italian women's relations specifically, the contributions of Laura De Giorgi (2017a; 2017b) represent meaningful and rare insights into these complex interactions.

It is indeed valuable to contextualize the background that led to the establishment and early political orientation of both the UDI and the ACWDF.

Shaped by Conflict: Women's Mass Federations and the Global Cold War

Partisan women and the development of post-war leftist union: The UDI

The UDI was born out of the wartime Gruppi di Difesa della Donna (Women's Defense Groups, GDD), which had begun organizing as early as 1943 and were active across Italy, but mostly in the Northern part, during the Nazi occupation. After the liberation, the Union was officially established in Naples in September 1944.

The UDI founding document made clear that the GDD operated on two distinct but interconnected levels: on one hand, they responded to the urgent demands of wartime, mobilizing women in the resistance against Nazi occupation and fascist repression; on the other, they aimed to change women's condition on a feminist agenda (De Luna 1995, Gabrielli 2024). Women's effort was invested not only to contribute to immediate liberation but also to build a future in which women would no longer be confined to the traditional roles imposed by fascism. They advocated for new conditions of life and labor that would redefine women's place in society. This dual mission, resistance and reconstruction, was central to their organizing and required active collaboration among women at all levels (Orlandini 2018). In Northern Italy, women had been involved in the GDD, aiding the resistance against Nazi-Fascism. They had participated in civil and military resistance, organized strikes and protests, and worked to save soldiers and Jewish families from deportation. In Central and Southern Italy, women were also active in assisting Allied forces and maintaining civil

resistance. Women in both regions had endured bombings, hardship, and violence, including sexual violence.

The UDI thus emerged in 1944 as the first women's association to reappear in liberated Italy, led by women who had been active in both the civil and armed Resistance. From its inception, the UDI was deeply rooted in this dual legacy: commitment to the anti-fascist struggle and gender emancipation. Politically, the UDI leadership was aligned with the two major left-wing parties of the time: the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the PCI. The UDI was not merely a social or charitable group, but a politically driven organization, advocating for women's labor rights, improved access to education, protections for mothers and children, and a more equitable legal system. The UDI maintained that any meaningful societal transformation required the active involvement of women, both as agents and subjects of change (Betti, Migliucci 2023; Betti 2020b; Migliucci 2022). Women partisans made up a key component of the UDI's membership, but the association's relevance to the postwar era had also been earned through its ability to point to the economic and social hardships shared by women who worked in the factories and the fields and who faced daily challenges in their homes as well. (Pojmann 2013, 25; Betti 2024a). This perspective extended beyond national borders, as the leadership was particularly influenced by internationalist ideals, especially in the context of the Cold War (Betti 2024b; Cioci 2021). They played an essential role in founding the WIDF, securing positions within its governing bodies, and actively participating in the development of the organization. The UDI's commitment to internationalism was not merely symbolic; it was rooted in the desire to foster solidarity among women across the world. These efforts contributed to a broader movement of cross-border cooperation, which became a cornerstone of UDI's identity (Pojmann 2013, 38).



Figure 2. The UDI funding members participated in a meeting to redistribute USA aid in Rome in November 1944. From left to right: Emilia Siracusa Cabrini, Bastianina Musu Martini, Rita Montagnana, Marisa Cinciari Rodano, Luigia Cobau, Marcella Ferrari e Maria Romita (*ND* 7, 1944, 14.)

In the Italian panorama, the Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF) represented the alternative to the UDI. Founded in December 1944 it united Catholic women's associations. While the UDI had a progressive, left-wing orientation, the CIF was closely associated with the Christian Democracy (DC) Party and the Catholic Church, positioning itself as a conservative counterpart. The ideological divide between the UDI and CIF mirrored the broader global divisions during the Cold War, with the UDI aligning with communist and socialist ideologies, while the CIF maintained closer ties to the Catholic Church and Christian Democratic institutions.

Despite this division, both organizations temporarily put their differences aside in the early postwar years to collaborate on common issues, such as women's access to education, childcare, work, and legal rights. However, by 1946, their political and ideological differences became insurmountable, and the UDI and CIF resumed their separate paths (Pojmann 2008; 2011; Tambor 2014).

The first National Congress of the UDI was held in Florence in October 1945, a critical moment in the organization's formation. The Congress brought together women from 78 provinces, representing 400,000 members, many of whom had distinct experiences. The women who gathered in Florence were a minority, but they represented the collective experience of many. They had been pushed to step outside traditional roles due to the demands of the war. In fact, the war had allowed women to demonstrate their capabilities beyond the domestic sphere. This marked a turning point for women's roles in Italian society. In the years following the war, from 1945 to 1956, women in the UDI, CIF, and other organizations played an essential role in the reconstruction of Italy, both in its material and social aspects. During this period, UDI women organized canteens, daycare centers, medical and housing support services, and more, becoming central to the reorganization of civil life. These grassroots efforts were pivotal in rebuilding the country. As a result, the UDI was able to integrate itself into early public administration structures, including commissions overseeing food distribution, hygiene, and the fight against the black market. At the same time, the UDI remained deeply involved in pushing for women's political rights. In 1946, Italian women voted for the first time in the institutional referendum on monarchy vs. republic, as well as in the election of the Constituent Assembly. This election saw 21 women elected, including Adele Bei, Teresa Mattei, Lina Merlin, Rita Montagnana, and Teresa Noce, all of whom were also key figures in UDI leadership.

The newly adopted Italian Constitution in 1948 guaranteed equality under the law for all citizens, irrespective of sex, race, or other distinctions, marking a historic milestone for women's rights. However, the geopolitical context of the Cold War was beginning to shape Italian politics in significant ways. The Cold War intensified political divisions globally, and in Italy, this led to significant electoral and ideological shifts. In the 1948 elections, the DC won an absolute majority, while the left-wing forces, including the Communists and Socialists, coalesced into the Fronte Democratico Popolare (Popular Democratic Front). The UDI, historically committed to maintaining political autonomy, made a significant shift by aligning itself with the Fronte Democratico Popolare and the broader left-wing alliance. This decision marked a departure from the UDI's founding principles, leading to internal debates about its role and identity (Gabrielli 2009; 2015; 2016; Betti 2013; 2018; 2019; UDI 2002).

The UDI of the first years was deeply influenced by Soviet models of women's emancipation, particularly in regions such as Emilia-Romagna, which were under communist governance. Soviet women were presented as paradigms of emancipation, successfully balancing work and family life due to the extensive social services provided by the state. In the early years of the Cold War, communist-led Bologna promoted an idealized image of Soviet families and women, reflecting the ideological influence of the Soviet Union on the UDI's approach to women's rights (Betti, 2020b).

By the 1950s, the UDI faced significant internal contradictions. Despite its advocacy for workers' rights and the fight against discrimination, the organization struggled with issues such as low literacy rates among women and a lack of access to infor-

mation. Many women, particularly housewives, had few opportunities for independent income or education. The Fourth Congress of the UDI, held in 1953, aimed to address these issues by breaking down sectarian divisions within the movement. However, this attempt to broaden the organization's scope was made without a thorough reflection on the UDI's specific identity and goals. Despite these tensions, the UDI's commitment to advocating for women's rights remained strong, even as the organization grappled with political pressures and the evolving landscape of postwar Italy (UDI 2002, 5-6).

The origins and development of the ACWDF, in and outside the PRC

The origins of Chinese Communist reflections on women's liberation can be traced to the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which offered an early platform for gender-related discourse within the broader context of cultural and political reform (Wang 1999; Barlow 2004; Zhu, Hui 2021). Key intellectuals such as Hu Shi 胡适 and Lu Xun 鲁迅, writing in *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (*New Youth*), argued that women's emancipation required economic independence and compensation for labor, rejecting the ideal of the passive, dependent female figure (Croll 1995; Edwards 2008; Hershatter 2011; Zhang 2020). Alongside these theoretical arguments, women writers such as Ding Ling began producing independent work that directly challenged patriarchal norms through literary means (Gilmartin, 1995). In the 1920s and 1930s, this foundational critique took new political forms, as women became increasingly involved in the Communist movement. Key figures such as Xiang Jingyu 向警予 – the first woman to join the Chinese Communist Party – played a formative role in the Party's early gender politics. Joining in 1922, Xiang led organizing campaigns among textile

workers, promoted feminist priorities within the Party, and envisioned the creation of a mass women's organization (ibid.) In the years leading up to the Second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese women's activism expanded alongside broader political tensions. Nonetheless, critiques of traditional ideals of womanhood – rooted in Confucian models – also emerged from outside the Chinese Communist Party. In 1936, during an International Women's Day event in Nanjing, Li Dequan, although affiliated with the Kuomintang at the time, publicly denounced the party's promotion of the "virtuous woman" ideal. She contended that genuine transformation for women could only be achieved through participation in the national liberation movement and broader processes of social change. (Manning, 2023, 54).

With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War – officially the Chinese War of resistance against Japan 中国抗日战争 (*Zhongguo Kangri Zhanzheng*) in the PRC – in July 1937, women from various political affiliations, including those aligned with the Kuomintang, the Communist Party, and independent democratic groups, began to coordinate efforts in resistance to the Japanese invasion. One major result of this cooperation was the founding of the Chinese Women's Association (中国妇女联谊会 *Zhongguo funü lianyihui*) in 1937, led by abovementioned Li Dequan. The association united women from different political backgrounds in KMT-controlled areas and took part in anti-war mobilization as well as efforts to limit internal repression and civil conflict (Lee, Stefanowska 2003, 302). Medical aid also became a major front for women's participation through the Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Corps, facilitating the establishment of the first transnational networks among women activists and volunteers (Guo 2018; Cicci 2024). After Japan's surrender in 1945, this collaborative momentum briefly extended into the postwar reconstruction period. In January 1946, the Political Consultative Conference convened by the Nationalist

government brought together the KMT, CCP, and smaller democratic parties (Guo 2017; Leutner, Spakowski 2005). Among the outcomes was the Program for Peaceful National Construction, intended as a framework for national administration and multi-party cooperation. Although this effort collapsed within a year as civil war resumed, it highlighted the role of wartime alliances, including those built by and among women.

1949, January 12 – The Preparatory Committee for the First National Women’s Congress of China was officially established at the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party’s headquarters in Xibaipo, Pingshan County, Hebei Province. This was a joint decision made by the women’s federations of the liberated areas, progressive women’s organizations in Kuomintang-controlled areas, and well-known patriotic democratic women in response to the call of the CPC Central Committee. In 1948, Mao Zedong, in the CPC Central Committee’s Notice on the September Conference, proposed: “In the first half of next year, a national women’s congress will be convened to establish the All-China Women’s Democratic Federation.”²³

From March 24 to April 3, 1949, the First National Women’s Congress of China was held in the newly liberated ancient capital of Beiping, now Beijing (Yang 1991, 1). The congress brought together women from different classes and beliefs, (workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectual women, and patriotic democratic women) from both liberated areas and Kuomintang-controlled areas, aiming to represent the united will of women from all ethnic groups across the country. The congress approved

²³ Original text: «中国妇女第一次全国代表大会筹备委员会在中共中央驻地 – 河北省平山县西柏宣告成立。这是各解放区妇女联合会、国民党统治区进步妇女团体、知名的爱国民主妇女人士响应中共中央号召而作出的决定。在1948年毛泽东拟的《中共中央关于九月会议的通知》中提出：“明年上半年，将召开全国妇女代表大会，成立全国民主妇女联合会。” See Yang (1991, 1).

Deng Yingchao's report, "Current Guidelines and Tasks of the Chinese Women's Movement", and adopted the resolution to establish the ACWDF and define the current direction of the women's movement. In the same speech the struggle for peace emerges as one of the principles at the core of the ACWDF:

We women cherish and long for peace, but we must distinguish between the real and the false, clearly identify our friends and enemies. We sincerely demand a genuine and lasting peace, and we resolutely oppose the sham peace.

We support the just people's revolutionary war to eliminate the reactionary war against the people – only in this way can true peace be achieved.²⁴

The Federation began refining itself into a national-level political organization. In the immediate post-revolutionary context, the ACWDF's central task was to create a functioning structure capable of both implementing state policy and mobilizing women in support of the new government's agenda. According to the official ACWRI (2017) account, this period was marked by the «organization and refinement of women's working institutions and women's organizations, as well as the beginning of women's work.»²⁵ Much of the activity revolved around the holding of meetings

²⁴ Original text: «我们妇女是酷爱和平渴望和平的，但我们要分清真假，认清敌友。我们衷心要求真正的持久和平，坚决反对虚伪的和平，我们拥护以正义的人民革命战争消灭反人民的反革命战争，这样才能达到真正的和平。中国人民的命运，应该由中国人民自己来决定，反对美帝国主义军事干涉及政治阴谋，反对所谓“国际调解”，反对任何外国政府干涉中国的事情，只有中国人民才有权利并且能够解决中国问题。」 Deng Yingchao's March 26, 1949 work report at the First National Congress of Chinese Women, in Yang (1991, 376).

²⁵ Among the key sources documenting the institutional trajectory of the ACWDF/ACWF is A Brief History of Contemporary Chinese Women's Movement, compiled by the ACWF Research Institute (ACWFRI), a research body operating directly under the Federation. Although this publication was released in 2017, five years after Xi Jinping took office, it offers an official account of the development of the Chinese Women's Movement from 1949 to 2000, with a clear emphasis on the role of the ACWF as the principal force behind this evolution. Owing to the limited accessibility of the ACWF archives, subsequent Chinese scholarship has frequently relied on this volume as a foundational source. For instance, Tian Muye (2023) undertakes a systematic analysis of the ACWF's representation in the WISC publication, utilizing word-frequency analysis and quantitative methodologies to identify longitudinal trends. This contributes to a nuanced reconstruction of the federation's policy trajectories between 1946 and 1956.

and conferences. Terms such as “meeting,” “representative,” and “conference” appear prominently in the reports until 1956, confirming that the ACWF relied heavily on structured assemblies to establish its operational framework (Tian 2023). The ACWDF’s work in this period combined ideological dissemination with targeted campaigns that reflected the priorities of the central government tailored to the necessities of women. Among its most significant initiatives was the promotion of the 1950 Marriage Law.²⁶ This law introduced a new legal framework for marriage, and the ACWDF assumed responsibility for spreading awareness of its contents and encouraging its implementation at the local level. Alongside this, the Federation worked on the abolition of prostitution, the development of modern midwifery practices, and the mobilization of women during the land reform movement.

While many of these policies originated from the central government, the ACWDF played a key role in tailoring them to address specifically the needs and experiences of women. As in the context of land reform, Federation members undertook educational initiatives directed at rural women, aiming to inform them of their civil rights and encourage their participation in the redistribution process. In this way, the ACWDF worked through a gendered lens even when engaging with policies that were formally neutral.

Between 1946 and 1956, the ACWDF developed both its internal structure and its external function as a mass organization aligned with the Party but in deep contact with the women. The People’s Daily coverage during this time tended to emphasize international themes such as “democracy,” “international,” and again “conference” (ibid.)

²⁶A civil code will not be produced, but individual laws will be enacted to regulate social relations. The first civil code was introduced in 2020. For further reading, see Jiang, Sirena (2021).

In the early years of the PRC, China had not yet established diplomatic relations with most Western European countries. Nevertheless, Chinese women promoted friendship and peace and defended women's and children's rights through people-to-people diplomacy. They successively invited women's delegations composed of both civil society members and senior government officials from Finland, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and other countries to visit China. This should certainly be understood as part of the policy of fostering diplomatic relations through people's diplomacy, at a time when People's China was not recognized as the legitimate China (Brady 2003).

The 1948 second WIDF congress marked, differently from the first, the presence of Chinese representatives affiliated with the CCP, the Chinese Women of the Liberated Areas 中国解放区妇女联合会 (*Jiefangqu Fulian*, shortened CWLA).²⁷ Their presence marked a change in the representation of Chinese women within the WIDF compared to the previous congress. However, the Chinese representatives in the second WIDF congress emphasized the unity of all Chinese women, including those in nationalist areas, in carrying forward a struggle for liberation from colonial oppression. The importance of the WIDF was so clear in the Chinese federation that it is present on the very first report of the foundational Congress, delivered by Vice Chairperson Deng Yingchao:

²⁷ At the time of the congress in November 1948, China was still engaged in the Second Civil War (Dierci Guogong Neizhan 第二次国共内战), also known as the War of National Liberation (Jiefang Zhanzheng 解放战争), as remembered in the historiography of the People's Republic of China. During this phase, the PLA had made significant advances and was in the midst of the Pingjin campaign (Pingjin Zhanyi 平津战役), which would also lead to the conquest of Beijing and Tianjin. See Westad (2003, 215-58).

Over the past three years, we have maintained regular contact with the Women's International Democratic Federation, and have become one of its important branches. We have received sympathy and support from democratic women all over the world. Going forward, we must further strengthen our ties with the international democratic women's movement, especially with the women of Asia. Let us unite with the democratic women of the world and stand shoulder to shoulder with the global people's democratic movement, building a strong front to oppose the enemies of humanity, the warmongers, and to defend world peace. Let us take the vow of the Second World Congress of Women as our own: "Completely eliminate fascism. Struggle for the justice of humanity and for lasting peace. Prevent all new acts of aggression. A lasting peace is the only guarantee of happiness for the families and children of the world!"²⁸

The colonial element is evident from the speech of Lu Cui (陆瑾, 1914-2015), who, in addition to representing the CWLA at the time of the congress, was secretary at the WIDF.

Chinese women understand very well that the emancipation of women is closely linked with the liberation of all of the Chinese people. To win their emancipation, the Chinese people must overthrow the reactionary Kuomintang clique and drive American imperialism out of China. Consequently, in the struggle, Chinese women too must take their place in the front lines. It must be said that it is

²⁸Original text: «坡近三年来我们与国际民主妇女联合会保持了经常的联系,而且成为其重要的支部,并得到了全世界民主妇女的同情和声援。今后要更加强与国际民主妇女运动的联系,特别是要加强和亚洲妇女的联系。让我们与世界上民主妇女团结一起,和世界人民的民主运动共同建立一个坚强的阵线,来反对人类的敌人——新的战争贩子,保卫世界的和平。让我们把世界第三次妇女代表大会的誓言,作为我们的誓言。彻底消灭法西斯主义,为人类的正义与持久和平,为制止任何新的侵略而奋斗,持久的和平,是世界人民的家庭与儿童幸福的唯一保证! »Deng Yingchao's March 26, 1949 work report at the First National Congress of Chinese Women, in Yang (1991, 380).

not only the women of the liberated areas who are carrying on a heroic struggle for emancipation. The oppressed women of the Kuomintang areas, especially the women workers in factories, are fighting shoulder to shoulder with us (WIDF 1949, 186).

The anti-colonial struggle is presented as a “just” unifying struggle from a national and international perspective (Forster 2020; Forster, Taylor 2023). During the war, the ACWDF will continue to stress the unanimous and complete participation of women of different origins, religions or social classes to the cause. Echoing Deng Yingchao’s report, already in the first publication of Women of New China states:

In the future, we must further strengthen ties with the international democratic women's movement, especially the democratic women's movements in Asian countries, to smash imperialist schemes to provoke new wars and fight for lasting world peace.²⁹

This discourse will later be expanded by Chinese delegates at the following WIDF conferences, embedding a pan-Asian and Afro-Asian connotation: colonized women must fight collectively against colonial invaders. A crucial workshop for developing this regional and trans-regional rhetoric is the 1949 Asian Women’s Conference (Armstrong 2016; 2023).³⁰

²⁹ Original text: «今後必須更進一步地加強與國際民主婦女運動，特別是亞洲各國民民主婦女運動的聯系，以粉碎帝國主義製造新戰爭的陰謀，爭取世界的持久和平.» In “Zhongguo funu yundong dangqian renwu de jueyi - Zhongguo funu diyici quanguo daibiao dahui tongguo” 中國婦女運動當前任務的決議 - 中國婦女第一次全國代表大會通過 (Resolution on the Current Tasks of the Chinese Women's Movement – Adopted by the First National Congress of Chinese Women), ZGFN no 1, July 20, 1949, 7-8.

³⁰ But the origins are retractable as early as 1948, when, in the context of the second WIDF Congress, Cai Chang, heading the Chinese delegation, held a speech titled Guan Yu Ya Fei Geguo Funu Minzhu Yundong Fazhan 關

The spirit of the Conference was to build unity and to destroy the gap that divide women on opposite frontiers, creating the feeling of universality of peace:

There was no barrier between representatives from colonial countries and democratic women from imperialist nations, as they openly expressed their shared determination to overthrow common enemies and liberate humanity. They embraced each other in solidarity, especially during moments such as when the French and Vietnamese representatives exchanged gifts and warmly embraced.³¹



Figure 2. Cai Chang's opening speech at the Asian Women's Conference on December 10, 1949 (Ji, Luo 2020, 52.)

于亚非各国妇女民主运动发展 (On the Development of the Democratic Women's Movement in Asian Countries). See Ji, Luo (2020, 5). The speech is included in section 5 of the Congress proceeding, dedicated to "The Conference of Women of Asia" and it markedly stresses the union of all colonized people in the fight for peace (WIDF 1949, 474-489).

³¹ Original text: «在殖民地代表及帝國主義國家中的民主婦女代表之間，毫無隔膜地表示了為打倒共同的敵人和為人類求解放的決心。她們為國際的友愛和階的同情而擁抱，特別是法國代表和越南代表互相贈送禮物，熱烈地擁抱時，那種國際主義的友愛和熱情，使全場每個代表都深為感動，很多人因而流淚。這樣的場面在大會中不斷出現若，尤其是當蘇聯代表到台上講話時，她的話聲幾次都被熱烈的鼓掌聲和歡呼聲所打斷，這表現了各國人民及婦女對蘇聯的高度的崇愛和護。」 Deng Yingchao 鄧穎超, "Yazhou funu daibiao huiyi de gaikuang ji shouhuo" 亞洲婦女代表會議的概況及收穫 (Overview and Achievements of the Asian Women's Representative Conference), ZGFN no 7, January 20, 1950, 8.

This pivotal moment marks the emergence of demands and strategies that, while politically oriented toward the socialist world, give voice to women from former colonial countries. As historian Katharine McGregor notes: «The diverse membership of the organization and its leadership means that it is difficult to isolate a center and periphery or clear hierarchies in this organization» (2016, 929). Other emerging socialist countries intercepted the – although constrained – space for dialogue and openness represented by the WIDF, first among them the country hosting the conference, namely the PRC.

The development of these “de-centered” demands is catalyzed a few months later by another key event: indeed, the Korean War. In the 1950s, Chinese women played a significant role in the Anti-U.S. and Aid-Korea patriotic movement, which has also raised their awareness and expanded solidarity among women from different social classes, ethnicities, democratic parties, and religious beliefs.³²

Archival Sources

Following Chiara Bonfiglioli (2012, 47-48) and Yulia Gradsanova (2021b, 9-10), I distinguish between the use of publications and documents intended for external readers (referred to as “representative” by Bonfiglioli) and materials circulated internally, such as protocols, minutes, and letters. The WIDF, along with the ACWF and

³² Especially from January of 1951, dozens of major Chinese cities have held parades and demonstrations against the U.S. rearmament of Japan. Over one million women from various sectors, including businesswomen, housewives, including some nuns and Buddhist nuns, were reported to have taken to the streets, enthusiastically shouting slogans for the Anti-U.S. and Aid-Korea cause. This movement overall was seen as significant in raising and advance women's participation by coeval reports. See “Zai kang mei yuan chao yundong zhong tuijin funu jiefang yundong,” 在抗美援朝運動中推進婦女解放運動 (Promote the women's liberation movement during the War to Resist America and Aid Korea), ZGFN no 20, March 15, 1951, 8-9.

UDI appeals, official speeches, bulletins, and other publications (including most materials published in women's magazines), aimed to disseminate the WIDF's ideas and attract new members and supporters. As a result, these documents often presented a very politically oriented position, particularly until 1956. I approached these documents mainly when exploring changes in the federation's discourses on women and human rights during the period considered. When doing so, I mainly paid attention to the use of language and the context of the documents main message. I also used the WIDF, UDI, and ACWF official publications to discern the general orientation of the federations' activities. I used those available in the UDI archive (ACUDI) for the internal documents. As mentioned, despite its importance it does not exist a WIDF archive to date.³³ Due to governmental restrictions, I could not access and the ACWF archives preserving information on the federation's international activities.³⁴ I also conducted preliminary research on the Shanghai and Beijing Women's Federations in their respective municipal archives. However, the limited documents regarding international activities during the period in question did not yield significant insights. Most of the information was related to the organization of local celebrations for International Women's Day (March 8th, IWD), and there was no information on the international delegations visiting the cities. Consequently, my understanding of the internal politics of the Chinese Federation is informed by its international activities within the WIDF and its direct interactions with the UDI. This study's main reference section was the ACUDI Thematic Archive's section *Donne nel mondo* ("Women in the World", DNM), pertaining to the federation's international relations. The archive was created after the UDI 1982 Congress, in line with an emerged awareness of the

³³ The WIDF, significantly impacted by the fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, was reestablished in 1994. It has since moved its headquarters from Europe to Latin America, in São Paulo, Brazil (de Haan F2010). This relocation process has lacked a parallel preservation of the materials of the federation in a unified location.

³⁴ These restrictions had also been mentioned by Wang (2017, 23) and have been confirmed to date.

importance of preserving the historical memory of the organization (Gabrielli 2005, 10-11). Accordingly, it was the result of a grassroots effort made by UDI activists themselves, and interestingly the organization reflects the feminist and intrinsic character of this collective effort. Luciana Viviani, Maria Michetti e Marisa Ombra, the three main activists involved in the archive creation divided it in two main sections: thematic and chronological. Under the thematic section fall documents pertaining the key sectors of UDI activism, i.e. Women and labour; Labour Rights; Countryside women; Childhood; Peace; Domestic work; 8 March; Family and Divorce; Women in the world; School; Sexual Violence; School; Abortion and Contraception; Social Services; Maternity; Sex and Society. The chronological section contains what didn't pertain to any of the above-mentioned fields. Despite its grassroots origins the archive creation process also involved the help of archivists, most notably Linda Giuva (Betti, Ciarrocchi 2022). These documents include protocols and minutes from WIDF congresses, council, bureau meetings, reports, and personal letters. The ACUDI documents contain WIDF's circular letters and bulletins, primarily in English and French. These protocols and minutes were often produced through stenography, providing an accurate record of the discussions at the meetings, including full-length speeches by the PRC and the Global South representatives. While self-censorship should be considered when analyzing individual speeches, these protocols and minutes, unlike official documents intended for a wider audience, can serve as more reliable sources of information about women's work, achievements, and concerns from different member organizations. Additionally, the protocols provide insights into internal conflicts within the federation. Bilateral correspondence between the ACWDF/ACWF and the UDI primarily occurred in English and involved the top leaders of both federations. It also included exchanges of greetings, New Year cards, and messages for IWD, as well as promotional materials about the activities of both federations, specifically

focusing on initiatives conducted in China related to various aspects of socialist state-building.

The correspondence between the UDI Secretary and the Italian section in the WIDF Secretariat proved particularly insightful. The documents analyzed provide information about discussions and rumors within the WIDF that were not officially recorded. This material offers a unique, less formal perspective on the situation at the WIDF headquarters, contributing to shed light on changes in the general atmosphere within the WIDF and shifts in the priorities of the Soviet leadership.

Language always poses a challenge when researching transnational organizations and activism. Documents preserved in the Rome archives are mainly in French, English, or Italian, reflecting the languages used during WIDF conferences and bureau meetings. This presents difficulties when studying the history of the ACWF and women from the Global South, as the accessible documents related to them (speeches, letters, publications) have been translated into French, English, or Italian. Translating original documents into Western languages can alter the initial meanings of the speeches and letters of activists from those countries. The Latinization of Chinese names created an extra challenge in identifying the activists (i.e. Tsao Meng Chun for Cao Mengjun 曹孟君). In addition, the CIA's online collection proved useful for gaining further formal details on the WIDF and the Communist fronts' organizing. The CIA declassified documents are equally considered in light of the USA intelligence agency's political positioning.

In analyzing the self-representation of the GSF movement, the work relied on an exhaustive consultation of the leading media output of the UDI and the ACWF. When approaching these materials, I have considered their context of production and their purpose to reproduce the internal discourses for a wider national public and motivate

them to get involved in the women's movement. Illiteracy in the first two decades of the Cold War was still widespread, and it must be considered that the potential public of this journal was probably young or middle-aged women to get involved in the federation's work. Women involved in the war were students, intellectuals, young mothers, cadres, politicians, and enthusiasts who created a new image of women outside the house/home.

The UDI magazine *Noi Donne* (1944-) is the main reference to confront the UDI representation to its national or Italian-speaking public. It never featured an overseas edition. The magazine *Women of New China*, 新中国妇女 (*Xin Zhongguo Funü*, 1953-1955), later *Women of China* 中国妇女 (*Zhongguo Funü*, 1956-1966), the key media outlet of the ACWDF/ACWF. The magazine was first founded with the name *Women of China* (中国妇女 *Zhongguo Funü*) in 1939 during the Yan'an period by the CCWMC. The publication was suspended during the years of the Second Sino-Japanese War and published again after the PRC foundation in 1949 (Li 2023). Given the challenges in accessing certain issues of the journal, this research is primarily based on an extensive examination of the issues published between 1954 and 1963, along with issues 6 and 7 from June and July 1953.

The change in the name corresponded to a change in the language used. The issues from 1956 began to progressively feature simplified characters, reflecting an ongoing process of simplification that evolved throughout the subsequent years. The international version of the magazine *Women of China* (1953-1966) was also consulted.³⁵ A special focus was placed on *Women of New China/Women of China* as it served as

³⁵ Both the Chinese and English versions of the women's magazine were published again after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979 and have continued since then.

the only official national magazine of the federation, providing coverage of its international activities. It is characterized by major differences from the national edition of the journal, reflecting the different audiences.

The research also included a comprehensive consultation on the key themes of the research of the main Chinese and Italian newspapers of reference, *People's Daily* 人民日报 (*Renmin Ribao*, 1949-1966) and *L'Unità* (Unity, 1948-1966). Furthermore, included individual articles from other periodicals, magazines, newspapers, posters, and zines. Among these is the homonymous overseas English version of the *China Pictorial* (人民画报 *Renmin Huabao*), *Avanti!* (Forward!), *Corriere della Sera* (Evening Currier). Finally, the research also included memoirs to access the more intimate thoughts, not adjusted in tones and words for the wider public. These have been integrated primarily to fill the narrative gaps in the official documentation regarding the structural changes and the agenda of the federations following the international upheaval represented by the split in the socialist movement in 1956. Specifically, I consulted the autobiographical memoir of the MP and UDI President from 1956 to 1987, Marisa Rodano (2011), and biographical materials on Yang Yunyu (杨蕴玉) – ACWDF resident secretary at the WIDF from 1953 to 1957, and then responsible of foreign affairs and the International Liaison Department at the ACWF Secretariat (Geng 2023; Cao 2021). The research also relies on documents from other archives concerning the Communist movement, including the UDI provincial archives. All the selected archives preserve precious ego sources, official documents, photographs, and material artifacts belonging to the lively political environment of the period, demonstrating the connection of localities to the global dimension.

Among them the Gramsci Foundation Central Archive, the Lelio e Lisli Basso Foundation in Rome, the Milan section of the Central State Archives (Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Milano, ACS-MI), the Unione Femminile Nazionale (UNF) Archive, the Piero Gobetti Foundation Archive; the UDI Siena Archive, the UDI Pesaro Archive.

The main analytical difficulty in working with GSF official sources is that they are adulatory. They praise the WIDF and present positive examples of women within the WIDF working together in solidarity to reach their purposes. Across the WIDF's publications, there is continual glorification of socialist societies such as the Soviet Union and the PRC as the most progressive in terms of achievements in women's rights. As Katharine McGregor pointed «the purpose of the positive reporting on socialist societies was presumably to project socialism as a teleological utopia towards which all people were heading» in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology. This is also true for the WIDF image and the federation work done within the transnational communist network presented by the UDI and the ACWF. The WIDF and the national federations used and reproduced idealized and homogeneous and coherent (contradictory) images of Asian and African women as vulnerable, depicting them as suffering victims, devoted mothers, and at the same time, right champions, and empowered, armed, anti-colonial resistance fighters or heroines (Gradska 2020). These contradictions became more apparent as we interpreted these tropes, considering who produced these discourses, whose needs they served, and who influenced the functioning of the WIDF. When treated critically, the WIDF sources provide access to a hitherto understudied history of anti-colonial activism. Considering the standpoint of women from Vietnam and Algeria, for example, this contributed to international discourses about heroic women revolutionaries (McGregor 2016).

Methodology

The study applies a transcultural perspective to studying the GSF movement. The work is informed by transnational history since it emphasizes the processes of interaction on a larger scale, on the international level, focusing on the relationships among national actors by paying particular attention to the role of organizations, movements, and ideas that are “not contained by national borders” (Gradskova 2021b, 4; Snyder 2013, 102; Iriye 2013, 28–30; Scholte 2017; Sluga & Clavin 2017). With Bracke and Mark (2015, 413), transculturality is envisioned as a complex process of adaptation and reinterpretation resulting from a dialogic tension involved in the process of mutual understanding. The resulting blending and hybridization processes are analyzed in terms of their complexity, including inherent contradictions and confusions. The unique mixed identities and practices that emerged from these interactions are evident, as shown in the opening example of their shared wartime experiences. By capturing frames of these continuous transformative actions, ideas, and practices, the research stresses the permeability of cultural boundaries. It highlights the critical role of groups and individuals as agents of cultural change, facilitating cultural blending and adaptation. Accordingly, large-scale processes and their effects are envisioned as an open background on these interactions and an interpretative field susceptible to modifications considering the micro-level interactions. This approach emphasizes complexity and the creation of new cultural forms. Consequently, I study how, in the immediate postwar context, particularly the concept of motherhood served as a basis to develop a productive dialogue capable of traveling through and, to some extent, transcending national borders and the “Iron” and “Bamboo” curtains effectively until 1956 (Chapters 1, 2, 3).

The thesis also uses postcolonial feminism as a valuable methodological and theoretical tool. I question the subject of feminism itself by criticizing the domination of Western interpretations of Third World women, gender inequality, sexism, and the aims and tactics of women's political mobilizations (Mohanty 2003, 40–1; bell hooks 1989). Despite China not having a colonial past, this example shows how it came to assume a leading role in bringing forward the perspectives of decolonial countries into the WIDF stage within the context of the Socialist Women's Movement divisions experienced from 1956 onwards.³⁶ Following the postcolonial feminist bell hooks stressed how the assumption «that resisting patriarchal domination is a more legitimate feminist action than resisting racism and other forms of domination» is made by «the White feminist movement in the West» and discriminates all other forms of feminist resistance, by envisioning feminism in determinist terms (ivi, 19–20). By examining the relationships between women from the “Global South” and the “Global North,” a postcolonial perspective provides valuable insights into the fractures within the Socialist women's movement that emerged gradually after 1956 and reached a tipping point in 1963. This rupture can be attributed to the imbalanced power dynamics within the federation. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the WIDF witnessed an increasing diversity in its membership; however, this diversification was not matched by proportional representation in positions of power (Gradska 2020). Analyzing the ostensibly “universal” documents and declarations of the WIDF through a post-colonial perspective enables an examination of their internal contradictions and omissions. Drawing on Ann Laura Stoler's (2009) method for conducting post-colonial research within colonial archives, the study distinguishes between what was “unwritten” because it was universally understood and needed no

³⁶ This was done not only within the women's movement but also at the level of general international communist politics, as analyzed by Frazier (2014).

articulation and what was omitted because it could not yet be expressed or was unspeakable. In doing so, the research uncovers and highlights the silences and internal contradictions during times of transition. This approach also allowed Yulia Gradszkova (2021b, 6) to study the archives of the Antifascist Committee of Soviet Women (which changed its name to the Committee of Soviet Women in 1956) and to find and expose the silences and internal contradictions during changing times, while the WIDF was still promoting a “uniform” (using Mohanty’s 2003 definition) image of those women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the name of whom the organization claimed to speak for.

This approach proved particularly useful in analyzing the different perceptions of the UDI and the ACWF activists when denouncing the WIDF's internal unbalance of powers after 1956 particularly in the context of the 1963 World Council in Moscow (Chapter 4).

The study uses textual analysis to historically contextualize every piece by identifying its main information, contents, and features. I consider it important to pay special attention to the author’s complex intentions, the context where the documents were created, and the possible reasons for their preservation in the archive. I find it useful to pay attention to the personal position and possible motivations and the (self-) censorship’s restrictions on the individual women who were the authors or recipients of classified and non-classified documents. The document analysis also focused on translingual processes underlying most of the documents. Speeches, proceedings, meeting minutes, and epistolary exchanges usually included a translation process, sometimes even double translations, from Chinese to French or English and then to Italian and vice versa. Although the top leaders generally spoke at least one of the

mediation languages, a second translation was sometimes necessary for disseminating the content of the international movement for discussion at the national level or broader distribution. The sources analyzed also included visual elements: photographs, political cartoons, films, and other forms of visual art. The study of visual artifacts integrated different theoretical perspectives, such as semiotics, art history, and visual anthropology, to comprehensively understand historical images and their cultural impact. I also considered the context of production, reception and circulation for their analysis.

Following Ganger (2017), I have framed *circulation* not as a synonym for diffusion, distribution, or spread, but as a distinct analytical category. To be effective, the concept should be used to describe movement within a bounded and potentially circular system – where the focus is not on what moves or under what conditions, but on the very process of movement itself. By emphasizing movement over content or context, I aim to employ the term more precisely within transcultural history, not by enforcing rigid definitions, but through ongoing critical reflection. In doing so, I remain attentive to the semantic lineage and interpretive weight that *circulation* carries, acknowledging how its meaning shifts across disciplines and historical periods.

This study helps unveil the extent to which the GSF's transnational activism transformed Women's History and Global History. Analyzing key episodes for encounter, dialogue, and exchange within GSF activists fills the gap in the historiography of feminist thinking. The analysis demonstrates women activists' concern and willingness to take advantage of their privileged official position and promote women's stances at a transnational level.

Chapters Outline

The first chapter, *Mothers as Warriors for Peace: A Transcultural Alliance*, explores how Socialist women's activism is rooted and developed in strong relation to the conceptual frameworks of war and peace during the initial phase of the Cold War, from 1947 to 1953. The chapter provides a historical background that sets the tone for the discursive practices that shaped Italian and Chinese women's exchanges in the following years. It demonstrates how these exchanges and contacts influenced local discursive practices concerning socialist women's identities and roles, imparting a specific focus on the themes of motherhood and child protection. A pivotal role in this process was played by the transnational mobilization for the Korean War. The chapter focuses on the involvement of WIDF activists in the global campaign to denounce anti-imperialist crimes and aid the Korean population. It investigates how the WIDF capitalized on its involvement to affirm itself as an international agency for protecting peace and human and women's rights. Furthermore, it analyses how the ACWDF capitalized on its involvement in the WIDF based on its primary role as a supporter of the Northern Korean population. Finally, it stresses how the discourses on the War were reproduced in Western Europe and specifically in the Italian national leftist realm by analyzing the main women's magazine of the UDI, *Noi Donne*. The analysis showed how Western women's organizations proved able to appropriate this discourse and make use of it for their own agenda on the one side and if and how international and local contexts shaped the room for these organizations' agency.

Creating a Worldwide Motherocracy examines the development of maternalist strategies created in the context of the Korean War, beginning with the period when the armed truce was under negotiation and subsequently approved. As a result, a period of dialogue emerged, as evidenced by the 1953 World Congress of Women. The brief

easing of international diplomacy following the 1954 Geneva Conference further strengthened the bonds between organizations affiliated with the WIDF, opening an unprecedented period of exchange between these groups, including the UDI and the ACWDF. However, the WIDF also faced repercussions due to its anti-imperialist campaign and its challenge to the UN's leadership on human rights, resulting in its expulsion from ECOSOC in 1954. In response to this setback, the federation sought to reinforce its leadership by leveraging maternalism, convening a World Congress of Mothers in 1955 and, at the same time, establishing a Permanent International Committee of Mothers. An analysis of the documents produced by this congress, along with its representation in the main media outlets of the UDI and ACWDF, reveals an attempt to create a new, complex, and contradictory professional role: that of the professional mother-diplomat. This role, rooted in innate biological characteristics, was legitimized both in the realm of human rights diplomacy and within the socialist movement. The mother-diplomat was portrayed as a unique actor endowed with specific qualities, rejecting all forms of violence and promoting diplomacy. This strategy was intended to distance the WIDF from the anti-imperialist label that had led to its exclusion from the UN. At the same time, the movement strove to maintain an internal dialectical tension that would make it useful and responsive to the needs of the second and third-world countries increasingly joining the federation. In this context, the ACWDF positioned itself as the spokesperson for these countries, particularly its Asian neighbors. *Women of New China* was rich in content emphasizing these bonds of friendship. The role that the ACWDF sought to assume was reaffirmed at the 1956 Beijing Council. However, the contradictions inherent in the movement's propaganda of unity and expansion would come to the forefront when confronted with the international events of 1956.

The third chapter, *Women Models: Mediating the Communist Dream of Liberation* discusses the period that unfolds after the easing of international tensions related to the Korean conflict opens up a series of bilateral international exchanges beyond the Iron Curtain. These exchanges also involve the socialist women's movement, which positions itself as a forerunner in bilateral transnational collaborations alongside other entities established for this precise purpose. This chapter analyzes the content of the exchanges between the ACWDF and the UDI from 1954 to 1956, focusing on three key moments: two Italian delegations to the PRC in 1954 and 1955 and an ACWDF delegation to Italy in early 1956. The evolution of bilateral women's diplomacy is examined through political pilgrimages, a strategy promoted by the USSR since the late 1940s. The analysis of the documentation related to the planning of these visits by the Italian side, preserved in the ACUDI archives, has allowed for an in-depth exploration of the strategies employed by the ACWDF and the UDI to elevate the professional significance of these exchanges within the realm of transnational cultural diplomacy. Their dual objective was to strengthen the stature of their respective women's organizations within their affiliated political parties while simultaneously acquiring greater authority and linking women's rights and human rights initiatives to broader diplomatic and cultural efforts. The media impact of these exchanges at the local level is analyzed through the primary media outlets of both organizations, *Noi Donne* and *Women of New China*. The analysis reveals a pronounced one-sided emphasis by the UDI on China. This reflects not only the organization's need to assert itself within local politics but also Italian women's interest in socialist experiments concerning women's rights and human rights, which were widely discussed and disseminated between 1954 and 1955 through the organization of events, conferences, and the production of original material related to these exchanges. The

year 1956 marked a pivotal moment, as forms of bilateral engagement between Chinese and Western European women largely ceased in response to shifting priorities within national organizations due to evolving global circumstances.

In the final section, *Unveiling the Limits of Maternalist Feminism: Mediating Coexistence and Resistance*, the contradictions inherent in the conceptualization of the mother-diplomat come to a head. The international events of 1956 exposed the irreconcilability between maternalist policies and anti-imperialist demands. The policy of peaceful coexistence clashed with the positions of representatives from post-colonial countries or those engaged in struggles for independence, whose numbers within the WIDF were steadily increasing. Consequently, the international federation progressively became a battleground for differing perspectives on human and women's rights and the methods to achieve them. This is reflected in the documentation relating to the World Congress of Women in Vienna in 1958. The policy of peaceful coexistence, promoted by the CSW, revealed its internal contradictions, particularly on one of the movement's most critical issues: the fight for nuclear disarmament. In this context, the international stances of women's movements in Italy and China would gradually crystallize into two opposing approaches shaped by global and local events. In both cases, autonomy from Soviet policy was sought, though pursued through significantly different approaches and ideological foundations. In Italy, the UDI adopted an emancipatory stance, seeking independence from the WIDF and its party in response to local demands for national representation. In contrast, the ACWF pursued international dialogue increasingly within a hardened ideological framework centered on anti-imperialism as the prerequisite for advancing human and women's rights. The contradictions within the WIDF and the irreconcilable positions of its member organizations would erupt at the World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1963. The undemocratic structure of the Congress, orchestrated by the CSW, was

openly criticized by the ACWF in a detailed report published in *Women of China*. While *Noi Donne* did not explicitly reveal the ongoing rupture, documents from the ACUDI archives disclose similar discontent from the Italian side. Though neither organization entirely withdrew from the international federation, the productivity of the transcultural dialogue within the federation was significantly diminished by this event. Nevertheless, the challenges faced during this period would eventually give rise to innovative and creative forms of feminist interaction, fostering new strategies for collaboration across ideological and geographical divides.

1. Mothers as Warriors for Peace: A Transcultural Alliance

1.1 The development of a global campaign against the Korean War

1.1.1 Korea and the Politics of Peace in the Cold War Divide



Figure 1.1. Pablo Picasso's 'Massacre in Korea'. Valauri, January 18, 1951 (Museu, 1951).

In early 1951, Picasso produced the large canvas *Massacre in Korea* (*Massacres en Corée*), inspired by the “dirty war” in Korea, as described by left-wing newspapers at the time. Picasso’s earlier masterpiece, *Guernica*, created in response to the bombing of Gernika during the Spanish Civil War, had already become a universal symbol of the devastating impact of modern warfare on civilians. One might assume that *Massacres en Corée* would similarly resonate, yet it was largely dismissed and forgotten (Keen 2017, 80). The dismissal was most likely related not to any decrease in Picasso’s fame but rather to the subject: the Korean War, later remembered as “forgotten” in the Global West.

Despite being forgotten by the time of its display, the work is a great starting point to realize, at a glance, who the protagonists of this sad episode of the recent past were. Drawing from Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808*³⁷, the work style is straightforward and shows us two groups, victims and perpetrators. Still, *Massacre in Korea* features an essential difference, namely the depiction of the victims as helpless, scared, and resigned civilians, particularly those more vulnerable among them: women, seemingly mothers, and children. Picasso, when drawing this long-forgotten masterpiece in early 1951, a few months after the beginning of the War on June 25, 1950. A striking feature of the painting is its sole staging of mothers and children as representatives of the victims among the Korean population. This points to the significance of this trope at the time, which was also a central element of the peace campaign developed at the international level, which was forefronted by the WIDF. Historian Suzy Kim (2019, 2023a) highlighted how the Korean War represented a crucial event that shaped the trajectory of Cold War feminism, consolidating a bifurcated understanding of the oppression of women on both sides of the ideological divide, influencing transnational feminist movements in the medium to long term. The War represented the starting point for the development of Social women networks based on the sexual biological feature of maternity. This concept was re-envisioned according to the political purposes of the movement and proved helpful for the development of a women-diplomacy. The sources from the UDI national archive (ACUDI) provide insight into the transnational discourses and activities shaping the "struggle for peace" within the WIDF. Documents highlight the crucial role played by the newly-founded ACWDF and by the Korean Democratic Women's Union

³⁷ Goya's painting shows Napoleon's soldiers executing Spanish civilians under the orders of Joachim Murat (Museu Picasso, 1951).

(KDWU),³⁸ as protagonists for bringing the stances of Korean and Chinese civilians, presenting themselves as champions of human rights. By displaying maternal transcultural strategies of Korean mothers and victims/heroes and white men as soldiers and perpetrators, Asian women impacted the understanding of their Western counterparts' war also in decolonial sense. These kind of images characterize and were widespread within the Socialist transnational milieu during the Korean War period. The WIDF sources enlighten the active role Chinese and Korean women activists in the promotion and spread of similar "peace images" within the umbrella federation network. The national federations then readapted the use of this global symbols for local public. As they spread, these images took on transcultural meanings, linking struggles in foreign lands to those taking place in local territories. The transcultural effectiveness of this image emerges from the reports and articles produced by the UDI activists both within the context of the Atlantist Italian political government and specifically for the women's public. Italian women demonstrated an attentive attitude when reporting what they exchanged in the transnational context and selecting information according to the public.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part contextualizes the transnational "struggle for peace" within the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War. It shows how it was shaped within the context of the Socialist transnational front, particularly within the women's network promoted by the WIDF concerning the Korean War, in which the ACWDF played a crucial role.

The second part analyzes the War's effect on the global and women's movement for peace. It enlightens the dynamics behind the creation of the movement in the Asian

³⁸ The North Korean women's organization was founded in 1945 in the aftermath of Japan's defeat. See Kim (2019; 2023a, 1-16).

context and how the strategies displayed by Asian actors proved to be effective in engaging Western audiences, particularly Italian women.

The third part will delve into the direct involvement of the WIDF in the transnational campaign for peace by analyzing the initiatives promoted and brought forward by the transnational federation, which represented a space where Italian and Asian women acted and built the meaning of socialist women struggling for peace.

The Korean War's importance in shaping the global network for peace emerged in the analysis of the exchanges between the UDI and the ACWDF, a peculiar element forging their connection in the early 1950s. One of the first traces of direct communication between the two women's organizations precisely discusses the campaign, indicating the cooperation actually builds on this event.³⁹

The women of China are, like the women of Italy, fighting actively alongside the rest of the people throughout the country for the defence of world peace. Now, we are exerting our greatest efforts to aid the people of Korea and to resist the aggression of the American imperialists).⁴⁰

With these words, on June 4, 1951, the President of the ACWDF, Cai Chang (蔡畅, 1900-1990), addressed the President of the UDI, Maria Maddalena Rossi (1906-1995). Shortly after that, on June 25, it would be one year since the outbreak of the Korean War, a conflict that represented one of the occasions in which transnational

³⁹ This letter from Cai is preceded by one from October 19, 1950, also concerning the topic of the Korean War, specifically addressing the international effort to sign the Stockholm Appeal (ACUDI 8, 36). An Italian translation of the original English letter is later published in the issue no. 46 (November 19, 1950) of *ND*, along with a report on Chinese children titled "Ore serene per i bimbi cinesi" (Serene Hours for Chinese Children), which praises the situation in post-war China, highlighting the opportunities that the country's unification offers to the future of its young inhabitants, depicted in scenes of school life, eating, and playing while supervised by a teacher. The happy circumstances of Chinese children are also featured on the cover of the same issue.

⁴⁰ Letter from Cai Chang to Maria Maddalena Rossi, June 4, 1951 in ACUDI 9, 45-1.

socialist-oriented associations demonstrated their extensive involvement and commitment to carrying forward the “struggle for peace.” The correspondence highlights the joint efforts of the two organizations to take forward a concrete commitment to supporting the civilian population affected by the war, particularly children.

The roots of this communal effort for peace, are retraceable in the WIDF’s second congress, held in Budapest on December 1, 1948, on the occasion of the third anniversary of the international federation (WIDF 1949, 7). Paradigmatically titled “Women’s Congress for Peace” the 1948 congress marked the starting point of the contacts and exchanges between the ACWDF and its – by them mostly European – counterparts.⁴¹ From this moment, the image of the dove came to define a precise pacifist iconography represented not only within the women’s federations but also through their media apparatus.⁴² The importance of the theme of peace emerges prominently from the UDI archival sources on the congress (ACUDI 8, 45).⁴³ The iconography adopted by the WIDF – also adopted by the UDI itself, as Giulia Cioci (2020, 142) noted – also echoes the relevance of this topic.

⁴¹ As mentioned, the 1945 first WIDF congress saw the participation of Chinese women delegates ambassadors of the Nationalist regime (see the introduction).

⁴² In the Italian context, this symbolism is already found within issue no 40 of *ND* (November 21, 1948, 8). For an in-depth study of the symbolism of peace, see Martellini (2006) and Guiso (2007).

⁴³ Indicative of this is the speech by UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi (1948) at the congress, titled *Le donne di tutto il mondo per la pace* (Women of the World for Peace), later published as a pamphlet.

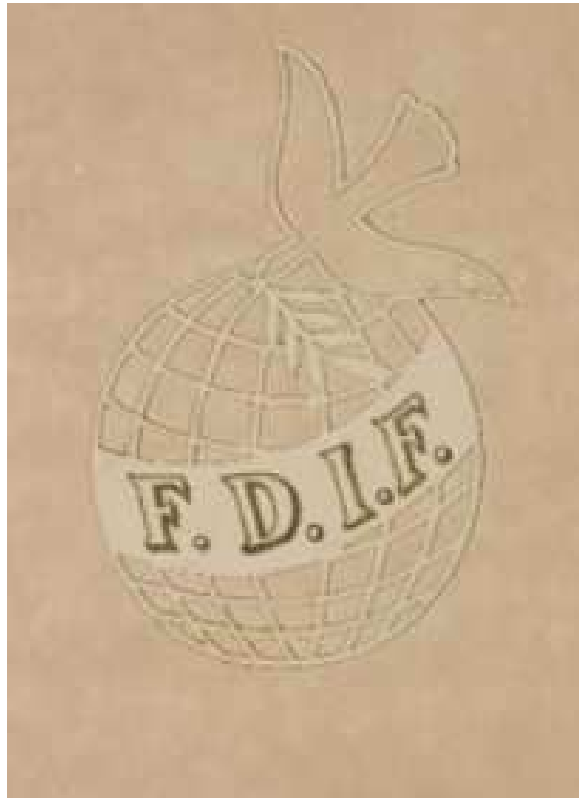


Figure 1.2. WIDF logo in November 1949 photographic album on the WIDF Council in Moscow (UDI 1949)

The relevance given by the WIDF to the theme of peace emerges in the words of its general secretary Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier. At the press conference preceding the congress on November 9, 1948, she stated:

[...] those who profited from slavery do not love freedom for others; they want to continue seeing their profits grow, even at the cost of the lives of men, women, and small children. During the last war, they told the people: “You are fighting for freedom.” The people thought this freedom was theirs and not just their masters’; today, they want this freedom. They are fighting for it. And we, the democratic women of the whole world, support them because we know that there is no democracy without equality and no peace without democracy. That is why we support the disarmament proposals put forward by the Soviet Union and the

ban on atomic weapons. Since our Constitutive Congress, we have never stopped fighting for the ban on atomic weapons. Only those who want war can be against such a proposal. (ACUDI 2, 18-1)⁴⁴

As enlightened in the extract, the women's peace movement was not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broader socialist network supported by collaboration with other entities, particularly the World Peace Council (WPC).⁴⁵

The WPC was an umbrella federation represented national peace movements within the socialist sphere, such as the Chinese People's Committee for Defending World Peace (中国人民保卫世界和平大会, *Zhongguo Renmin Baowei Shijie Heping Dahui*, also called Chinese Peace Committee, CPC)⁴⁶ and the Partisans for Peace in Italy.⁴⁷ As an international communist organization, its logo prominently displays this affiliation.

⁴⁴ Original text: «Parce que ceux qui profitaient de l'esclavage n'aiment pas la liberté, pour les autres; ils veulent continuer à voir grossir leurs profits, même si c'est au prix de la vie des hommes, des femmes et des petits enfants. Pendant la dernière guerre, ils avaient dit aux peuples: 'Vous combattez pour la liberté'. Les peuples ont pensé que cette liberté, c'était la leur et pas seulement celle de leurs maîtres; aujourd'hui, ils la veulent, cette liberté. Ils se battent pour elle. Et nous, les femmes démocrates du monde entier, nous les soutenons parce que nous savons qu'il n'y a pas de démocratie sans égalité et pas de paix sans démocratie. C'est pour cela que nous appuyons les propositions de désarmement proposées par l'Union Soviétique et l'interdiction de l'armes atomique. Depuis notre Congrès Constitutif, nous n'avons jamais cessé de lutter pour l'interdiction de l'arme atomique. Il n'y a que ceux qui veulent la guerre qui puissent être contre une telle proposition.»

⁴⁵ The WPC was founded in April 1949 – initially named the World Committee of Partisans for Peace, later changed to World Peace Council, in November 1950 (CIA 1971, 2).

⁴⁶ For a broader contextualization on the creation of the Chinese Peace Committee in the context of the Socialist transnational front, see Shen and Xia (2014); For a specific work on the Committee, see Nasser (2023). Notably, after the beginning of the Korean War it was also settled a particular organ to administrate the Korean and Taiwanese circumstances, namely the Chinese People's Committee for Defending World Peace and Against U.S. Aggression (*Zhongguo Renmin Baowei Shijie Heping Fandui Meiguo Qinlue Weiyuanhui* 中国人民保卫世界和平反对美国侵略委员会); see Zhang (1996); Harrison (2013, 102-12).

⁴⁷ On the Partisans for Peace in Italy, see the scientific works of Petrangeli (1999) and Cerrai (2011). Recently, a book by Tussi and Cracolici (2024) has also been published, containing new testimonies from participants in the movement.

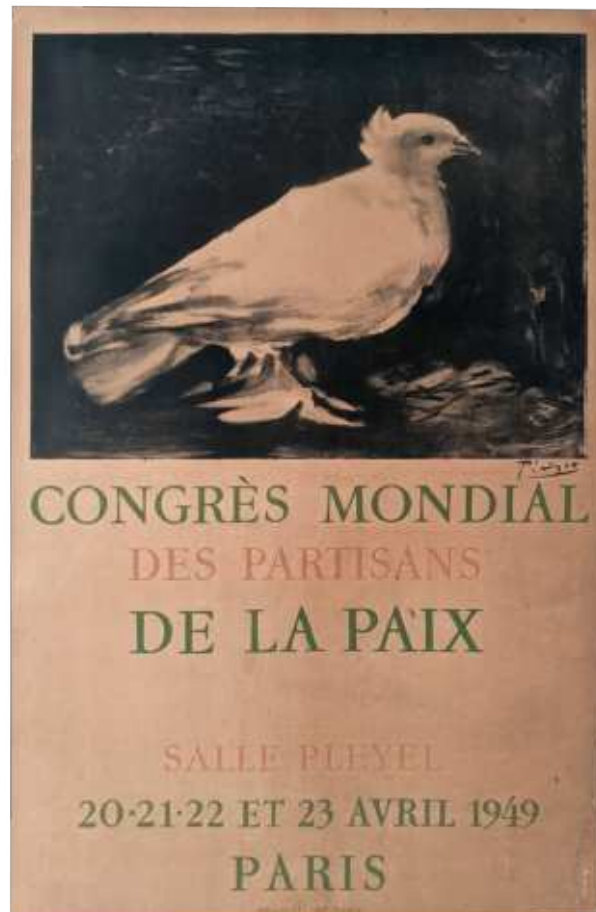


Figure 1.3 Poster of the World Congress of the Partisans for peace – also Congress of the Defenders of Peace (NBM Poster). The poster displays the famous peace dove painted in January by Picasso which became not only the symbol of the Peace Congresses but also of the ideals of world Communism. Bottinelli (2004) reports that the day before the conference opening, Picasso's companion Françoise Gilot had given birth to his fourth child, who was named Paloma, the Spanish word for 'dove'.

The WPC was officially created at the Second World Peace Congress, held in Warsaw on 16-22 November 1950 (CIA 1954, 11-14). Despite of that, its creation is usually associated with the previous year's first World Congress of the Defenders of Peace – on 20-25 April 1949 – when the platform leading to its officialization was established (Goedde 2019, 15). The congress was jointly convened in Paris by the WIDF and the new Wroclaw Liaison Committee – created the previous year Franco-Polish initiative by antifascist intellectuals meeting in Wroclaw in August 1948 (Wernicke 2001, 334-5). Owing to French government obstruction, a parallel congress took place in Prague (ibid).

Both the UDI and the ACWDF were committed to the WPC's objectives as a framework for maintaining world peace, offering a fundamental guide for the United Nations. The WPC called on the UN «to return to the path defined by its Charter», which, according to the organization, «has become a tool of war, [...] strayed from the path of maintaining peace.»⁴⁸

After the first plenary conference held in Berlin 21-26 February 1951, the WPC launched the call for signatures to support the signature and enforcement of the “Peace Pact between the Five Powers” (Dobrenko 2024, 35) – also referred to as the “Pact between the Big Five” or the “Berlin Pact”. The aim was to urge the conclusion of a peace pact among the five major powers (the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China) in order to prevent the remilitarization of West Germany and to promote détente during the Cold War (FRUS 1951). The pact was the object of a vast dissemination campaign by the WIDF and its affiliated federations, as evidenced by the exchange between the ACWDF President Cai Chang and the UDI President Maria Maddalena Rossi that represented one of the first direct

⁴⁸ Chen Hanbo 陳翰伯. Baowei heping de xin gaochao 保衛和平的新高潮 (A New High Point in Defending Peace), *ZGFN* no 20, March 15, 1951, 14–15.

exchanges between the Chiense and Italian women mass federations.⁴⁹ The exchange between Cai and Rossi reveals a direct connection between the signature campaign for the conclusion of the “Pact between the Big Five” and the peace campaign concerning the Korean War. It highlights how Chinese and Korean activists were able to seize the opportunity presented by socialist peace campaigns to give global resonance to local demands. For this reason – and thanks to their diplomatic skills – the Korean War marked a new phase of Asian women’s leadership on the global stage. However, before delving specifically into the campaign related to the Korean War, it is useful to trace the roots of the peace movements in which the international network of socialist women played a key role in previous years, paving the way for the Korean campaign. It is relevant to stress that the 1951 signature campaign was not the first example of the collaboration between the WIDF and the WPC. An earlier example was the March 1950 signature collection campaign for the Stockholm Appeal, which was also carried out by the WPC and called on the UN: «for an absolute banning of the atomic bomb, strict international controls to ensure implementation, and the recognition that the use of an atomic weapon “would be a crime against humanity” for which the government in question would be tried as a war criminal» (Marx Memorial Library n.d.). The Stockholm appeal was given echo by the WIDF at the executive committee meeting held in April 1950 in Helsinki, when the WIDF issued an open letter to the women of the world, urging them to sign it.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The abovementioned letter of June 4 was followed by Rossi’s answer to Cai on September 26, 1951 (ACUDI 9, 45-1).

⁵⁰ Information Group of the International Department of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation 中華全國民主婦女聯合會國際部資料組. Guoji Minzhu Funü Lianhehui Gongzuo Gaikuang 國際民主婦女聯合會工作概況 (Overview of the Work of the Women’s International Democratic Federation), *ZGFN* no 17, December 15, 1950, 14–55.

1.1.2 The development of a socialist women's network for human rights

Even prior to the WPC foundation, as early as 1948, the WIDF conducted similar campaigns initiatives directly petitioning the UN. The women's umbrella federation openly supported the Soviet Union's anti-nuclear stance, which had emerged as early as 1947 in opposition to the U.S. position. The latter promoted an approach aimed at retaining nuclear weapons while restricting and regulating their use through the establishment of a dedicated international agency—a position that ultimately prevailed and led to the creation of such an agency within the United Nations framework the following year (X.Y.Z. 1955, 334-5). These diverging perspectives on disarmament mirrored the broader and intensifying political rift between East and West. As tensions escalated during the early Cold War, efforts to reach consensus on disarmament became increasingly mired in stalemate. As a reaction protests were carried out by international actors supporting the USSR pacifist stance, including the WIDF and its affiliated national federations. This is made explicit in the speech by Vaillant-Couturier in November 1948, stating:

[...] we support the disarmament proposals put forward by the Soviet Union and the prohibition of the atomic weapon. [...] Our campaign is supported in all countries. The women of Paris demonstrated it forcefully on October 27 at the Vel d'Hiv. Petitions for peace are circulating everywhere in France and around the world. Italian women came two days ago to bring more than 3 million signatures to the UN. Our task is to denounce the handful of criminals who would risk leading the world into another massacre if we let them. But we are the vast majority who want peace, and it is this will for peace that will be affirmed in Budapest at our 2nd International Congress, by delegations from the United States, Great Britain, the USSR, France, India, Iran, Sweden, Poland, Venezuela,

Brazil, Mongolia, Vietnam, Greece, Republican Spain, Denmark, Egypt, Australia, Czechoslovakia, and all other countries. It is this will for peace that is our strength.⁵¹

This context partly explains why organizations such as the WPC emerged as leaders of the antinuclear movement. Furthermore, the first American thermonuclear test in 1952 appears to have accelerated Soviet nuclear research and suggested new technical possibilities. Consequently, just as the production of the first Soviet atomic bomb spurred the US government to develop a hydrogen bomb, American efforts to build such a weapon in turn encouraged Soviet leaders to proceed with their own development. The Soviet hydrogen bomb was tested less than a year later, in 1953 (Wittner 2009, 41). Even earlier, on August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union had tested its first nuclear bomb – an event that became a rallying point for the Communist-led peace campaign. Among the Soviet Union’s Cold War allies, there was little dissent regarding nuclear weapons. Elated by the Soviet atomic breakthrough, they portrayed it – consistent with Eastern Bloc peace propaganda – as a blow against war (ibid).⁵² For this reason, the WPC – as the WIDF (see Introduction) – is generally portrayed in historiography as the primary vehicle of Soviet propaganda in the so-called “fight

⁵¹ Original text: «[...] nous appuyons les propositions de désarmement proposées par l'Union Soviétique et l'interdiction de l'arme atomique. [...] Notre campagne est approuvée dans tous les pays. Les femmes de Paris l'ont démontré avec force, le 27 octobre, au Vel' d'Hiv'. Partout en France et dans le monde entier, circulent des pétitions pour la paix. Les femmes italiennes sont venues, il y a deux jours, porter plus de 3 millions de signatures à l'O.N.U. Notre tâche est de dénoncer la poignée de criminels qui risqueraient d'entraîner le monde dans une nouvelle tuerie si nous les laissons faire. Mais nous sommes l'immense majorité à vouloir la Paix et c'est cette volonté de paix que viendront affirmer à Budapest, à notre IIe Congrès International, les délégations des États-Unis, de Grande-Bretagne, d'URSS, de France, des Indes, d'Iran, de Suède, de Pologne, du Vénézuéla, du Brésil, de Mongolie, du Viet-Nam, de Grèce, de l'Espagne Républicaine, du Danemark, de l'Égypte, d'Australie, de Tchecoslovaquie et de tous les autres pays. C'est cette volonté de paix qui est notre force.» The WIDF general secretary Vaillant-Couturier at the press conference in preparation for the 2nd WIDF Congress, on 9 November 1948 (ACUDI 2, 18-1).

⁵² It is worth noting that Wittner refers to Chinese sources such as *Ta Kung Pao* 大公报 (*Dagongbao*) without, however, providing precise citations—similarly to his claims regarding the unqualified support he attributes to the governments of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland.

for human rights,” aiming to undermine the authority of the UN as a guarantor of human rights (Dobrenko 2024, 36).⁵³ It is in relation to this bipolar tension that counter-narratives emerged in opposition to the Soviet-led peace campaign.



The peace dove as portrayed by the anti-communist propaganda prominently with a communist mark. Figure 1.4 (left) shows the famous 1950 poster *La Colombe qui fait BOUM* by an anonymous (FAMSF 1950; Kotek 2016). Figure 1.5 Shows the WPC Logo as portrayed in a CIA (1971, 1) report.

Indeed, in a progressively bipolar Widespread ideological tensions forced pacifist organizations to proceed with caution, as their efforts were often viewed with suspicion—seen as communist-leaning by pro-American circles and as serving American imperialism by pro-Soviet ones. These polarized perceptions made cooperation between the non-communist and communist-aligned sectors of the peace movement increasingly difficult and divisive as stressed by Wernicke (2001, 334-5) and Wittner

⁵³ For a broader contextualization, see Foot (2010).

(2009, 47-9). This latter author also noted that in the early 1950s the anti-nuclear campaign declined as a reaction to escalation of the Cold War, resulting in an ideological lockdown coming from the both the communist and the anti-communist spheres, which nonetheless favored a burgeoning non-aligned movement (Ivi, 50).

Bipolar dynamics were evident as early as March 1947 in the European context, after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine, which was a consequence of Stalin's policy of "prudent expansionism" followed in the Middle East and the Mediterranean (Guiso 2004, 151). The USSR response articulated in the "two camps" doctrine, presented by Andrei Zhdanov (Claudin 1975, 307-320) and the launch of an ideological and agitational offensive in the West called the "Struggle for Peace in all the World" (hereafter "Struggle for Peace") a central feature of Soviet foreign policy rhetoric between 1948 and 1954 (Johnston 2008, 259). This notion encompassed elements of a complex strategy aimed at, through the power of opinion and mass extra-parliamentary mobilization, countering the implementation of American strategic and economic plans and, in perspective, causing a gradual erosion of the bond between Europe and the United States, thus creating the conditions to effectively subvert the Western bloc (Guiso 2004, 153). The WIDF, in this context, conceived as an organization hinged around antifascism and inclusion, had necessarily oriented itself in defense of the demands of internationalist socialism (de Haan 2009, 245). The "struggle for peace" was conducted in the socialist women's networks through multiple modalities (street demonstrations, signature collections, newspapers, periodicals, cinema, television) already widespread but assuming a more global dimension, and enriching with new communicative strategies, namely maternal and anti-colonial (Donert 2016; Gradskova 2020, 85-90).

It is against the backdrop of these events that the peace activism carried out by WIDF activists – and more specifically by those of the ACWDF and UDI – should be situated, within the context of a conflict that reignited fears of a “hot” war: the Korean War. Maria Maddalena Rossi’s response to Cai Chang message discussed at the beginning of this chapter, arrived after a few months, on September 29, 1951. Despite the delay the message was enthusiastic and show engagement; detailing – as requested by Cai – how the dissemination of the Berlin appeal was widespread throughout the peninsula through local UDI channels. It also stressed how the propaganda work went hand in hand with a collection of aid for the Korean population (ACUDI 9, 45). By that time, the Korean War had been ongoing for fifteen months, and since July 1951, the frontlines had reached a stalemate along the 38th parallel. The subsequent phase of the conflict was characterized by extensive U.S. bombing of North Korea, with an estimated 635,000 tons of bombs dropped by the end of the war – approximately 20% more than the total tonnage dropped on Japan during World War II (Seth 2023, 112).

The WIDF peace campaign to end the Korean conflict represented the culmination of years of advocacy for disarmament, the abolition of atomic weapons, and, concurrently, the protection of women’s and children’s rights. These latter point, in particular, was central to the WIDF’s propaganda efforts to halt the Korean War. The protection of children rights was among the federation’s most critical objectives since its inception. It was in fact the WIDF that established June 1 as International Children’s Day (ICD) to be celebrated worldwide. This date was proposed at the 2nd WIDF Council held in Moscow, 17–22 November 1949. Delegates from the ACWDF were also among the participants, including Li Peizhi 李培之, Gong Pusheng 龚普

生 and writer Ding Ling 丁玲. The proposal to establish a Children's Day was put forward by UDI delegate and WIDF Secretariat representative Elena Caporaso.⁵⁴ Approved unanimously, ICD was formalized by a resolution the final day of the council. June 1 was chosen in memory of the 88 children massacred by Nazi forces in the Czech village of Lidice in June 1942 (Chen 2017). Since then, June 1st has been celebrated as ICD – in Chinese 六月一日国际儿童节 Liuyue Yiri Guoji Ertong Jie – in socialist countries and by political organizations belonging to the socialist milieu. While in Italy, prior to that moment, a specific day for this observance had not been established; in the PRC, this marked a significant shift from the previously observed date of April 4. The earlier celebration had been established in China in 1931, following the adoption of the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child – the first international legal document to acknowledge children's specific needs – by the League of Nations on 26 November 1924 (Stornig 2015).⁵⁵ Since 1959, November 20 – the date on which the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child – has been recognized as the official World Children's Day (referred to as 儿童节 Ertong Jie, in the Sinophone world) in many countries, including Italy (UN n.d.). However, June 1st continues to be celebrated as ICD in post-socialist countries, including the People's Republic of China. Elena Caporaso is credited as the initiator of this tradition, and the WIDF recognized as the original platform for its promotion (Chen 2017). Caporaso report stresses that the will to establish

⁵⁴ Speech by Elena Caporaso at the In Chinese sources, Elena Caporaso is transliterated as 海伦·加波罗佐 and is usually referred to as “Helen Gabrozo,” as in Chen (2017).

⁵⁵ The reason for choosing April 4 is that the weather is suitable both in the north and the south, and it complements the then-existing festivals such as 'Three-Three' (三三 San San, March 3rd), the Shangsi Festival 上巳节), 'Five-Five' (五五 Wu Wu, May 5th, the Duanwu Festival 端午节, Dragon Boat Festival), etc. (Chen 2017). Notably, in HK, the ROC (Taiwan) April 4th remains the national Children's Day.

an ICD came from a concrete need to shed light on children conditions, an effort rooted back in the immediate postwar:

On December 19, 1946, the UDI celebrated "Children's Day" in Italy, to demand from the government the subsidies to which it is entitled, to denounce to public opinion the impotence of the Italian assistance system, and to highlight what democratic organizations have achieved and intend to achieve to help resolve the serious situation in which Italian childhood finds itself. However, the celebration of this day did not gain particular prominence and did not take place in all provinces. [...] Our organizations were unable to give sufficient importance to this "Day" [...].

The International Children's Day, which Italian democratic women are committed to celebrating this year with particular importance, must be the synthesis of a vast action carried out throughout the country. It must constitute a demonstration of political and organizational strength towards the government and must serve to give new impetus to the action of all democratic women for the struggle they will have to face in the future.⁵⁶

The WIDF's policy on the protection of children would continue in the following years as well. The 10th WIDF Executive Committee (Helsinki, 17–20 April 1950), outlined the comprehensive strategy for the establishment of the ICD, specifically targeting sections in "capitalist countries." This resolution underscores the significance of June 1, 1950, by positioning it as a pivotal moment for the "defense of children's lives against the menace of a new war," advocating for the reduction of military budgets to free up resources for children's social welfare, health, and education. The inherent connection to global peace is a central tenet, explicitly articulated through

⁵⁶ Caporaso, Elena. *Assistance to Children* (Assistance à l'Enfance) WIDF Council in Moscow. The document includes a handwritten reference to I. Pisoni as the author of the report (ACUDI 7, 27). This clearly refers to the report to the Assistance Commission presented by Ines Pisoni at the 2nd National Congress of the UDI on the previous 10 October (see Cosmai 2017, 92).

calls for demonstrations “against war” and for a “policy of peace,” alongside the condemnation of atomic weaponry. Furthermore, the document demonstrates a keen attention to global circumstances by addressing the «inhumane exploitation of children in colonial countries,» («l'exploitation inhumaine des enfants des pays coloniaux») highlighting the plight of children in specific conflict zones such as Spain, Greece, and Vietnam, and contrasting these conditions with the purported «happy situation» («situation heureuse») of children in the USSR and popular democracies. This multifaceted approach reveals a strategic intent to leverage the International Children's Day as a globally aware platform for both immediate child welfare advocacy and broader anti-war and anti-colonial political mobilization.⁵⁷

Simultaneously, within the same executive committee, an appeal was produced to promote signatures for the Stockholm Appeal. The appeal is characterized by maternalistic tones, addressing «Women, Mothers, Sisters!» («Donne, Madri, Sorelle!») as well as by strongly polarized tones against American imperialism and its plans for «unleash[ing] as soon as possible a new war of extermination.» («scatenare al più presto una nuova guerra di sterminio.»)⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Resolution on the Problem of Children* (Résolution sur le Problème de l'Enfance), 20 April 1950 (ACUDI 7, 33-1).

⁵⁸ *Appeal* (Appello), in ACUDI 7, 33-1.



Figure 1.6. UDI Poster on the occasion of June 1st 1951 reporting «For the salvation of all the world's children, a peace pact among the 5 Great Powers.» (Per la salvezza di tutti i bambini del mondo, un patto di pace tra i 5 Grandi) (UDI 1951).

These elements of political propaganda and the use of maternalist language aimed at forging an increasingly broad network of female solidarity would continue to characterize the following period, culminating in the World Congress of Mothers in June 1953 (see chapter 2). We know that the WIDF was not alone in this endeavour, but collaborated with other international bodies. In a message addressed to the UDI prior to the Second Congress of the Partisans of Peace in November 1950, the WIDF is identified as the leader of an International Committee for the Defense of Children (Comité International de Défense de l'Enfance), together with the World Federation

of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the International Federation of Teachers' Unions (IFTU), the International Federation of Former Political Prisoners (IFFPP), the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), and the International Union of Students (IUS).⁵⁹

A key moment in the development of the peace strategies was the peace campaign carried out in the context of the Korean War – an initiative that also marked a phase in which the ACWDF began to play a more active role within the WIDF. The narrative surrounding the Korean War, as disseminated across the communist bloc, portrayed the United States as the aggressor responsible for initiating the conflict in North Korea. In contrast, American propaganda presented the war as a Soviet-backed offensive. As evidenced by Sino-Italian correspondence, this polarized framework of political propaganda was widespread, as highlighted by Rossi's response to the earlier letter from Cai Chang, in which she emphasized the need to «disclose the truth about American aggression». This sentence discusses a key characteristic of the appeal to promote signatures for the Stockholm Appeal, notably its maternalistic language and strong anti-American sentiment regarding the Korean War (ACUDI 9, 45). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that this polarized political discourse reflected the dominant language within the WIDF environment. However, this does not negate the fact that such discourse was deliberately employed by female activists as

⁵⁹ Letter from Carmen Zanti (WIDF), Kuty Hookham (WFDY), Paul Delanoue (IFTU), A. Leroy (IFFPP); M. A. Fontenay (IOJ); Ms. Mirande-Thomas (IADL); and K. Ekbatani (IUS) to the UDI, October 30, 1950 (ACUDI 7, 33-2). The signatories of the letter do not explicitly state that they constitute the Committee for the Defense of Children, but it can be inferred from the context. No documentation has been found tracing back to the origins of this committee. In the same period – likely following the entry into force of Geneva Convention No. IV on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War (21 October 1950) – other bodies dedicated to the protection of children were founded and proved active. For example, in 1950 the International Centre for Children (Centre International pour l'Enfance, CIR) was established in Paris (Colin 1950; Denéchère & Marcilloux 2016; Fillastre & Guérin 2003). During these years the International Union for Child Protection (Union internationale de protection de l'enfance, UIPE) – an organization originating in the 1920s and affiliated with the IRC, WHO, and UN – was also active (IRC 1951; IRC 1953; Bibliothèque de Genève n.d.).

a strategy for political legitimation, aiming to forge alliances and enhance their own prestige and international visibility. Notably, elements such as anti-American rhetoric, which were present in some contexts, are absent from other UDI communications directed at different audiences. In these cases, the emphasis shifts toward themes more appropriate for the intended recipients. For example, one such communication includes the «condemnation of any form of war propaganda, as well as of all acts of aggression and foreign armed intervention in the internal affairs of nations, urging the cessation of such interventions.»⁶⁰ a formulation that reflects a broader and more diplomatically neutral appeal rather than overt ideological polarization. As the Cold War intensified, an openly anti-American stance increasingly characterized the peace propaganda of UDI activists – as well as that of the ACWDF – particularly during the Korean War, when the United States was identified as the principal “aggressor.”

1.1.3 The (transnational) War to Resist America and Assist Korea

The Korean War broke out on June 25 when the Korean People’s Army crossed the 38th parallel and began its invasion of the South. After thirteen months, the front had crystallized along the 38th parallel, but aerial engagements continued until the armistice of July 27. Overall, the Korean war caused enormous devastation, with about 4 million casualties, of whom no less than 2 million were civilians (20 percent of the North Korean population was decimated), and severe infrastructural destruction, particularly in the North (Cumings 2010, 161; Moses 2021, 19).⁶¹ In the Western context,

⁶⁰ «[...] la continuazione delle azioni per la messa al bando delle armi atomiche; la proposta concernente la riduzione generale e controllata di tutti gli armamenti; la condanna di qualsiasi propaganda di guerra la condanna di qualsiasi aggressione e intervento straniero armato negli affari interni dei popoli e la richiesta della cessazione di tali interventi.» Draft letter in Italian probably addressed by UDI to local federations and organizations. It refers to the appeal launched for the ICD 1951 by the International Committee for Children (ACUDI 7, 33-1).

⁶¹ Historian Bruce Cumings (2010, 172) defined the indiscriminate bombing of North Korean cities as genocide, based on the subsequent UN Genocide Convention.

particularly in the United States, the Korean War has long been remembered as the “Forgotten War” «for the allegedly muted response it received during and since» (Kim 2023a, 30). The effect is also visible in the war historiography, which has only recently begun investigating this complex conflict. In Socialist Asia, the Korean War will later be extensively referenced as a war against imperialism to protect peace, a war of resistance as opposed to a war of aggression. This emerges clearly in the Chinese term “The War to Resist America and Assist Korea” (抗美援朝战争 *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzheng*) (Shen 2012, 1).

The War had a high stake in PRC politics, especially since the direct involvement of Chinese People’s Volunteers (CPV), on October 19, 1950.⁶² First, it turned the PRC into America’s number one enemy in Asia. For the following two decades, the United States would build military posts around the communist country while trying to isolate it diplomatically and economically (Shen, Xia 2011; Garver 2016, 59). Chinese involvement in the Korean conflict was also pivotal in shaping Taiwan’s fate, as it prompted the United States to increase its support and protection of the KMT stronghold. According to Garver (2016, 60), by the end of 1949, US leaders had decided to sacrifice Taiwan to the invasion of the People’s Liberation Army as part of the strategy to create a split between Soviet and Chinese communists. The Sino-Soviet alliance treaty of February 1950 – stipulated shortly before the invasion of North Korea – transformed Taiwan’s geopolitical significance, leading Washington to place the island under US military protection. Secondly, from the Soviet perspective, on the other hand, China’s decision to go to war against the US to save the North Korean regime from extinction finally convinced Stalin that Mao and the CCP were genuine

⁶² Within two weeks, China sent 200,000 troops into North Korea. Despite the official label as the Chinese People’s Volunteers, they were regular soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army, not civilian volunteers, as noted by Seth (2023, 98).

communists. Soviet assistance became more generous now that there was no doubt about China's global alignment (ivi, 59-60). Internally, the Chinese involvement in the Korean War would also have been instrumental in the internal development of the Chinese national project: a key piece in taking the Chinese revolutionary project to the next stage of the socialist state-building process. The war provided an opportunity to strengthen the control of internal dissent and identify and punish those considered agents of USA imperialism within China, thus meeting the goal of internal stability (Strauss 2002, 83-99; Foot 2010, 452). At the end of 1951, the campaign known as the "Three Antis" 三反 (Sanfan), against corruption, waste, bureaucracy was launched, followed the next year by the "Five Antis" 五反 (Wufan) campaign against political corruption, fraud, tax evasion, theft of state property, and the leaking of state economic secrets. These campaigns were aimed at creating a new public ethic to support the alongside a law on the "repression of counterrevolutionaries," 镇反运动, (Zhenfan Yundong, 1950-1952) which led to a wave of arrests and public trials in February of the same year. To strengthen its control over the population, the Party expanded its ranks by actively recruiting millions of new members, particularly among peasants, workers, and students. Party membership increasingly became a key determinant for access to education, employment opportunities, economic resources, and thus a crucial pathway for social mobility. Simultaneously, large mass campaigns, known as "information, criticism, and self-criticism," were initiated to deepen the CCP political control in the country and its dominance over the economy (Zhang 2005).

Overall, the offensive against the USA imperialists led to a domestic propaganda policy to create an image of China as both a victim and a solid power to engender

confidence in wartime victory.⁶³ This strategy was carried out «by appropriating war memories and coordinating collective sharing of war suffering and of atrocities perpetrated by Japan and the United States» (Chin 2023, 46). These themes are also found in the propaganda about the war fielded by the Sino-Korean front allies. The ACWDF's propaganda consequently followed the orientation of the party-state, advancing a rhetoric aligned with the North Korean version of events – centered on the narrative that the conflict was initiated by the United States as a strategy to gain support. At the same time, the ACWDF positioned itself as both the leading ally and primary advocate of the KDWU, broadly representing their demands at both the domestic and international levels, offering concrete support and acting as a sounding board for their propaganda.

Hajimu Masuda (2015, 1) defined the Korean War as the “crucible” of the Cold War, claiming the War's role in marking the postwar configuration. A situation initially termed “a cold war” or the “so-called cold war” in the late 1940s escalated into the definitive “Cold War” precisely during the Korean War. This conflict amplified mutual fears and suspicions, leading to the realization of the worst possible outcomes through a cycle of reciprocal actions and reactions (Kim 2023a, 30). Masuda's definition of “crucible” undoubtedly applies to the Asian context, as the Korean war notably signaled the extension of Cold War dynamics into Asia (Masuda 2012; 2015). This stand true particularly since when the PRC also joined the conflict (Shen 2012; Shen, Xia 2020). However, the Korean War's pivotal role – maybe not as a crucible but certainly as a watershed – also proves true when looking at European and Italian

⁶³ There are several examples of this in *ZGFN* issues from 1949–1950, particularly in issue no 17 from 1950.

politics.⁶⁴ The outbreak of the Korean War enhanced the securitarian policies of the Christian Democracy's (DC) government in the construction of a strong state ("stato forte"), markedly anti-communist. Notably, in the years of centrism ("centrismo") from 1950 to 1952, a series of laws later remembered as Korean legislation ("legislazione coreana") was adopted to improve internal security (Mazzei 2013, 1-15).

The impact of the Korean conflict is also evident when observing international activism for human rights. The WIDF was undoubtedly involved in efforts to promote the Communist struggle against anti-imperialist forces led by the US, engaging in the propaganda effort to denounce US war crimes and glorify Communist peacekeeping efforts.⁶⁵ Candidate as the bulwark of international peace and security under the anti-imperialist and democratic banner, the WIDF and its national affiliates grew in number during this period, including new national formations from the Global South.⁶⁶

The Korean War also represented a crucible in these respects, being the first post-WWII circumstance to give rise to a worldwide global peace campaign within the socialist internationalist front (Donert 2016; Kim 2019; Dobrenko 2024). Within this campaign, the WIDF and other socialist international bodies aimed to position themselves as impartial organizations warranting peace and human rights, thus challenging the UN's authority.⁶⁷ Cold War dynamics, although constraining socialist women

⁶⁴ The importance of the Korean War in recasting China's foreign relations in Europe – becoming «much more intense» – is stressed in Schaufelbuehl et al. (2019, 1).

⁶⁵ These, according to Claudin (1975, 317-370), would have been in continuity with the Stalinist line of non-intervention and "peacekeeping" pursued during WWII (and supported by the PCF) that led to non-intervention in the war in defense of Poland, and later Greece in 1948, during the world conflict.

⁶⁶ By the time of the next international WIDF conference in Copenhagen in 1953, the organization had seen significant growth from the 1948 Congress. In just five years, over sixty-six countries from across the globe had joined its ranks. Elizabeth Armstrong (2023, 14) suggests this is related to the critical impact of the 1949 Asian Women Conference in Beijing.

⁶⁷ As a result, the WIDF was excluded from crucial political arenas, such as the UN in 1954 (de Haan 2010, 550, 568; Kim 2023a, 36). On the WIDF's role in shaping women's rights specifically, see Donert (2013, 2022).

activists' efforts to negotiate women's rights, also favored their development, an essential part of the global challenge for human rights. A "human rights struggle" that effectively constitutes the reverse side of the coin to the negatively polarized and ideologically laden "struggle for peace."

This effort is also rooted in the WWII dynamics as pointed by Foot (2010, 448): «If the allies in the Second World War had chosen to describe their opponents as systematic violators of human rights, the antagonisms between the Communist bloc and the Western democracies quickly embraced similar rhetoric.»⁶⁸

The role of women activists as interpreters must be collocated in this entangled context. From the terrain of international peace to national politics, activists mediated multi-leveled stances intersecting the leftist transnational front and local political issues. Thus, in analyzing the propaganda for peace on the Korean conflict it is necessary to bear in mind that it was entangled with the women organizations shared aim – especially outside socialist states – of building consensus through «a popular and clear message that would reassure the masses of women about the credibility of the communists, particularly on the terrain of family and morality» (Casalini 2005, 192). In the immediate postwar, this purpose was well-matched with sponsoring the WIDF's agenda for promoting peace, motherhood, and child protection. Rachele Ledda (2021, 26) points out how the UDI's pacifist effort, on the one hand, was rooted in its engagement in the civil war of resistance and thus was motivated by a genuine interest in promoting pacifist instances; on the other hand, it was aimed at politically legitimizing Italian women activists within national politics, superimposing their image as champions of peace.

⁶⁸ For a broader contextualization, see also Mariager and Molin (2014, 1-12) in the European context, Zhang and Buzan (2020) in the Chinese context, and Tarantola (2008) about health and human rights.

The relevance of the Cold War as turning point also emerges within the WIDF documentation. The War outbreak catalyzed internal plurality, leading both to the emergence of divisions within the women's movement and to parallel compensatory strategies, cementing its unity (Kim 2023a, 54-5). It is telling that the Korean conflict represents the first moment when the transnational network within the WIDF created a broad conceptual and media apparatus to support socialist causes and protect women's and children's rights, crucially influencing the development trajectories of socialist feminism during the Cold War (Donert 2016; Kim 2019).

It is worth dwelling on the concrete activities carried out in this perspective and how these led to the consolidation of transnational solidarity networks. The "struggle for peace" proved effective in involving feminist activists of various social and religious backgrounds beyond the Global North. As mentioned, the contradictory phrase "struggle for peace" reflected, four years after its inception, the political climate of the Cold War, which led to the creation of a progressively growing perception of two opposing international fronts. The creation of the WIDF monthly *Women of the Whole World* in 1951 indicates how, in the early 1950s, the international federation made explicit efforts to create a united front and promote its core ideals.

This process also involved sharing practical strategies on how to effectively engage women at the grassroots level within the movement and to strengthen its unity, thereby creating a broad and deep base of support that would facilitate more effective dissemination. This strategy was certainly promoted by the ACWF activists within the context of Chinese state-building, as evidenced by Ting Yan's speech at the WIDF Berlin Council of February 1951:

In China, the organizations of the United Front of Women starts with the ACWDF and goes down to the women's associations at the local level, to form

the comprehensive united front under the leadership of the working class. This is supported by the working women from the working class and the peasantry, united with the women of the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, as well as all patriotic democratic women, including not only women from various professions but also representatives of women from all strata, who are called upon to participate in the various works of the ACWDF, including participation in leadership.⁶⁹

From its inception, it emphasized the importance of unified intent and action beyond existing differences, reflecting the political climate of the “New democracy” phase (1949-1953), based on the principle of reconciliation and class collaboration elaborated by Mao in 1940.⁷⁰

1.2 The conflict impact on women’s media

1.2.1 The Korean War in the eyes of Chinese Women

From its inception, the ACWDF’s propaganda consistently focused on Korea and the oppression of the Korean people. The articles *The Life and Struggles of Korean*

⁶⁹ Original text: «Deshalb bilden in China die Organisationen der Einheitsfront der Frauen, angefangen mit dem chinesisch-barnesdemokratischen Frauenbund bis hinunter zu den demokratischen Frauenvereinigungen auf lokaler Ebene, die umfassende Einheitsfront unter der Führung der Arbeiterklasse, gestützt auf die werktätigen Frauen aus der Arbeiterklasse und der Bauernschaft, vereint mit den Frauen des Kleinbürgertums und der nationalen Bourgeoisie und allen patriotischen demokratischen Frauen, einschließlich nicht nur der Frauen der verschiedenen Berufe, sondern auch die Vertreterinnen von Frauen aus allen Schichten werden herangezogen, um sich an den verschiedenen Arbeiten der demokratischen Frauenbundes zu beteiligen, bis hin zur Beteiligung an der Führung.» Report by Ting Yan at the fourth WIDF Council in Berlin on February 1-5, 1951 (ACUDI 8, 39.)

⁷⁰ According to Mao’s theory, China was to pass through a phase of New Democracy, in which the government included various social classes: workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. During this period, initial land and social reforms were launched to eliminate the remnants of feudalism and capitalism, though private property was not yet fully abolished. The guiding principle was the people’s democratic dictatorship: power rested with the people, led by the CCP, while “enemies of the people” such as reactionaries and landlords were repressed. This theory was developed in Mao’s 1940 essay *On New Democracy*. The New Democracy policy, updated after the CCP’s rise to power, remained in place until late 1957, when it was replaced by a more radical strategy aimed at accelerating economic development (Samarani 2014b, chapter 8).

*Women*⁷¹ and *Korea Today and Yesterday* – appeared on *Women of China* in November 1949 and August 1950 respectively –, briefly summarize the history of Korean women by contrasting the advantages of North Korea with the oppression carried out prior by Japan and now by American imperialists in South Korea, particularly regarding the treatment of working women and unequal pay.

Korean women were also among the protagonists of the WIDF sponsored Asian Women Conference (also referred to as Asian Women's Representative Conference 亚洲妇女代表会议 *Yazhou Funü Daibiao Huiyi* in coeval sources), held in Beijing in December 1949. During the conference, Asian countries were divided into three categories: free states, semi-free states, and those still entirely under imperialist and colonial domination. Among the representatives of the semi-free group were the women of Korea, together with delegates from Vietnam, Burma, and Malaya:

[in free zones] must continue their unyielding struggle against imperialism, fully support and assist their country's sacred national liberation wars, expel invaders, and fight for national independence and people's democracy, eliminating all privileges held by foreign imperialists within their countries. In regions under enemy rule, women must expose the colonial regime's nature and the collusion between reactionary governments and imperialism, denouncing their betrayal of national independence. Women must also fight for their daily

⁷¹ Jin Tao 金涛 “Chaoxian funü de shenghuo yu dou zheng.” 朝鮮婦女的生活與鬥爭 (The Life and Struggles of Korean Women), *ZGFN* no 5, November 20, 1949, 15; and continues in Li Nuo 立懦, “Chaoxian de zuori he jinri.” 朝鮮的昨日和今日 (Korea Today and Yesterday), *ZGFN*, no 13, August 15, 1950, 7.

economic, political, and social interests, reserve their strength, await opportunities, and coordinate with the development of the people's armed struggles.⁷²

With the outbreak of the Korean War, the interest in the Korean cause understandably surged. In July 23, the Beijing branch of the ACWDF, gathered over 8,000 women to a mass meeting at the majestic Imperial Ancestral Palace (劳动人民文化宫 *Laodong Renmin Wenhua Gong*, also 太庙 *Taimiao*). The was considered the inaugural meeting of the movement to oppose U.S. imperialism and expressing solidarity with Korea (抗美援朝 *Kangmei Yuanchao*) (ibid). *Women of China* features accounts of the impact women had during the war, emphasizing the emotional role of mothers, wives and daughters of warriors, but also active participants as resistance fighters, producers, and healers: the suffering of war martyrs in Korea was linked to the experiences of Chinese women during the WWII and Japanese occupation.⁷³ The cruelty of American troops is portrayed through accounts of civilian massacres, destruction, and sexual violence against Korean women. Despite being less known compared to the broader phenomena of Japanese “comfort women” (Seth 2023, 46-7; Tanaka 2003), historian Chunghee Sarah Soh (1999) reported that US sexual assault are in fact an historical truth.

Korean women military efforts are framed by *Women of China* as righteous and necessary struggles for liberation against American imperialism, a power that is both

⁷² «一方面繼續反抗帝國主義的奮不顧身的鬥爭，用全力來擁護並支援本國人民的神聖的民族解放戰爭，把侵略者驅逐出國境，為爭取自己祖國的獨立與人民民主，取消外國帝國主義者在國內的一切特權而奮鬥；但在另一方面，還在敵人統治地區的婦女，則要揭穿殖民地政權的本質，揭穿本國反動政府的和帝國主義的勾結，背叛民族獨立的賣國行兇。偽赫女一切日常經濟的、政治的、社會的利益而鬥爭，儲蓄力量，等待時機，配合人民的武裝鬥年及其發展。還是在兩種不同地區的兩種不同的鬥爭任務。」 Deng Yingchao 鄧穎超. “Yazhou funü daibiao huiyi de gaikuang ji shouhuo.” 亞洲婦女代表會議的概況及收穫 (Overview and Gains of the Asian Women's Conference), *ZGFN* no 7, July 20, 1950, 8.

⁷³ Jun Hui 君慧. “Mu qin men de jiao ao”母親們的驕傲 (Proud and Honorable Mothers). *ZGFN* no 17, December 15, 1950, 11.

mocked and diminished. The so-called “atomic heroes” (原子英雄 *Yuanzi Yingxiong*) are ridiculed, becoming the “mighty” enemies of world peace.⁷⁴ Overall, the Korean War is depicted as a continuation of the Chinese war of liberation, a momentum toward the international liberation of oppressed peoples and a collective embrace of peace, voiced through the words of model workers and the people themselves: «Peasant labor model Wang Jinzheng says, “I am so happy to hear that the Korean people have defeated the American imperialists. We must accelerate production to support the frontlines and strengthen our army, so we can liberate Taiwan sooner.”»⁷⁵

North Korean women are portrayed as key agents of revolutionary transformation following liberation from Japanese imperialism in 1945, enabled by Soviet support and socialist reforms. Their emancipation is framed as a key indicator of societal progress, with sweeping changes in political, economic, and cultural life.⁷⁶ Women are shown participating as legislators, judges, factory workers, miners, doctors, educators, and students, embodying the new citizen who contributes to both state-building and wartime resistance. Their inclusion in public life is portrayed as substantial and measurable, with detailed statistics reinforcing the narrative. Among them stand out figures such as Pak Chǒng-ae,⁷⁷ chairwoman of the KDWU and executive committee member and board member of the WIDF, whose revolutionary history and resistance during the war are highlighted: the violence and torture endured and confronted by Park and other heroines – without ever betraying their comrades – are

⁷⁴ For a historical contextualization on the notion of “atomic hero” see Hecht (2008).

⁷⁵ «農村勞動模範王金貞說：「我聽見朝鮮人民打敗了美國鬼子，我很高興，我們要一定加緊生產，支援前線，養得咱們的隊伍兵強馬壯，早點解放台灣。」 The Editors. “Gei chaoxian zi mei de xin.” 給朝鮮姊妹的信 (Letter to Korean Sisters), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 6.

⁷⁶ Xiao Ying 小瑛. “Ying yong de chao xian fu nu.” 英勇的朝鮮婦女 (The Brave Korean Women), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 9.

⁷⁷ A Yin 阿茵. “Chao xian min zhu nu xing tong meng zhu xi pu zheng ai.” 朝鮮民主女性同盟主席朴正愛 (Pak Chǒng-ae, Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League of Korea), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 28.

described with almost photographic detail, aiming to deeply penetrate the hearts of Chinese women who shared similar traumas.⁷⁸ Park also makes use of the same maternalist strategies employed by Chinese women in searching for support within the WIDF, as she is reported declaring:

U.S. imperialists, in pursuit of their greedy invasion, have dropped bombs on our innocent children, mothers, and the elderly. The blood has stained our beautiful mountains and rivers. Korean women, who cherish peace, oppose war, and hold the independence and freedom of our homeland more precious than their own lives, are now filled with extreme hatred toward U.S. imperialism and its puppets. We are fully confident that we will expel these cruel invaders from our land.⁷⁹

Moreover, many women, inspired by her example, eagerly volunteered for the army. Since the war's outbreak, as many as 100,000 North Korean women reportedly sub-

⁷⁸ «During her imprisonment, the enemy attempted to extract information about her comrades and revolutionary secrets by torturing her, including using needles to puncture her fingernails. However, Pak Chŏng-ae gritted her teeth and, with sweat dripping from her, used the weapon of resolute silence, refusing to betray her comrades. As a result, the enemy was unable to extract any secrets from her. Pak Chŏng-ae held great contempt for the enemy's vile methods of torture. To her, iron bars and brutal interrogations were nothing more than a part of her daily life. The enemy had no way of breaking such a determined revolutionary.» Original text: «她在坐牢時，敵人爲了要她供出同她工作有關的同志，和革命的秘密，就殘酷地把針刺到她的指甲縫裏，但朴正愛就咬緊牙關，滴着淨汗，用寧痛死也不說話的武器來抵抗敵人，結果敵人不能從她口中得到任何秘密，朴正愛對於敵人種種用嚴刑拷打的卑鄙手段是非常鄙視的，因此她是把鐵窗牢獄嚴刑拷打當作家常便飯的，敵人在這樣一個堅如鐵石的革命者前面，實在也沒有什麼辦法。」 In A Yin 阿茵. "Chao xian min zhu nu xing tong meng zhu xi pu zheng ai." 朝鮮民主女性同盟主席朴正愛 (Pak Chŏng-ae, Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League of Korea) *ZGFN* 13 (1950), 28. For other examples see Ni Fei 倪斐 and Hu Bin 胡彬. "Chao xian de hao nu er zheng zhu qing" 朝鮮的好女兒鄭珠卿 (The Good Daughter of Korea, Jeong Joo-kyung), *ZGFN* no 14, July 15, 1950, 20.

⁷⁹ Original text: «美帝國主義者為了其食婪的侵略目的，把炸彈扔在我們無辜的孩子、母親和老人的頭上，鮮血染紅了我們美麗的山河，熱愛和平、反對戰爭、把祖國的獨立自由看得比自己的生命還寶貴的朝鮮婦女，對美帝國主義及其走狗的憤恨已達極點？我們有充分的把握和信心把兇惡的侵略者從我組國的疆土上驅逐出去。」 In A Yin 阿茵. "Chao xian min zhu nu xing tong meng zhu xi pu zheng ai." 朝鮮民主女性同盟主席朴正愛 (Pak Chŏng-ae, Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League of Korea), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 28.

mitted petitions to enlist. In Pyongyang alone, 3,000 female students organized support teams to work in field hospitals.⁸⁰ Statistical data produced in the Chinese context during this historical period were prone to adjustment – and, in this case, inflation – as noted by Huang (1994) and Diamant (2000, p. 28). However, given that the northern population amounted to roughly ten billion – half that of the south (Seth 2023, p. 84) – the figures reported may nonetheless be reliable.

In a contrasting way, women under control of the southern regime are portrayed as living under continued oppression, poverty, and violence due to U.S. imperialist occupation and the Syngman Rhee regime. However, even in these harsh conditions, they emerge as heroic figures through their militant resistance and guerrilla warfare. Numerous female guerrilla fighters also reportedly joined the southern liberation forces, allied to northern army.⁸¹ Individual stories of bravery, such as women fighting in guerrilla units, leading uprisings, and sacrificing their lives, serve to illustrate their revolutionary potential and moral superiority. These women, while not institutionally empowered like their northern counterparts, are valorized for their courage, self-sacrifice, and unbreakable will in the struggle for liberation.

At the same time, Chinese women are called to actively support the Korean War through three primary channels: ideological mobilization, productive labor, and direct aid. Women are urged to internalize anti-U.S. sentiment, expose reactionary religious groups as imperialist collaborators, and revive wartime vigilance roles in rural areas. Simultaneously, they are called to enhance economic output through patriotic

⁸⁰ “Fu yun xiao xi.” 婦運消息 (Women's Movement News), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 42.

⁸¹ Original text: «美帝國主義者為了其食婪的侵略目的，把炸彈扔在我們無辜的孩子、母親和老人的頭上，鮮血染紅了我們美麗的山河，熱愛和平、反對戰爭、把祖國的獨立自由看得比自己的生命還寶貴的朝鮮婦女，對美帝國主義及其走狗的憤恨已達極點？我們有充分的把握和信心把兇惡的侵略者從我組國的疆土上驅逐出去.» In A Yin 阿茵. “Chao xian min zhu nu xing tong meng zhu xi pu zheng ai.” 朝鮮民主女性同盟主席朴正愛 (Pak Chŏng-ae, Chairwoman of the Democratic Women's League of Korea), *ZGFN* no 13, July 20, 1950, 28.

labor competitions and to participate in frontline support efforts. This multifaceted mobilization frames women as both political agents and material contributors to China's anti-imperialist struggle and its solidarity with North Korea.⁸²

Alongside the representation and mobilization for the Korean War, there is also a constant emphasis on its global dimension and particularly to WIDF role in involving women around the world to mobilize for peace – a condition achievable only through a war of resistance against the oppressor.⁸³ Korean women activists strategically built a transcultural bridge between their local experiences of the Korean War and women's wartime memories of World War II elsewhere, while invoking the fear that those memories could be replayed in a Third World War. This is made clear in the speech given by Pak Jeong-ae at the Second World Peace Congress in November 1950, where her words stand out:

The Korean people firmly believe that the war-mongers' conspiracies will fail. Their attempt to turn the intervention in Korea into another world war will not succeed. The world's peace camp will not allow the imperialists to realize their bloody plans. The ardent desire of all the world's peoples to uphold the peace and security of all nations is the best guarantee. Peace will triumph over war!⁸⁴

⁸² The Editor. "Jin ji xing dong qi lai wei kang mei yuan chao bao jia wei guo er fen dou." 緊急行動起來為抗美援朝保家衛國而奮鬥 (Urgent Action to Fight for the Defense of Our Homeland and Assist North Korea in the War Against U.S. Imperialism), *ZGFN* no 16, November 15, 1950, 4.

⁸³ International Department, All-China Women's Federation 中華全國民主婦女聯合會國際部資料組. "Guo ji min zhu fu nv lian he hui gong zuo gai kuang." 國際民主婦女聯合會工作概況 (Overview of the Work of the Women's International Democratic Federation), *ZGFN* no 17, December 15, 1950, 14.

⁸⁴ Original text: «朝鮮人民堅信戰爭販子們的一切陰謀將遭到失敗，他們企圖把干涉朝鮮變為另一次世界大戰是不會成功的。世界和平陣營不會讓帝國主義者實現他們的血腥計劃。全世界一切人民擁護各民族和平與安全的熱。」 In "Ying yong min zu de ying yong er nv men" 英勇民族的英勇兒女們 (The Brave Sons and Daughters of a Brave Nation), *ZGFN* no 18, January 15, 1951, 12.

Anti-imperialism provided Chinese and Korean women activists with a necessary framework for both articulating the federations' broader humanitarian demands and advancing their own gender-specific claims. During this period, for example, the implementation of the fundamental Marriage Law – commonly known as the “Divorce Law” (Diamant 2000, p. 7) – assumed particular importance and will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter. This perspective is indispensable for any analysis of ACWDF propaganda from this period, which was pervasive during the Korean War. For example, slogans advocating the celebration of International Women's Day in 1951 proclaimed:

Salute the brave Korean People's Army, the Chinese People's Volunteer Army,
and the Chinese People's Liberation Army!

Salute the courageous Korean women resisting U.S. imperialism's invasion!

Salute the women of all Asia who fight against imperialist aggression and for
national independence!

Salute the women of the world who are fighting to defend peace and protect the
rights of women and children!⁸⁵

Within China the Korean conflict in fact becomes a cause for unity and universal mobilization, not solely tied to the communist and revolutionary struggle, but a human and global issue: over one million women from various sectors, including businesswomen, housewives, and even Buddhist nuns, are reported taking to the streets,

⁸⁵ Original: «慶祝『三八』國際婦女節口號 / 一、慶祝『三八』國際婦女節! / 二、向英勇的朝鮮人民軍、中國人民志願軍和中國人民解放軍致敬! / 三、向英勇反抗美帝國主義侵略的朝鮮婦女致敬! / 四、向全亞洲為反抗帝國主義侵略, 爭取民族獨立的婦女致敬! / 五、向全世界為保衛和平, 保護婦女兒童權利而鬥爭的婦女致敬! ..» See “Guanyu jinian sanba guoji funü jie de tongzhi.” 關於紀念「三八」國際婦女節的通知 (*Notice Regarding the Commemoration of "March 8" International Women's Day*), ZFGN no 19, February 15, 1951, 8.

enthusiastically shouting slogans for the Anti-U.S. and Aid-Korea cause. This movement has significantly raised and advanced women's participation.⁸⁶

The representation of the early Korean War in *Women of New China* becomes a powerful vehicle for mobilizing women within a broader revolutionary and internationalist framework. Women are portrayed not only as victims of imperialist violence but as active agents of resistance, both at home and abroad. Their struggles are linked across national boundaries, particularly through the shared histories of Chinese and Korean women. By framing the war as both a continuation of China's liberation and a global struggle for peace, the magazine integrates women into the political narrative, using their roles to legitimize armed resistance and promote socialist ideals. The Chinese narrative found resonance in the UDI's propaganda.

1.2.1 The Korean War on *Noi Donne*

Building on this transcultural dialogue of anti-imperialist and feminist discourse, the narrative soon reappeared in Italy's women's press. In particular, the UDI magazine *Noi Donne* regularly featured War reports from China and Korea, alongside original reporting on local struggles. These pages not only reproduced the rhetoric of revolutionary sisterhood but also framed Italian women's rights campaigns (from labour protections to the "Divorce Law") within the broader anti-colonial framework championed by their Asian counterparts. The first articles devoted to the Korean War appear on *Noi Donne*, on July 9, 1950. The first by historian and leftist catholic Gabriele

⁸⁶ See "Zai kang mei yuan chao yun dong zhong tui jin fu nv jie fang yun dong," 在抗美援朝運動中推進婦女解放運動 (Advancing the Women's Liberation Movement in the Anti-U.S. and Aid-Korea Movement). *ZGFN* no 20, March 15, 1951, 8.

De Rosa titles *What happened in Korea?*⁸⁷ It traces the Korean peninsula's recent history, emphasizing the US role in vetoing its independence and forming a sovereign state. De Rosa emphasizes the colonial character of the US «occupation troops» in the South, and presents the American presence in continuity with the Japanese experience: «Syngman Rhee's government immediately presented itself as a government of reactionary revolution that surrounded itself with the same clique that had collaborated with the Japanese.» In contrast, the situation in the northern part of the peninsula is the opposite: peaceful, democratic, partisan-based. Finally, De Rosa presents the beginning of the war as the result of aggression by despotic southern forces supported by American intervention. The description undermines UN neutrality as the primary international organization guarantor of peace, suggesting its submission to US decisions. It is detailed how these decisions – imperialist in nature – extend beyond Korea to threaten the Chinese territorial reunification effort. Furthermore, the piece makes an explicit parallel between the South Korean and Taiwanese situations – the two being governments led by «corrupt» leaders. De Rosa occupies a central position, two-thirds of p. 3 of the issue. A second article, entitled *The Women's Crusade Against the Atomic Weapon*⁸⁸, follows on the same page. The short piece by the longtime Communist Emilio Sereni, a leading Italian Partisans for Peace figure.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ De Rosa, Gabriele. «Che cosa è avvenuto in Corea?» (What Happened in Korea?), *ND* 28 (September 7, 1950), 3. A few days earlier, De Rosa had published an article with the same tone in the communist newspaper *L'Unità* (June 27, 1950) with the title «I Partigiani della pace hanno già lanciato il loro allarme: se di una conferma vi era bisogno alla necessità di allargare e consolidare il fronte della pace per salvare il mondo dal terzo conflitto, questa è venuta dall'aggressione imperialista in Corea.» (The Partisans of Peace Have already Sounded their Alarm: If any Confirmation Was Needed for the Necessity to Expand and Consolidate the Front for Peace to Save the World from a Third Conflict, it Has Come from the Imperialist Aggression in Korea). After the dissolution of the Christian Left on December 17, 1945, De Rosa joined the PCI and began working as an editor at *L'Unità*. In 1949, following the decree of excommunication of communists issued by Pope Pius XII, De Rosa was forced to choose between his Catholic faith and the party. He decided to leave the PCI and joined the Christian Democracy party, aligning himself with the left-wing associated with Giuseppe Dossetti (Malgeri, 2017).

⁸⁸ Sereni, Emilio. «La crociata delle donne contro l'arma atomica.» (The Women's Crusade Against the Atomic Weapon). *ND* (July 9, 1950), 3.

⁸⁹ For a biographical account of Sereni, see Giardina (1996); specifically, for his role within the Partisan for Peace, see Petrangelì (1999).

Sereni's article explicitly links the theme of war with the "struggle for peace," portraying the alleged American attack as a challenge to the sovereignty of Korea and China, as well as a threat to global peace. It emphasizes the alarming prospect of the war escalating into a third world war, in which «Italy, at the behest of the American masters, could be involved.»

American aggression against the peoples of Korea and China, which already covers those populous lands with mourning and ruin, threatens these days to drag all humanity again into a world war more terrible and disastrous than the one from which we have just emerged. [...] Thus, suddenly, these days, a third world war could break out: an airplane dropping an atomic bomb anywhere in the world could ignite a fire from which humanity would emerge incinerated.⁹⁰

Sereni reinforces the reference to the recent past by invoking atomic weapons. A threat that will strike, first and foremost, the most defenseless: «Korean mothers and babies.» The article thus stresses the importance of the action by the socialist front for peace, which cuts across the women's and the Partisans for Peace movement: «More than ever these days, the Women's Crusade Against Atom, called by the UDI in agreement with the National Committee of Partisans for Peace for July 9-16, acquires a topical and urgent character.»⁹¹

⁹⁰ Original text: «L'aggressione americana contro i popoli della Corea e della Cina, che già copre di lutti e di rovine quelle terre popolate, minaccia in questi giorni di trascinare di nuovo tutta l'umanità in una guerra mondiale, più tremenda e disastrosa di quella da cui siamo appena usciti. [...] Così, all'improvviso, in questi giorni, potrebbe scatenarsi una terza guerra mondiale: un aereo che sgancia un'atomica, in qualsiasi parte del mondo, può accendere un incendio dal quale l'umanità uscirebbe incenerita.»

⁹¹ Original text: «Più che mai, in questi giorni, la Crociata delle donne contro l'atomica, indetta dall'Unione Donne Italiane in accordo col Comitato Nazionale dei Partigiani della Pace per il 9-16 luglio, acquista un carattere di attualità e di urgenza.»

Sereni refers to the Stockholm Appeal signature campaign, launched by the WPC in March 1950, to promote nuclear disarmament and prevent an atomic war.⁹² The campaign leverages the traditional woman's roles, emphasizing the responsibilities as a «mother,» «wife,» «sister,» and «daughter» and connecting these roles to the broader global struggle for peace. The appeal to tradition is also imbued with references to Catholicism, where «crusade» refers to the signature gathering.

In subsequent issues of *Noi Donne*, the reports delve deeper into the plight of Korean civilians, incorporating firsthand testimonies from witnesses far removed from the front lines. Of particular interest is the article by UDI's founding mother, Emilia Cabrini, entitled *Cho-Song Placid River*,⁹³ most likely a real interview with a Korean woman who emigrated to Italy. Through her family's long-term experience – first under Qing rule as a tributary state and later under the Japanese Empire – she emerges as a living witness to the country's recent history. The account portrays a positive image of Chinese rule compared to the Japanese one, being portrayed as a period of freedom.⁹⁴ She advocates a return to this freedom, as she states, already achieved in the North. This is evident when looking at the women's condition:

“We do not have an American war to fight, but our own war of unification”

[...]. “While the women of the North have gained all rights, in the South, our daughters are still bought and exploited. Today they fight alongside men to achieve, along with the freedom of their country, also their own freedom.” [...]

⁹² As it was later disclosed, fewer than 51 million of the claimed 500 million signatures came from countries aligned with the West. Among these, France and Italy – home to the most prominent Communist parties in Western Europe – contributed 23 million signatures. This left fewer than 28 million signatures for the remaining countries in Western Europe and all the countries in the Americas and in Asia (Dobrenko 2024, 33-34).

⁹³ Cabrini, Emilia. “Cho-Song fiume placido.” (Cho-Song Placid River). *ND* 33 (August 26, 1950), 11.

⁹⁴ This finding also matches the description of other vassal domains of the Qing Empire, such as Taiwan (Chou 2015, 68-100).

“Under Chinese rule, we had a feudal system, old and full of inconveniences and injustices, as indeed throughout China, a system that somewhat recalls your southern Italy. But they were our own issues, and we could struggle, change, and improve. Instead, nothing can be addressed without freedom, and Korea cannot remain divided into two, just as you Italians could not remain divided into many regions in the past century.”⁹⁵

She draws parallels with the Italian condition of a predominantly rural and economically less prosperous south than the north. But, in the Italian case, being the south part of a unitarian state, it can be the target of national aid.⁹⁶ This circumstance cannot happen in Korea because of division and domination by foreign forces: only national unification can lead to social and economic progress. The interviewee is also clear about women’s role in this family, namely that of mother: «Being women is very important because through us humanity continues, but we must be serene, calm, peaceful to build a good family.» An ideal of womanhood that, while rooted in Confucian ideals, is also informed and eager for freedom of expression of more recent origin. To Cabrini’s invective, «But you women had a hard condition even with the Chinese.» Cho-Song responds:

⁹⁵ Original text: «"Noi non abbiamo una guerra americana da fare, ma una nostra guerra di unificazione" [...]. "Mentre le donne del Nord hanno acquistato tutti i diritti, nel Sud le nostre figlie vengono ancora comprate e sfruttate. Oggi esse lottano a fianco degli uomini per raggiungere, insieme alla libertà del loro paese, anche la loro libertà." [...] Sotto il dominio cinese noi avevamo un sistema feudale, vecchio, pieno d'inconvenienti e di ingiustizie, come del resto in tutta la Cina; un sistema che ricorda un poco la vostra Italia meridionale. Ma erano mali nostri e si poteva lottare, cambiare, migliorare. Invece senza libertà non si può provvedere a nulla e la Corea non può restare divisa in due, come voi italiani non potevate restare divisi in tante regioni, nel secolo passato.»

⁹⁶ Shortly before, on August 10, 1950, the Italian government had in fact launched a major aid plan for the realization of extraordinary works of public interest in Southern Italy directed “to the economic and social progress of Southern Italy” (l. 646/Aug. 10, 1950), which would remain in force until 1984. For an in-depth study see Lepore (2012).

Do not say, “even with the Chinese,” we are Chinese, say “when we were free.” We were like all the women of Manchuria, Shandong, or Anhui, women who hoped for democracy to become free citizens like their men. In North Korea, with the People’s Republic, this aspiration of ours has been realized, while in the South, our daughters are still bought and exploited. In the North, women work at home and outside the home. There are over six thousand teachers and just as many workers and three thousand four hundred eighty-eight women participate in public life. This is why South Korean women look enviously at the North: with the freedom of their country, there is also the desire to conquer their freedom. Our freedom. The South has more than a million women in the Democratic Women’s Union, and these women are the wives and daughters of men who do not wage war with MacArthur against the brothers of the North. We do not have an American war to fight but our war of unification.⁹⁷

Women, once again, would be uniformly united in the struggle against the invader, equating it with personal liberation. One finds the themes of communist feminism, in which women’s liberation is subordinated to class struggle and, in this case, colonial struggle. Cho-song stresses the colonial nature of the conflict by repeatedly asserting that what happened in Korea is not “a US business.” It does not matter who started the conflict; getting Korea back to a single country counts. This decolonial position extends beyond the Korean situation and parallels other Asian countries. Cho-song

⁹⁷ Original text: «Non dica: "anche con i cinesi", noi siamo cinesi, dica "quando eravamo liberi". Eravamo come tutte le donne di Manciuria, o dello Shan-tung o del Han-hoi, donne che speravano nella democrazia per diventare cittadine libere come i loro uomini. Nella Corea del Nord, con la Repubblica Popolare, questa nostra aspirazione è stata realizzata, mentre nel Sud le nostre figlie vengono ancora comprate e sfruttate. Nel Nord le donne lavorano nella casa e fuori casa. Ci sono oltre seimila insegnanti e altrettante operaie e tremila e quattrocento ottantotto donne partecipano alla vita pubblica. Ecco perché le coreane del Sud guardano con invidia al Nord: con la libertà del loro paese c'è anche il desiderio di conquistare la loro libertà. La nostra libertà. Il Sud ha più di un milione di donne nell'Unione Democratica Femminile e queste donne sono le mogli, le figlie di uomini che non fanno la guerra con Mac Arthur contro i fratelli del Nord. Noi non abbiamo una guerra americana da fare, ma una nostra guerra di unificazione.» (Ibid.).

compares Syngman Rhee and other politicians considered collaborators with colonial forces, from Bao Dai⁹⁸ to Chiang Kaishek: «They are men against the people, bad men.» The testimony closes with a reference to recent Italian history and the role of partisan women, an ideal model of struggle for Korean women: «We think of your partisan women who saved Italy, just as ours will certainly save Korea.» The parallel with Italian partisan women continues in issue No. 16 of April 22, 1951, whose cover page shows a wounded Korean woman and reads, «A Korean partisan woman wounded and captured by American invaders. The protest of the peace-loving people and the heroic resistance of the Korean people brought down MacArthur. The Slaughterer of Women and Children.» The issue precisely has an article about the US general and his removal from the leadership of the US Army by President Truman.

⁹⁸ Bao Dai (Bảo Đại) was the 13th and final emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty. From 1926 to 1945, he served as emperor of Annam and the de jure monarch of Tonkin. He oversaw regions that were then protectorates in French Indochina, corresponding to modern-day Central and Northern Vietnam. In March 1945, the Japanese ousted the Provisional French administration and ruled through Bao Dai, who subsequently declared the Empire of Vietnam. He abdicated in August 1945 following Japan's surrender. From 1949 to 1955, he served as the chief of state of the non-communist State of Vietnam. His reign was often viewed as symbolic and criticized for his close ties with France. Besides, also Bao Dai's frequent absences from Vietnam were subject to criticisms. Ultimately, he was deposed in a 1955 referendum led by Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm (Ngô Đình Diệm), who had the backing of the United States (Pham, Pham Thi 2024).



Figure 1.7. *ND*, cover page of no 16 (April 22, 1951).

The reference to the exploitative past that emerged in Cho-Song's interview is also present in the speeches of KDWU delegates at WIDF meetings. Dealing with the topic of education, the Korean delegation's speech at the International Conference for the Defense of Children (Vienna, April 12 -16, 1952) states:

I want to cite the following facts as an example of the situation of our children:

if in 1944, under the rule of the Japanese imperialists, the number of primary

schools was 1,372, attended by 870,000 students, by December 1, 1950, with primary education having become compulsory, the number of primary schools had reached 5,224, attended by 2,060,000 students; this means that the number of schools had quadrupled and the number of students had doubled. After the attack on Korea, the situation has significantly changed. From the beginning of the war until today, that is, about 20 months, the American aggressors have turned our cities and villages into ruins. Schools, kindergartens, and nurseries where our dear little ones played and studied, as well as all cultural institutions, have been destroyed and burned. The peaceful inhabitants of these regions, including women and children, are being massacred en masse by the Americans.⁹⁹

These early accounts of the representation of the Korean conflict within the transnational women's movement contain themes that would be deepened and relaunched on a larger scale by the first international commission to investigate the effects of the Korean War: this is the WIDF commission of May of 1951.

⁹⁹ Original text: «Après la libération, grâce aux mesures du pouvoir populaire dans le domaine sanitaire et le domaine de la protection de l'enfance, la mortalité infantine a baissé rapidement. Notre gouvernement a interdit d'employer la main-d'œuvre enfantine jusqu'à l'âge de 14 ans: de cette manière, grâce aux soins constants du pouvoir populaire, une large route aux études est ouverte à nos enfants. Ils ne connaissent ni la disette, ni la pauvreté, ni l'exploitation, ni l'oppression. Je voudrais citer en exemple les faits suivants sur la situation de nos enfants: si en 1944, sous le règne des impérialistes japonais, le nombre des écoles primaires était de 1.372, fréquentées par 870.000 écoliers, le 1er Décembre 1950, l'enseignement primaire étant devenu obligatoire, le nombre des écoles primaires avait atteint le chiffre de 5.224, fréquentées par 2.060.000 écoliers ; cela signifie que le nombre des écoles était quadruplé et le nombre des écoliers doublé. Après l'attaque de la Corée, la situation a bien changé. Depuis le début de la guerre jusqu'à ce jour, c'est-à-dire environ 20 mois, les agresseurs américains ont transformé en ruines nos villes et nos villages. Les écoles, les écoles maternelles, les crèches où nos chers petits ont joué et étudié, ainsi que toutes les institutions culturelles ont été détruites et brûlées. Les paisibles habitants de ces contrées, parmi lesquels les femmes et les enfants, sont massacrés en masse par les Américains.» (ACUDI, 10, 46-5).

1.3 We accuse! The world's first fact-checking commission in Korea

1.3.1 The WIDF activists as women rights diplomats

Particularly resonant was the dispatch of a commission of inquiry composed of 21 delegates from different countries that WIDF sent to Korea for 11 days from May 16-27, 1951. It was the first commission of an international body to assess the War's effects on the population (Donert 2016; Kim 2023a, 37-49). The commission spokespersons (in the order listed in the report), were the Korean Pak Chŏng-ae, leader of the KDWU;¹⁰⁰ Chinese Lui Chin Yang; British Monica Felton; and Fatma Ben Sliman, from Tunisia.



Figure 1.8. WIDF commission in Korea, at the center of the table, Nora K. Rodd and Pak Chŏng-ae (ACUDI, Photographic Archive).

¹⁰⁰ For a biographical insight on the Northern Korean Women leader Pak Chŏng-ae see Kim (2023b).

The result of the commission is a wide-ranging indictment of the US military campaign whose charges are collected in *We Accuse!*, a report published in five languages: English, French, Russian, Chinese, and Korean (WIDF 1951).¹⁰¹ The delegation echoes internationally. The report was submitted to various governing bodies of the UN – to the President of the General Assembly, the Secretariat, and the President of the Security Council. To them, the report's concluding appeal is explicitly addressed. The appeal challenges the legitimacy of the UN by invoking their missed application of the 1943 Allied Declaration to accuse «war criminals.» The WIDF legitimates his accusations, calling for its role as the spokesperson for the international socialist women's movement, whose numerical strength («91 million») is invoked. In the appeal, as in other parts of the report, however, the USA is not openly called into question; instead, it is accused passively through the voices of survivors. The only direct reference is found in the first part of the appeal to the «U.S. bombings» as the cause of the «massacres of the civilian population, particularly women and children.» Furthermore, the final part of the appeal contains a list of the WIDF demands to the UN, including another direct attack on the humanitarian organization. Particularly in point No. 1, in which WIDF demands directly to stop the bombing, thus equating the UN

¹⁰¹ An unabridged version of the report in Italian was reported in supplement no 31 (August 3, 1951) of the PCI magazine *Per una pace stabile, per una democrazia popolare!* (For a Stable Peace, for a People's Democracy!).

itself as the instigator of the war.¹⁰² This is followed by the other two points in which the organization is asked to: 2) find a peaceful solution and order the withdrawal of foreign forces there; and 3) guarantee the self-determination of the Korean people, in this sense referring directly to Article 1 of the UN charter which, defining its objectives in point two declares to «respect the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.»

These accusations were not without consequences. Because of this open accusation, WIDF suffered the revocation of its consultative status at the UN meeting in New York in 1954, as Dora Russell's account documents. The American pacifist who participated on behalf of the international federation was prevented from attending. On that occasion, the federation report was criticized for obstructing the work of the UN in Korea. It was described in very negative terms, being labeled as «cynical, destructive and sterile,» as well as being accused of exploiting women for propaganda purposes. Russell's 1954 testimony is documented in Kim (2023a, 36). The status would not be reinstated until June 1967 (de Haan 2010, 550).

Overall, *We Accuse!* contains first-hand accounts of women encountered by the commissioners recounting their stories or those of others who disappeared during the war.

¹⁰²«The Congress established the World Peace Council as the highest leadership body for defending global peace. The Council comprises 222 distinguished individuals, respected both within their nations and internationally. Together, they represent countries and populations far exceeding those governed by the United Nations under the influence of the United States. The Council is entrusted with the noble mission of safeguarding world peace and urging the UN to return to its founding principles. However, if the UN stubbornly remains a mere voting machine for the U.S., the World Peace Council will act on behalf of the people's will to ensure peace is upheld.» Original text: «大會產生了一個保衛世界和平的最高領導機構——世界和平理事會。當選的二百二十二名理事都是在一國或國際範圍內享有很高聲望的人物，他們所代表的國家和人民，超過了今天美國操縱下的聯合國。這個理事會擔負着保衛世界和平的崇高任務，它將代表全世界愛好和平的人民，來督促聯合國回到它所賴以建立的原則上來。但如果聯合國頭固不化地甘為美國的表決機器，那麼這個世界和平理事會便將執行人民的意如何貫徹執行二居和大決議。」“Di er jie shi jie bao wei he ping da hui de jing guo ji qi cheng jiu.” 第二屆世界保衛和平大會的經過及其成就 (The Proceedings and Achievements of the 2nd World Congress for the Defence of Peace) ZGFN 18 (January 1951), 8.

Throughout the text, these women's status as mothers is markedly emphasized.¹⁰³ Detailing the family ties of those interviewed does not seem accidental. Still, it is a specific strategy aiming to “universalize” the personal tragedies of the Korean population by making them collective and transgenerational. One of the testimonies, for example, reads:

A woman, Sim Tong-Bin, who came from the village of Wu-Se-Ri, 8 km from Anak, stated that the Americans had killed her husband, her father-in-law, her mother-in-law, and her sister-in-law. All of them were shot, and when they appeared to be still alive after the shooting, with the exception of the father-in-law, they were bayoneted. The father-in-law was buried alive (WIDF 1954, 9).

The results of the WIDF commission in Korea were presented to the women's realities afferent to the umbrella federation in the context of the executive committee held in Sofia from June 20 to 24, 1951. On this occasion, several of the committee's participants – from Soviet Nina Popova to Cuban delegate Kandélaria Rodriguez and the commission leader Nora K. Rodd – spoke to declare the importance of support for Korea and to denounce US interference in the area. Among the 21 WIDF commissioners in Korea is an Italian, Elisabetta Gallo.¹⁰⁴ A Piedmontese from Asti, we find her among the “candidates for peace” in the first postwar Italian elections of 1948, later elected deputy to the Chamber on the Communist lists. A housewife with a high school diploma, during her years as an MP, she participated in several commissions, including that for the protection of maternity, for the inquiry into private

¹⁰³ ‘Mother’ uses for war propaganda are not new but were widespread since WWI. See Grayzel (2014), Garner, Slattery (2012); Lieberman (1998).

¹⁰⁴ Her selection by UDI is communicated to WIDF in a message signed by Rossi and Longo dated May 5, 1951 (ACUDI 9, 45-2), 11 days before her departure, in which, opposite to other cases, such as, for example, the UDI delegates on diplomatic trips (including those to the PRC in 1955 and 1956, which will be discussed in chapter 3), no biographical details are given and neither is stated the reason why she was chosen.

schools, and for the implementation of measures within the National Maternity and Childhood Organization (Opera nazionale maternità e infanzia, ONMI)¹⁰⁵ (Camera n.d.).



Figure 1.9. Elisabetta Gallo in 1948 (*ND* 10, April 11, 1948, 8.)

Gallo was also a UDI executive. As a result of her involvement in the Korea committee, she became the spokesperson for UDI's primary aid collection for the Korean people: the "A Box of Milk for Korean Children" campaign.

1.3.2 The WIDF campaign representation in Italy

In connection with her participation in the WIDF commission in Korea, Gallo becomes the contact person for what is happening in the country in the eyes of Italian Communism, which presents her as «one of the very few Italians who have seen with her own eyes what is happening in Korea, the only Italian woman who has done so

¹⁰⁵ The ONMI was a public institution established in the 1920s, following similar institutions that arose in the European context for the management of maternity and childcare. For an overview of the ONMI, see Minnesso (2007).

not following the aggressor but on the side of the victim, on the soil of People's Korea.».¹⁰⁶ Upon her return, Gallo published first-hand articles in *Noi Donne*. The first was published on July 1, 1951, under the title *Korea Accuses*.¹⁰⁷ The article takes up the themes contained in the WIDF report, descriptions of the tragic circumstances facing the Korean population, enriched with micro biographical details providing names of those presented as helpless victims of the US fury: In particular, women and children, protagonists in a scenario of pain that Gallo describes as so intense that it crosses linguistic barriers, expressing it in a deafening silence.

Rather than from words, it is from the tear-streaked expressions of the women who point out to us the mutilated bodies of women, children, and the elderly in the mass graves that we understand how the corpses, emanating a nauseating smell, are their loved ones. With the Korean women, we wept at the site of the mass executions, in front of the pits where the victims of the ferocity of American soldiers and Sin-Man-Ri lay piled up.¹⁰⁸

Gallo's narrative enriches with details of the atrocities reported by the Korean population she met during the visit, in particular, the war crimes perpetrated against mothers with children in tow.

¹⁰⁶ Extract from Ennio Polito's interview "Ho visto la Corea devastata dalla guerra. Intervista con Elisabetta Gallo." (I Saw Korea Devastated by the War. Interview with Elisabetta Gallo). *L'Unità* (June 20, 1951), 1. Polito's reference to other Italians on the ground is probably referring to the volunteers of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to whose presence a book recently republished by the Italian Red Cross was dedicated (Cannonero, Pianese 2021).

¹⁰⁷ Gallo, Elisabetta. "La Corea accusa" (*Korea Accuses*). *ND* (July 1, 1951), 6-7.

¹⁰⁸ Original text: «Più che dalle parole, è dall'espressione del volto rigato di lacrime delle donne che ci additano, nelle fosse comuni, i corpi martoriati delle donne, dei bambini e dei vecchi, che comprendiamo come i cadaveri dai quali esala un odore nauseante siano dei loro cari; con le donne coreane abbiamo pianto sul luogo delle esecuzioni in massa, davanti alle fosse dove giacciono ammucchiate le vittime della ferocia dei soldati americani e di Sin-Man-Ri.»

A young woman, Sin-Ra-Na, eight months pregnant, was torn from her family by the hordes of American imperialism, tortured for five days, then stripped naked in the public square and killed after the child was extracted from her womb with sticks. Equally tragic was the fate of the young daughter-in-law of the farmer So-Tion-Do in the village of Ok-Tom-Ri, and that of a very young leader of the women's organization in Phyongyang, who was killed with hot irons and buried with her six-year-old child, still alive, beside her.¹⁰⁹

Here, too, the contents follow those of the WIDF report, which contains several pages of testimonies of a similar nature. The exposure of scabrous details appears to result from a precise strategy aimed at stirring public opinion on the conflict and condemning the actions of the American army. Gallo's narration is taken up iconographically on the cover of the same magazine issue, dedicated to the Korean War. It shows a woman holding a child around her waist who is probably not hers, given her advanced age; with a distraught expression, she raises her hand as if to ask for help.

¹⁰⁹ Original text: «Una giovane donna, Sin-Ra-Na, incinta di otto mesi, fu strappata alla famiglia dalle orde dell'imperialismo americano, torturata per 5 giorni, quindi denudata sulla pubblica piazza e uccisa dopo che la creatura fu estratta a colpi di bastone dal suo grembo. Ugualmente tragica è stata la sorte della giovane nuora del contadino So-Tion-Do, nel villaggio Ok-Tom-Ri e quella di una giovanissima dirigente dell'organizzazione femminile di Phyongyang, uccisa a colpi di ferri roventi, e sepolta con accanto, vivo, il suo bambino di sei anni.»



Figure 1.10. *ND* 26 (July 1, 1951), cover page, titled ‘Ciò che ha visto in Corea una donna italiana’ (What an Italian woman saw in Korea).

The following issue of *Noi Donne*, presents another report by Gallo entitled *The Truth about Korea*,¹¹⁰ which reproduces – one year after the conflict’s outbreak – the “truth” for the socialist front: «On June 25, 1950, South Korean troops crossed the 38th Parallel, which constitutes the border between the People’s Republic of North Korea and the puppet state of South Korea controlled by the Americans, penetrating many kilometers into the territory without any warning or declaration of war is.»¹¹¹ The same issue, on p. 3, publishes a letter from Pak Chŏng-ae to the UDI, sent precisely one year after the outbreak of the war, on June 25, 1951. Interestingly, the Italian text accompanies a photo of the Korean leader and the letter’s original in Korean to attest

¹¹⁰ Gallo, Elisabetta. “La verità sulla Corea.”(The Truth about Korea). *ND* (July 8, 1951), 4.

¹¹¹ Original text: «Il 25 giugno 1950 le truppe sudcoreane varcarono senza alcun preavviso, senza dichiarazione di guerra, il 38° Parallelo che costituisce il confine fra la Repubblica Popolare della Corea del Nord e lo stato fantoccio della Corea del Sud controllata dagli americani penetrando per molti chilometri nel territorio.»

to its integrity. In the letter, Pak personally thanks the Italian women for sending a UDI delegate to the WIDF commission and testifies to the enthusiasm of the «Korean mothers» in receiving attention from other women: «as they know that only women can fully understand their ordeal.»¹¹² It follows a reference to the threat of an enlargement of the conflict and the consequent invocation to the “struggle for peace”: «Do actively fight against the war because if the war broke out in your country, the terrible fate of my people would be your fate.»¹¹³ Pak’s appeal for world peace is reinforced by showing on the same page next to the NKWU’s leader letter, the WIDF appeal “to women all over the world” to sign for peace. The Korean leader’s letter ends with a thank you and a promise to UDI:

Dear Italian sisters, I have heard that you want to ask every Italian mother to give a box of milk to every Korean child on behalf of their children. Thank you for your sympathy and help, and I make a solemn promise, on behalf of all Korean women, that the fraternal bond that today unites us in the name of peace and freedom will never fail!¹¹⁴

The campaign mentioned by Pak Chŏng-ae is precisely “A Box of Milk for Korean Children.” This action undergoes a promotion in the UDI magazine from the beginning of July until the beginning of October 1951. The short articles on the campaign were generally placed in a reasonably prominent position (usually on the second page)

¹¹² Original text: «Questo avvenimento ha entusiasmato l’anima dolente delle madri coreane, perché esse sanno che soltanto le donne possono comprendere a fondo il loro calvario.»

¹¹³ Original text: «Lottate attivamente contro la guerra, perché se la guerra scoppiasse nel vostro Paese la sorte terribile della mia gente sarebbe la vostra stessa sorte.»

¹¹⁴ Original text: «Care sorelle italiane, ho saputo che voi volete chiedere a ogni mamma italiana di dare a nome dei suoi bambini una scatola di latte ad ogni bambino coreano. Vi ringrazio della vostra simpatia e del vostro aiuto e vi faccio solenne promessa, a nome di tutte le donne coreane, che mai verrà meno il legame fraterno che in nome della pace e della libertà oggi ci unisce!»

and reported the campaign results, with thanks to the donors. It is interesting to note the visual element of these short articles, which once again recall solidarity between mothers, which shows an Italian mother holding her child and offering a carton of milk to a contrite Korean mother, who is also holding her child.¹¹⁵



Figure 1.11. “Una scatola di latte per bambini coreani” (A Box of Milk for Korean Children) (ND 39, October 7, 1951, 2).

1.3.3 Socialist women international solidarity campaigns

The UDI campaign to collect food and funds for Korea represents the first transnational effort of the Italian federation since its foundation in 1945. The Korean campaign was part of a broader commitment to support minors. During the winter of 1945-46, a solidarity initiative was organized in which thousands of children from

¹¹⁵ “Una scatola di latte per i bambini coreani.” (A Box of Milk for Korean Children). ND 39 (October 7, 1951).

the poorest areas of southern Italy were transferred to Emilia and welcomed by peasant families who saved them from hunger and disease (Mafai 1979, 137-141; Maida 2020). This initiative was replicated for children affected by floods and other natural disasters. Furthermore, with the worsening of relations between the government and the left, the UDI's action extended to the children of workers and militants arrested or fired for political reasons, transforming into a strong action for claims. The UDI promoted among women the will to claim assistance as a right and asked for government subsidies, complaining about discriminatory treatment compared to religious organizations and the ONMI (Michetti, Repetto, Viviani 1998, 69-70; Gelsomini 2011, 282).

Among the protagonists of this transnational effort for children's protection is UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi. In step with her commitment on the national front, Rossi is among the most active peace activists in the international campaign on the North Korean conflict. It is worth mentioning her article is on issue of August 1951 entitled "*Let's help them live!*" ["*Aiutiamoli a Vivere!*"]¹¹⁶ providing an account of the nationwide development of the Italian campaign for Korean children.

[...] the war must stop, Korean children should no longer die from bombs, Korean children deprived of their parents, Korean children must live, be nourished, learn to smile and play again. The "box of milk" from UDI has become, through the initiative of some farming organizations, "a handful of grain;" it is about to become "a handful of rice" in some rice-growing provinces; elsewhere, it will become medicines, clothes, money, and it is always also a signature for a peace pact among the five Great Powers. Committees formed under the UDI initiative are multiplying; organizations and people who have joined find fresh initiatives

¹¹⁶ Rossi, Maria Maddalena. "Aiutiamoli a vivere!" (Let's Help Them Live!). *ND* (August 12, 1951), 3.

and a whole network of people of all classes and ages operating [both] in cities and countryside [...].¹¹⁷

The article also attests to creating a correspondence network between Italian and Korean children. This network idea was promoted within the WIDF and, specifically, on the initiative of the charismatic NKWU leader:

A few weeks ago Pak Den Ai¹¹⁸ with her childlike hands handed us a letter for the Italian women; this letter has already received tens of thousands of replies written on the milk box. In Milan, the evening when the UDI delegate in Korea, Elisabetta Gallo, gave a speech, 1800 responses were collected. Everyone scratched their response to Pak Den Ai on the shiny tin: "Long live Peace" and "Long live Korean children!" "Freedom for Korea!" along with the names and addresses of Milanese children who have already begun to wait for a reply postcard from the Korean child who will receive their milk box.¹¹⁹

The Italian campaign is not unique but is part of a transnational effort for peace promoted by the WIDF and carried out by its member national organizations. The February 1951 issue of the WIDF magazine *Women of the Whole World* bears witness

¹¹⁷ Original text: «[...] la guerra deve cessare, i bambini coreani non debbono più morire di bombe, i bambini coreani privati dei genitori, i bambini coreani devono vivere, nutrirsi, imparare di nuovo a sorridere e a giocare. La "scatola di latte" dell'UDI è diventata per iniziativa di alcune organizzazioni contadine "un pugno di grano," sta per diventare in alcune province risicole "un pugno di riso," altrove diventerà medicine, vestiti, denaro, ed è sempre anche una firma per un patto di pace fra i cinque Grandi. I Comitati formati per iniziativa dell'UDI si moltiplicano, le organizzazioni e le persone che vi hanno aderito trovano iniziative nuove, si muovono già nelle città e nelle campagne tutta una rete di persone di ogni ceto e di ogni età [...].»

¹¹⁸ Note that Pak Den Ai is the common transcription for Pak Chông-ae both in UDI and WIDF coeval sources.

¹¹⁹ Original text: «Pak Den Ai ci ha consegnato qualche settimana fa con le sue mani di bambina una lettera per le donne italiane, questa lettera ha già ricevuto decine di migliaia di risposte scritte sulla scatola di latte. A Milano, una sera in cui tenne un comizio la delegata dell'UDI in Corea, Elisabetta Gallo, se ne raccolsero 1800. Sulla latta lucente ognuno aveva graffiato la sua risposta a Pak Den Ai: "Viva la Pace" e "Viva i bambini Coreani!" "Libertà per la Corea!" e nomi e indirizzi di bambini milanesi che hanno già incominciato ad aspettare una cartolina di risposta dal bambino coreano che riceverà la loro scatola di latte.»

to the anti-war actions carried out by federations from various countries: Greece to Cuba, West Germany to Czechoslovakia, and even the USA. Here in 1952 an association of mothers of soldiers who had gone to war was formed which carried out the campaign “Save our Sons”; furthermore the actions of the group American Women for Peace (AWP) created in 1950, were directed against the Korean War after its outbreak (Kim 2023a, 37). Many of the members of this group during this period were also part of the main grass-roots association of left-wing feminists during this period the Council of American Women (CAW) and continued their action within the AWP after the CAW was forced to disband in 1950 (de Haan 2010, 548).

Further evidence of these efforts can be found in the WIDF booklet *The Children of Korea Call to the Women of the World*, which – using extensive photographic material – describes the conditions in which children and the overall Korean population find themselves. It also contains an appeal «to mothers all over the world» to help them, notably changing the usual term “women” to “mothers.”¹²⁰ The initiatives carried out by the other national federations are also reported in detail, country by country of *Nouvelles Brèves*, entitled “The solidarity campaign for women and children of Korea” [“La campagne de solidarité pour les femmes et les enfants de Corée”].¹²¹ These initiatives, it is said, are in response to an appeal launched by the Chinese delegate to the 4th WIDF council held in Berlin between 1-5 February 1951. The reference is probably to the substantial speech by «Ting Yen,»¹²² a Chinese delegate to the council whose speech, focused on the organization of the female masses in the

¹²⁰ The booklet does not have a printed publication date, but the copy preserved in the UDI archive has a pencil annotation of “1951” (ACUDI, 9, 45-2).

¹²¹ “La campagne de solidarité pour les femmes et les enfants de Corée.” (The Solidarity Campaign for Women and Children of Korea). *Nouvelles Brèves* 28 (May 17, 1951). Similar descriptions are also reported in the WIDF periodical *Women of the Whole World*, as noted in Kim (2023a, 37-38).

¹²² It wasn’t possible to find any information about the name’s Chinese characters and, consequently, any biographical information about «Ting Yen,» likely Ding Yan.

PRC in the final part mentions the collective effort of the Chinese population in aiding the Korean one, and invites the international audience to take part in an transnational effort for peace:

Dear Sisters! The experiences in China prove that with the everyday political demands of women of all classes and their concrete interests as an objective basis, through the policy, guidance, and activity of a united front under the strong leadership of the working class, and combined with subjective efforts as already mentioned, a broad united front and a remarkable unity of women can be realized.¹²³

The initiatives in response to Ting's appeal, documented by the WIDF bulletin, include the sending of a "medical train" by Bulgaria for the Korean People's Army; of medicine and clothing by the German Democratic Women's Federation, the American CWA and the French UFF, which also collected milk. The bulletin also announces the Belgians' protests in front of the USA embassy and the Polish's collection of gifts and funds for Korean children (which is said to have reached 10 million zlotys). The country that has spent the most is Romania. Upstream of an excellent propaganda effort involving different media, from cinema to radio to television, the organization of five thousand conferences. Furthermore, the Romanian Democratic Women's Union and the local Red Cross have collected 47 railway wagons of clothing and funds for 40 million lei. The aid campaign of the communist country continued over the years, as demonstrated by the article of Noi Donne entitled "Smiling

¹²³ Original text: «Liebe Schwestern! Die Erfahrungen in China beweisen, dass mit den gemeinsamen politischen Forderungen der Frauen aller Schichten und deren konkreten Interessen als objektive Basis mit der Politik, Anleitung und Aktivität einer Einheitsfront, unter der starken Führung der Arbeiterklasse und, wozu noch die subjektiven Bemühungen, wie die bereits erwähnten kommen, eine weit ausgedehnte Einheitsfront und eine grosse Einheit der Frauen verwirklicht werden kann.» (ACUDI, 8, 39).

Again” [Sorridere ancora]¹²⁴” dedicated to the Romanian colonies of Tusnad and Siret, which hosted 1,500 North Korean children. It is the only article in the Italian women’s magazine describing other national women’s organization aid campaigns. Again, the importance of the defense of childhood emerges dramatically.



Figure 1.12. A child from “New China” in *ND* 15 (April 15, 1951, cover page).

The children's image emerges as the critical agent of the fight against war and the campaign for peace, a powerful symbol capable of stirring consciences. The evolution in the representation in Noi Donne shows how children's centrality becomes increasingly present to the point of having them speak in the first person. This is evident in the UDI pamphlet entitled *A Letter from Korean Children to Italian Children*, distributed during the electoral campaign during the Italian political elections in 1953 (ACUDI 14, 67-2). The short pamphlet contains a letter dated May 9, 1953, from the «Schoolchildren of the 9th Popular School of Pyongyang» addressed in person to the Italian children, placing itself as a response to the messages previously received from them in the context of the UDI fundraising campaign. In the letter, the alleged schoolchildren use a language very similar to that found in other appeals from the socialist world. The message begins with: «Dear children, our little Italian companions in the far West» and provides a description of the life of hardship experienced by them and their «uncles»:

[...] we know that we must study well so that the war ends soon. All our schools were destroyed, and we study in dark caves, but we always sing. The workers sing in their underground workshops, the farmers in the rice fields, and the soldiers at the front. We, the uncles who are soldiers, the uncles who are workers, and the uncles who are farmers, sing hymns of victory. The Americans continue to drop fire bombs, but they cannot stop us from working and studying. One

day, they will have to return to their country! Today, our life is not beautiful.

But tomorrow it will be beautiful.¹²⁶

The letter concludes with an appeal that invokes, once again, international women's and children solidarity: «Tell your mothers to do everything so that your beautiful country is not burned by war as ours has been. Goodbye, dear children, little companions from the distant West! Long life to the friendship among all the good children of the world!»¹²⁷

Another interesting element featuring the letter, absent in previous reports, is the accusation against the US militias of using bacteriological weapons: «Many children like us have already died from drinking a glass of water that the Americans had poisoned. We cannot even quench our thirst anymore.» From the beginning of 1952 until the end of the war, this theme was an object of media representation, inflaming the international debate and sharpening the polarized representations of the conflict.

In the context of the use of the figure of the child, both the appeal of the Chinese women and that of the WIDF more generally emphasize the importance of women's action as protectors of children.

For us women, this [Asia-Pacific Peace] conference holds even greater significance. As mothers responsible for nurturing life, we urgently seek peace and happiness for our children. [...] To ensure the smiles on our children's faces are

¹²⁶ Original text: «Ma noi sappiamo che dobbiamo studiare bene perché la guerra finisca presto. Tutte le nostre scuole sono state distrutte e noi studiamo nelle caverne scure, ma cantiamo sempre. Anche gli operai nelle loro officine sotterranee cantano e cantano i contadini nelle risaie e i soldati al fronte. Noi, gli zii soldati, gli zii operai, gli zii contadini cantiamo inni di vittoria. Gli americani continuano a lanciare bombe di fuoco ma non riescono a farci smettere di lavorare e di studiare. Un giorno dovranno ritornarsene nel loro Paese! Oggi la nostra vita non è bella. Ma domani sarà bella.»

¹²⁷ Original text: «Dite alle vostre madri di fare tutto perché il vostro bel Paese non sia bruciato dalla guerra come è stato il nostro. Arrivederci, cari bambini, piccoli compagni dell'Ovest lontano! Viva l'amicizia fra tutti i buoni bambini del mondo!»

not taken by the roar of cannon fire, to ensure that our happy and peaceful families are not destroyed by war, and to live in a world where we are free from oppression and the threat of war, we, the 800 million mothers and women of Asia and the Pacific, must unite all our strength and direct our collective anger against those who deliberately destroy peace and promote war. Despite our differences in ethnicity, language, and religious beliefs, we share a common bond – a love for peace, for children, and for families.¹²⁸

WIDF secretary Carmen Zanti was also a guest in Beijing for the Asian Pacific Conference in October 1952. The resolution she presented was republished in *Women of New China* the following month:

[...] Representatives from 37 countries, upon arriving in your capital, were warmly welcomed by Chinese children, who expressed the deep love and desire for peace shared by all the people of China¹²⁹. [...] The deadly bacteria that have

¹²⁸ Original text: «對於我們婦女來說，這個會議更具有特別重要的意義。因為負責孕育人類生命的母親，更迫切地需要和平幸福的生灣 朝鮮婦女和兒童所遭受的深重的災難，是人所共知的。[...] 爲了使我們的兒童臉上的笑容，不會被砲彈的呼嘯聲所奪去，爲了使我們幸福安寧的家庭不被戰火所破壞，爲了使我們能在和平陽光的普照下過自由的、不受任何壓迫、不受戰爭威脅的生活，我們全亞洲和太平洋區域的八億母親們和婦女們，必須把我們的一切仇恨向着那蓄意破壞和平的戰爭份子！必須把我們的一切力量團結起來，反對戰爭，保衛和平！儘管我們種族不同，語言不同，宗教信仰不同，但我們有着一個相互溝通的橋樑——我們都熱愛和平，我們都熱愛孩子和家庭。」Li Dequan 李德全，「Funü men tuan jie qilai wei baowei yazhou ji taipingyang quyu de heping er douzheng.」婦女們團結起來，爲保衛亞洲及太平洋區域的和平而鬥爭 (Women Unite to Fight for the Defense of Peace in the Asia-Pacific Region), *ZGFN* no 10, October 1952, 7.

¹²⁹ Original text: «三十七個國家的代表們在抵達你們首都的時候，就受到了新中國兒童們的熱烈歡迎，這些兒童們向他們表達了全中國人民對和平的熱愛與意願。[...] 致命的細菌已散佈在朝鮮和中國的土地上，如果沒有中國人民和朝鮮人民的努力，疫病恐怕已經傳怖到了全人類。」WIDF Secretary Carmen Zanti 國際民主婦聯副總書記卡爾曼·桑帶，「Tuanjie qilai wei shixian yazhou ji taipingyang quyu heping huiyi de jueyi er douzheng.」團結起來爲實現亞洲及太平洋區域和平會議的決議而鬥爭 (Unite to Fight for the Implementation of the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference Resolution), *ZGFN* no 11, November 1952, 20–1.

spread across the lands of Korea and China could have easily spread to all humanity if not for the tireless efforts of the Chinese and Korean people.

1.4 Transnational Women Activism in the Bacteriological Warfare

1.4.1 The polarization of the Global campaign to aid Korea

The “biological” or “bacteriological” warfare, in Chinese 细菌战 (*Xijun Zhan*), represents a controversial chapter of the Korean War, as well as a theme that characterizes the transnational socialist propaganda for peace. It regards the accusation made against the US establishment of having used infected animal and plant species to contaminate the air and water in North Korean territories, thus transporting viruses such as smallpox and malaria. Chinese and Korean activists, particularly, have proven to operate effective propaganda efforts that found reception in their Italian counterparts.

The North Korean foreign minister makes the accusations of using bacteriological weapons on two occasions. First, on May 8, 1951, when he turned to the UN, presenting a summary report and asking for an inspection. The UN ignored the appeal (Dobrenko 2024, 33). The WIDF commission left shortly after for Korea, and although politically aligned in support of the Korean cause, it does not report traces of this type of accusation (WIDF 1951). The lack of convincing evidence resulted in the loss of international support, which led to the abandonment of the accusation by July of the same year (Dobrenko 2024, 33). The second occasion occurred in January 1952, when the North Korean foreign minister returned to accuse the US of bacteriological weapons use, bringing a new, more detailed report to the attention of the UN. Vladimir Dobrenko (*ibid*) has underlined there are no traces of this new invective in the

Soviet archives, which leads to the assumption that the origin of the accusation campaign comes from the Chinese side: April's publication of *Women of new China*, 1952¹³⁰, reported that starting on January 28, U.S. forces began engaging in bacteriological warfare in Korea, and from February 29, aircraft allegedly dropped insects carrying infectious agents over northeastern China and Qingdao. The aim was to spread epidemics among soldiers and civilians in both China and Korea, disrupt armistice negotiations, and broaden the scope of the war. On the occasion of International Women's Day, women's organizations across China responded with public declarations. The All-China Women's Federation, along with Christian women's groups, issued petitions condemning the alleged actions and calling for mobilization to prevent bacteriological warfare. These appeals emphasized the need to protect national security, public health, and future generations. The hypothesis of a preponderant Chinese role in the new invective seems supported by the analysis by Shen and Xia (2011, 2018), who underlines the importance assumed by the Chinese leadership in the conflict after the entry into the war. Chinese military successes against the US army in October 1950 would have reassured Mao and his allies, to change the objective of entering the war, which from re-establishing the border at the 38th parallel became the conquest of the entire peninsula. However, this assessment was based on an underestimation of US forces and caused the military stalemate until the end of July 1953. Shen emphasizes how Mao in this sense refused to accept two possibilities to end the war early and acquire a better position on the international chessboard: on December 14, 1950, when the thirteen-nation resolution was proposed (endorsed by the UN) and in January 1951 when the same UN proposed a cease-fire resolution (Shen, Xia 2011, 204).

¹³⁰ The Editor. "Jian jue fen sui mei di guo zhu yi de xi jun zhan." 堅決粉碎美帝國主義的細菌戰 (Resolutely Crush the U.S. Imperialist Bacteriological Warfare), *ZGFN* no 5, April 1952, 5.

Even in this second accusation, the UN does not actively respond. Instead, the international organizations of the socialist front take action, mobilizing commissions to analyze the case. From March 5 to 19, 1952, the commission of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) (Dobrenko 2024, 37; ACUDI 10, 46-5) took place, and in June of the same year, the WPC investigative commission (Garver 2016, 85; ACUDI 10, 46-5) followed by the relative Oslo Appeal for the decommitment of bacteriological weapons.¹³¹

¹³¹ The commission's report, as well as the appeal, underlines how the United States has not ratified the International Convention of June 17, 1925, which prohibits the use of poison gases and bacteriological means (Rossi 1952, 4). On the same subject see the article of *L'Unità* "Basta con la guerra dei microbi!" (Enough with the War of Microbes!) (April 8, 1952).

Date	Event
May 8, 1951	1st statement by North Korean Foreign Minister Bak Hun Yung to the UN
May 16-27, 1951	WIDF Commission
June 1951	Chinese Government Commission
June 1951	Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs Commission
January 1952	2nd statement by North Korean Foreign Minister Bak Hun Yung to the UN
January 1952	Chinese Government Commission
March 4, 1952	Speech by the US Secretary of State Acheson at the UN denying allegations of biological warfare
March 5-19, 1952	Commission of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers
Mid-March 1952	Chinese Government Commission
June 23 – August 31, 1952	Commission of the World Peace Council ('Needham Commission')

Table 1. Summary of the critical events of the “Bacteriological War.”¹³²

These new delegations echoed what Soviet sources proved to be a grand orchestration initiated by the Chinese People’s Volunteers (中国人民志愿军 *Zhongguo Renmin Zhiyuanjun*, CPV), then supported by the Chinese, Korean, and Soviet establishments (Leitenberg 2016; Garver 2016, 69). The Bacteriological warfare accusation was comprehensively covered in Soviet and Chinese newspapers, particularly in the four

¹³² The data are from the following sources: Dobrenko (2024, 33-44); Garver (2016, 85).

weeks between mid-March and mid-April 1952 (ivi, 84). This effort continued in the Chinese context throughout 1953, fueled by a series of international publications by the Chinese government based on the findings of its commissions in Korea.¹³³ Even in Italy, the leading communist newspaper *L'Unità*, presents some articles supporting the campaign.¹³⁴

1.4.2 The Bacteriological warfare and the WIDF

Within the women's socialist transnational network, the delegates of the Chinese and Korean women's federations reproduced this discourse. WIDF meetings of the period demonstrate open denunciation of bacteriological warfare. Their claim is evident from the speeches of Kang Keqing¹³⁵ (康克清, 1911-1992)¹³⁶ and Kim En-Sou (Kim Yǒng-su)¹³⁷ at the International Conference for the Defense of Children (Vienna, 12-

¹³³ For example, the 4-page article in the March 1952 issue of *China Pictorial*, titled "American Germ Warfare in Korea and China." (March 1952), 3; or the special issue from May 1952 of the same magazine, published in four languages – Chinese, Russian, English, and French – titled "Meiguo Qinlue zhe Jinxing Xijunzhan De Tie-zhen" 美國侵略者進行細菌戰的鐵證 (Irrefutable Evidence Concerning the Use of Bacteriological Warfare by the American Aggressors). Also see the 5-volume series published in English in 1952 by the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, titled "Stop U.S. Germ Warfare!" (CPC, 1952).

¹³⁴ In particular, a series of articles under the overall title of "Basta con la guerra dei microbi!" (Enough with the war of microbes!) occupies the entire third page of the April 8, 1952 issue of *L'Unità*. The images reported in the article follow those found in the aforementioned materials of the *China Pictorial*.

¹³⁵ «This cruel biological warfare was a long-prepared conspiracy. The U.S. government has been preparing for biological warfare since 1941. The United States did not sign the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which unconditionally bans the use of biological weapons. The U.S. also collaborated closely with Japanese biological warfare criminals, who had accumulated experience in biological warfare. They had long been cultivating bacteria and conducting numerous sinister experiments, including on captured Chinese and Korean soldiers, as was the case on the island of Geojedo.» Origins text: «這種殘酷的細菌戰爭是有長期準備的陰謀的。美國政府從事細菌準備是從一九四一年就開始了的。美國是沒有批准日內瓦一九二五年關於無條件禁用細菌武器的國際公約的國家。美國在東方進行細菌戰的準備，是取得了有罪惡經驗的日本細菌戰犯們的密切合作的。他們長期的在培養細菌，並作了許多罪惡的試驗，其中在巨濟島，曾經把朝、中部隊被俘人員作為試驗品，這就是一個例子。」 Kang Keqing 康克清. "He ping dui yu wo men de hai zi yi wei zhe shen me?" 和平對於我們的孩子意味着什麼? (What Does Peace Mean for Our Children?), *ZGFN*, no 5-6, May/June 1952, 6.

¹³⁶ Kang was then responsible for the welfare policies for women and children within the federation. Later, she led the ACWF from 1978 to 1993. More details on her biography are provided in chapter 2.

¹³⁷ Kim Yǒng-su was reported as vice-president of the KDWU in 1957 (Kim 2023a, 114).

16 April 1952) and Shen¹³⁸ to the next WIDF executive committee in Bucharest, 18-20 July 1952. Kim's speech details the accusations brought forward by the Sino-Korean front:

The American invaders, trampling on rules and international agreements, have openly started using bacteriological weapons. American night bombers are dropping insects (fleas, lice, flies, ants, grasshoppers, mosquitoes) infested with cholera, typhus, plague bacilli, etc., on the rear and the front lines to exterminate the civilian population en masse. Recently, they have been using bacteriological shells and asphyxiating gases. (ACUDI 10, 46-5)¹³⁹

Kang Keqing also makes a similar and more detailed accusation emphasizing how the bacteriological attack had been prepared for a long time and had availed itself of the help of «Japanese war criminals» who «possess rich experience» obtained through tests on Korean and Chinese prisoners of war (ibid). Once again, the strategy employed is to refer to the past to legitimize the present; thus, the reference to the Japanese use of bacteriological weapons during WWII.¹⁴⁰ The intervention also highlights that the USA is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention prohibiting bacteriological weapons. This argument will also be strongly emphasized in the WPC appeal,

¹³⁸ Likely referring to Shen Ziji 沈兹九 (1898-1989), editor-in-chief of Women's Life magazine and later editor of the magazine *ZGFN* (Wang 2017, 1).

¹³⁹ Original text: «Les envahisseurs américains, foulant au pied les règles et les accords internationaux, se sont mis à employer ouvertement les armes bactériologiques. Afin d'exterminer en masse la population civile, les bombardiers nocturnes américains lancent à l'arrière et sur le front des insectes (puces, poux, mouches, fourmis, sauterelles, moustiques) infestés des bacilles du choléra, du typhus, de la peste, etc... Ces derniers temps, ils ont employé des obus bactériologiques et les gaz asphyxiants.»

¹⁴⁰ As Garver (2016, 84) noted «Linking putative US actions to earlier Japanese actions also greatly increased the propaganda value of these charges, both within China and globally.» (Ibid.).

published shortly after. Once again, the activists of the ACWDF become spokespeople and sentinels for the protection of human rights, in particular, those of children – to whom the congress is dedicated – leveraging and emphasizing the Chinese leading role in safeguarding human rights:

The Chinese called on the conference to mobilize the world's public opinion to check the war, which is massacring children, and to stop immediately the war in Korea. We appeal to all parents concerned over children's happiness to protect the life of our next generation to ensure their rights to life, health, and education. Protect the welfare of every home! Use all scientific achievements of mankind for the benefit of children.¹⁴¹

The Italian Federation does not reproduce the denunciation of bacteriological warfare through the periodical *Noi Donne*. The only reference to this theme is in the article *In Korea I Saw* [In Korea ho visto] by the lawyer Luigi Cavalieri¹⁴², part of the IADL commission, which states: «women of Korea, who have suffered torture, abuse, massacres, toxic gases, bacteria.»¹⁴³ The IADL brief report of about ten pages, published on April 2, 1952, was shared with the WIDF delegates at the above-mentioned World Conference for Children and a series of WPC bulletins on the same topic (ACUDI 10, 46-5).

Despite not receiving an echo in the women's magazine, the accusation of Bacteriological warfare is openly denounced in the UDI internal discussions and its delegate's

¹⁴¹ This last quote is taken from a second speech by Kang, given in the role of spokesperson for the Chinese delegation at the Conference. The transcription, in this case, was done in English.

¹⁴² Cavalieri, Luigi. "In corea ho visto." (In Korea I Saw). *ND* 26 (June 28, 1952).

¹⁴³ Original text: «donne di Corea, che avete subito le torture, le sevizie, i massacri, i gas tossici, i batteri.»

work within the Italian parliament. This is demonstrated by Maria Maddalena Rossi's parliamentary question of October 15, 1952, entitled *The war of the plague threatens all the children of the world*.¹⁴⁴ The main themes of Kang's speech are also in Rossi's. Her own is a vast and accurate representation with an annexed denunciation of bacteriological warfare, which openly refers to the results of the WPC commission in Korea and the testimonies of the Korean and Chinese delegates at the WIDF meetings. Rossi reconstructs punctually and at length the critical points of Sino-Korean propaganda, proving the denunciations' validity – tracing their origins, developments, and current evidence of bacteriological warfare. The punctual and programmatic narration ends with an autobiographical note conveying the high-stakes emotional experience of the communist MP, outraged by the indifference shown towards the suffering of the war victims.

Peace for Korea! In Vienna, during the International Conference for the Defense of Children last April, I had the opportunity to sit on a commission that included one of these mothers, a medical doctor. After describing the horrors she had experienced in her country, this Korean woman asked us, members of the Commission, to express in a document [the fact] that we were discussing the condemnation of the use of bacteriological weapons by units of the American Army in Korea. We then witnessed a harrowing scene. Several members of the Commission, honest and respectable figures who enjoy great prestige in their own country, where fortunately, the war is not ongoing, stood up one after the other and, with words of compassion, responded to the Korean delegate that they understood her anguish, that they were ready to believe the reported facts, but that

¹⁴⁴ Rossi is the first signatory, along with other parliamentarians and UDI representatives: the secretary Rosetta Longo, Giuliana Nenni, Leonilde Iotti, and Irene Coccoli (Rossi 1952, 33).

without evidence before their eyes, they could not accept her request. [...] The interpreter, a Korean herself, translated the statements word for word, and as these were being made, the face of the unfortunate mother, pale and troubled, seemed to turn to stone. But when everyone fell silent, she suddenly seemed to react to her despair, stood up and, almost shouting, with a voice broken by sobs, addressed each of us, and it seemed to me that she almost accused us one by one, we, women with smooth hands, men with carefully shaved faces, who would soon return to our countries where we do not live among the rubble overturned a thousand times by bombings, where we do not live underground like moles, where the horrible danger of the plague does not threaten the lives of children. What that Korean mother said we would never know: the interpreter did not translate, and she, too, was sobbing uncontrollably. I felt, along with a profound sense of pity, a great discomfort, and almost a sense of remorse, as if I felt somehow responsible because the mothers of my country do not yet know, all of them, the truth about Korea and therefore have not yet given their Korean sisters the help needed to end the war, to enforce the banning of bacteriological weapons. In the name of the sufferings of Korean mothers and so that Italian mothers may be spared such horror, we ask today in the Chamber to invite the Government “to exercise – as our agenda says – its offices with the Governments that have not yet ratified or have not yet accepted the Geneva Convention,

to fill this gap, guaranteeing all humanity from the use of the terrible scourge of bacteriological war.¹⁴⁵

What strikingly emerges from Rossi's narration is that it ultimately does not necessarily matter whether the accusations made by the Korean women are true or not. Instead, what is important is the will to interrupt or give respite to a concretely visible element: the pain felt by another person, although distant – from a geographical, linguistic, and even class point of view – but at the same time close – as a woman, mother, activist, “sister,” “friend.” The need for evidence of bacteriological warfare seems to disappear, becoming secondary to the sisterhood trust bond between the two women, even at the risk of making a mistake or perjuring oneself. Rossi's priority is to stand with another woman in active suffering, exemplifying solidarity in global socialist feminism. The discourse is also spread outside parliament among the UDI

¹⁴⁵ Original text: «Pace per la Corea! A Vienna, durante la Conferenza Internazionale per la Difesa dell'Infanzia, nell'aprile scorso, io ebbi occasione di sedere in una commissione di cui faceva parte anche una di queste madri, una dottoressa in medicina. Questa donna coreana, dopo aver descritto gli orrori da lei stessa vissuti nel suo paese, chiese a noi che facevamo parte della Commissione di esprimere in un documento che stavamo discutendo la condanna per l'impiego delle armi batteriologiche da parte di unità dell'Esercito americano in Corea. Noi assistemmo allora ad una scena assai penosa. Parecchi componenti la Commissione, gente onesta e rispettabile che gode di un grande prestigio nel proprio paese, nel quale fortunatamente, la guerra non è in atto, si alzarono uno dopo l'altro e con parole di pietà, di compassione, risposero alla delegata coreana che essi comprendevano il suo strazio, che erano pronti a credere ai fatti denunciati, ma che non avendone davanti agli occhi le prove non potevano accettare la sua richiesta. [...] L'interprete, coreana essa pure, traduceva parola per parola le dichiarazioni, e, a mano a mano che queste si succedevano, il viso dell'infelice madre, pallido e sconvolto, pareva farsi di pietra. Ma quando tutti tacquero, essa parve all'improvviso reagire alla sua disperazione, si alzò e, quasi gridando, con la voce rotta dai singhiozzi si rivolse a ciascuno di noi e a me sembrò quasi ci accusasse a uno a uno, noi, donne dalle mani lisce, uomini dal volto accuratamente rasato, che saremmo tornati tra poco nei nostri paesi dove non si vive tra le macerie mille volte sconvolte dai bombardamenti, dove non si vive sottoterra come talpe, dove sulla vita dei bambini non pende l'orrenda insidia della peste. Che cosa disse quella madre coreana noi non sapremo mai: l'interprete non traduceva, singhiozzava anch'essa senza ritegno. Io provai, insieme con un profondo senso di pietà, un grande sconforto e quasi un senso di rimorso, come se mi sentissi in qualche modo responsabile perché le madri del mio paese non conoscono ancora, tutte, la verità sulla Corea e non hanno perciò ancora dato alle loro sorelle coreane l'aiuto necessario per far cessare la guerra, per imporre che le armi batteriologiche siano bandite. In nome delle sofferenze delle madri coreane e perché alle madri italiane sia risparmiato un tale orrore, noi chiediamo oggi alla Camera di invitare il Governo “ad esercitare – come dice il nostro ordine del giorno – i suoi uffici presso i Governi che non hanno ancora ratificato o non hanno ancora accettato la Convenzione di Ginevra, perché colmino questa lacuna, garantendo tutta l'umanità dall'impiego del terribile flagello della guerra batteriologica”.» (Rossi 1952, 30-33).

members, as described in an initial note of the document. In the initial caption, dedicated precisely to UDI women, we find once again ample use of the image of the mother:

The Italian Women's Union desires with this booklet to inform all women, through the passionate and documented speech given by its President MP M. Maddalena Rossi at the Chamber of Deputies during the debate on foreign policy, the truth about the war in Korea. No woman, no mother, should spare her efforts to end this war, to ensure that bacteriological weapons, which, if today, kill Korean children, might tomorrow cause victims among children all over the world! This appeal, repeated from house to house by the messengers of peace, finds a profound echo in the country and, with the support of all Italian women, will amplify the powerful voice that will rise from the Congress of the Peoples for Peace.¹⁴⁶

The representation of the bacteriological conflict disappears at the next international meeting of the WIDF, the World Congress of Women held in Copenhagen from 5 to 10 June 1953, taking place a month after the armistice. On that occasion, the Chinese delegates Li Dequan (李德全, 1896-1972) and Zhang Yun (章蕴, 1905-1995) none-

¹⁴⁶ Original text: «L'Unione Donne Italiane desidera con questo opuscolo far conoscere a tutte le donne, attraverso l'appassionato e documentato discorso pronunciato dalla sua Presidente On. M. Maddalena Rossi alla Camera dei Deputati durante il dibattito sulla politica estera, la verità sulla guerra in Corea. Nessuna donna, nessuna mamma risparmi i suoi sforzi per far cessare questa guerra, per far sì che sia bandita l'arme batteriologica, che se oggi uccide i bimbi coreani, potrebbe domani fare vittime fra i bimbi di tutto il mondo! Questo appello, ripetuto di casa in casa dalle messaggere della pace, trovi eco profonda nel paese, e forte del consenso di tutte le donne italiane vada ad ingigantire la possente voce che si leverà dal Congresso dei Popoli per la Pace.» (Rossi 1952, back cover).

theless mention the Korean War, although now giving more stress to its regional liaison. The Korean conflict becomes part of a broader anti-colonialist effort for independence, inseparable from others, such as the Vietnamese and Malaysians, as well as from past experiences, such as the Japanese and Chinese. Argues Li:

Just as we jealously protect the apple of our own eyes, we will protect the sacred independence of our motherland and the People's Power and defend peace. We will never tolerate any act of aggression and the invasion of our homeland by warmongers. Day by day, women from different countries worldwide are becoming increasingly active in the fight to defend their rights and for peace. We salute our sisters from Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia, who are heroically fighting to obtain and safeguard their own countries' independence and security and defend world peace.¹⁴⁷

Conclusions

[...] Human conscience hammers us and demands
accountability for every one of our acts
and also, also for the crying
of children in distant Korea.
Mothers, what have we done
to prevent this bestial madness,

¹⁴⁷ Original text: «De même que nous protégeons jalousement la pupille de nos propres yeux, nous protégerons l'indépendance sacrée de notre mère patrie et du Pouvoir Populaire et nous défendrons la paix. Nous ne tolérerons jamais aucun acte d'agression et l'envahissement de notre patrie par les fauteurs de guerre. De jour en jour, les femmes des différents pays du monde deviennent de plus en plus actives dans la lutte pour la défense de leurs droits et de la paix. Nous saluons nos sœurs de Corée, du Viêt-Nam et de Malaisie qui luttent héroïquement afin d'obtenir et de sauvegarder l'indépendance et la sécurité de leur propre pays et de défendre la paix du monde.» (ACUDI 13, 59-4).

what have we done
 to make it cease and not spread in the world?
 Mothers, we can have one ideal
 or another ideal,
 we can be different, adversaries, enemies,
 turn our backs and look at each other with hostility
 over new and old disputes,
 but for peace, mothers, let's join hands:
 war today is the extermination of children,
 the slaughter of innocents; and no ideal
 can call itself that
 paid at such an inhuman price.¹⁴⁸

These verses conclude the poem “For Peace, Mothers, Let’s Join Hands”¹⁴⁹ by communist writer Joyce Lussu (1912-1998). The poem is accompanied by an image of three Korean children standing still in front of a shack surrounded by rubble, looking sadly and shocked at the camera and recalling the expressions on the faces of the war victims portrayed in Picasso’s painting. In her poem, Lussu correlates the experience of WWII to that of the Korean War. The poem begins by describing a photograph that portrays the moment immediately preceding an SS massacre of Polish civilians in Gestachowa in 1943. In particular, she describes in detail the arrival – among the line of civilians lined up for execution – of a woman holding a child by the hand and

¹⁴⁸ Original text: «La coscienza umana ci martella, e chiede / conto di ogni nostro atto / e anche, anche del pianto / dei bimbi nella lontana Corea. / Madri, che cosa abbiamo fatto / per impedire la follia bestiale / che cosa abbiamo fatto / perché cessi e non dilaghi nel mondo? / Madri, possiamo avere un ideale / o un altro ideale / possiamo essere diverse, avversarie, nemiche / volgerci le spalle e guardarci male / per controversie nuove e antiche, / ma per la pace, madri, diamoci la mano: / la guerra, oggi, è sterminio di bambini / è strage d’innocenti; e nessuno ideale / può chiamarsi tale / pagato a questo prezzo inumano.»

¹⁴⁹ Lussu, Joyce. “Per la pace, madri, diamoci la mano.” (For Peace, Mothers, Let’s Join Hands). *ND* (July 29, 1951), 11.

gently pushing him towards his sad fate. The woman shows resignation but, at the same time, is aware of the imminent end, determined to spend the last moment of her life tightly embraced by her son. This photograph contrasts with that described in the poem's second part. The scene moves to Pyongyang in 1951 and tells of what could be the moment following the previous photograph: a mother lies helpless amid a corpse pile with her eyes wide open, and her child is still clutched to her chest, crying. The final part of the poem returns to the present in which Lussu writes and, horrified, looks out the window, trying to erase what has just been imprinted in her mind and on paper and contrasting it with the image of «living children.» Lussu's poem, like Picasso's painting, bears witness to the media impact of the peace campaign during the Korean War. In particular, they testify to the effectiveness of the strategies for mediation carried out by protagonists of the peace campaign, namely the Korean and Chinese activists. Efforts such as Rossi's in parliament and that of the UDI activists and the Italian population in the campaign "A Box of Milk" also demonstrate the effective transversal involvement of civil society in the peace network for Korea. Although part of a broader strategy supported by the socialist front, the widespread impact of the international campaign for supporting Korea is not merely a passive reaction to socialist propaganda but rather an active response to the mediating efforts of the activists involved.¹⁵⁰ As stressed by Johnston (2008), the socialist "Struggle for Peace" allowed individuals to imbue the term "peace" with their different interpretations, and this resulted in creating a space for participants' agency, which was crucial for the campaign's success.

¹⁵⁰ Timothy Johnston (2008, 260) similarly stressed this in his analysis of the Soviet civil society participation in the peace campaign.

Beyond the broader geopolitical purpose, the WIDF transnational campaign effectively addresses the need to make sense of the lingering wounds of WWII past and prevent their recurrence by all possible means. The individual pain gains a renewed meaning in the reflection within the international environment, thus collectivizing it and making it universal. This exorcism of pain is mixed with a sense of guilt, emerging from the awareness of being part of a country whose «reactionary Italian government» – as described by Rossi in her reply to Cai Chang on 26 September 1951 (ACUDI 9, 45-1) – is conniving at colonial exploitation. The guilt emerges strongly in Rossi's parliamentary question (1952), when she states that the Korean delegate: «almost accused us one by one, we, women with smooth hands, men with carefully shaved faces, who would soon return to our countries where we do not live among the rubble overturned a thousand times by bombings, where we do not live underground like moles, where the horrible danger of the plague does not threaten the lives of children.» An “accusation” that recalls that of Primo Levi (1959) – a Jewish writer who survived the Nazi-fascist deportations – in the opening poem of his famous book *If This Is a Man* (“Se questo è un uomo”), published in 1947, «You who live safe / In your warm houses, / You who find on returning in the evening, / Hot food and friendly faces.»

At the base of the transnational socialist feminist network, there appears to be an awareness based on a personal and collective pain rooted in a recent past and revived by a vivid present. To dismantle this pain, the interventions of Chinese and Korean activists within the WIDF call for the creation of an international network for human rights. This new ideological network lies on socialist foundations, and thus, it is believed it will be finally capable of canceling the inequalities in which men, women, and children still find themselves – as the Korean War expressly demonstrates – together with the fear of a third-world conflict. To do this, it is necessary to call not

only for the end of the (colonial) war in Korea but also for the colonial yoke throughout the world. This semantic equation of peace to de-colonialism is far from being casual. Chinese and Korean delegates' interventions constantly display this connection in their contents. In so doing, they present themselves as victims and, simultaneously, as solid leaders of a new socialist world order where Asia plays a new crucial role. In these respects, the Korean War represents the arena where this effort takes shape, becomes evident on an international scale, and proves capable of carrying forward compelling narratives to bridge ideological divisions.

A key strategy that repeatedly emerges from the sources is that of mothering. Women mediate their roles as protectors and guarantors of peace through their roles – and the traditionally conferred authority – as mothers, linking personal interests and legitimacy to broader geopolitical issues. The Korean War catalyzed this strategy within what became the largest transnational peace campaign, creating a network that would survive even after its end. The arrangement of these strategies is functional in legitimizing women's federations within the transnational geopolitical context and advancing claims for the protection of human rights, specifically women's rights, as demonstrated by the World Congress of Women in Copenhagen in June 1953. The congress led to the creation of significant documents such as an “Appeal to the Women of the World” and a “Declaration of Women's Rights,” which criticized the negative impact of the Cold War on women's rights and called for reductions in military spending and a complete ban on weapons of mass destruction, as highlighted by de Haan (2018, 237).

2. Creating a Worldwide Motherocracy

Ode to Mother

When the moon rises, it sees her nursing the baby,
When the sun rises, it sees her washing away the urine;
Only the stars can compare to her,
Endlessly persevering without a word of complaint.

When it comes to the beloved child,
Her words flow like a long stream;
Though the child still sleeps in her arms,
She eagerly looks forward to the day he can run and fly.

She is as unyielding as a mountain,
And as humble as the earth;
When the child is hurt, her heart shatters,
Her might surpasses even thunder.

When the child becomes a hero, and heroes return,
Even heroes carry the scent of their mother's milk,
Heroes forge a new society,
Mothers nurture heroes, generation after generation.

Ke Zhongping¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Original text: «月亮出來望見她顧奶，/ 太陽出來望見她洗尿；/ 只有星星能比她，/ 熬來熬去不說累。/ 說到心肝兒寶貝，/ 她的話像長流水；/ 兒還在她懷中睡，/ 她早望見兒能跑能飛。/ 她像山來不自高，/ 她像地來不自卑；/ 兒被傷害她心碎，/ 她比雷霆威更威。/ 兒成英雄，英雄歸，/ 英雄還有奶香味。」 Ke Zhongping 柯仲平. *Muqin song* 母親頌 (Ode to mother), *ZGFN* no 2, February 1954, 30. As reported in the magazine, the poem was Written on January 20, 1954, on the eve of the 30th anniversary of Lenin's passing.

2.1 The background for the development of maternal discourses

2.1.1 The Geopolitical Framework

The armistice that ends of the Korean War in the July 1953, created a more fertile ground for opening up international relations within the socialist horizon. According to Silvio Pons (2021, 140) the end of the war could be read a direct consequence of the death of Stalin in March 1953. As a consequence of the war, the PRC saluted the post-Korean War order with a new position on the global chessboard – in light of its moral and factual victory over the US army on Korean soil. On the global stage, the conclusion of the Korean conflict didn't mean the end of armed decolonial conflicts on the Asian and global scenario. The war in Indochina was still ongoing, and so were the call for peace of socialist women's activism condemning French imperialism. The Geneva Conference, held from late April to late July 1954, was widely regarded as a significant step toward establishing international stability amid growing fears of a potential "Third World War." While it succeeded in bringing the Indochina conflict to an end, the Conference ultimately failed to halt the broader trajectory of bipolar confrontation. Notably, the United States chose not to sign the Final Declaration of the Conference, remaining skeptical about the North Vietnamese government's autonomy from Moscow. Subsequently, the US increased its aid to the Saigon regime – substantially replacing France presence in Vietnam – and promoted the creation of the South-east Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).¹⁵² Furthermore, historian Zhai Qiang (1992) stressed how the 1954 Geneva Conference marked a turning point in China's diplomacy, bringing Beijing's foreign policy onto the global stage despite American objections. The conference not only bolstered China's international standing but also confirmed its self-conception as a leader of the Afro-Asian bloc of newly

¹⁵² For comprehensive analyses of the pivotal Geneva Conference, refer to Cable (2000) and Thomas (2024).

independent states. In this setting, Beijing helped articulate the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” laying the groundwork for the Afro-Asian solidarity showcased at Bandung in 1955. Relations with Britain also warmed slightly: diplomatic representation was raised to *chargé d’affaires*, and bilateral trade expanded. Laura De Giorgi (2017a) – pioneering the study of sino-italian relations during this period – highlighted how, with the end of the Korean War and the easing of international tension, the activities of the ACWDF expanded beyond ties with socialist countries and that, therefore, «[...] the theme of the anti-imperialist struggle was downplayed in favor of showcasing, even in the West, the new Chinese woman who had become a central figure in the construction of socialism.»¹⁵³

This strategic repositioning also occurs because, in some countries like Italy, communism seemed to be on the rise, and having allies from the “Imperialist” side of the front was considered an important element. Perhaps there was hope that communist forces in Italy could experience a revolutionary shift, motivated by a small presence of revolution-oriented people in the PCI party. In August 1954, American pressure to outlaw the PCI reached its peak, leading Scelba to prepare and present a package of measures at the end of the year that could have destabilized Italy's constitutional balance (Pons, 2021, 141; Del Pero 2001, 239-41). This was averted by removing the leading exponent of the party's revolutionary wing, Pietro Secchia, who in 1954 was dismissed from his position as head of the PCI's organization and propaganda. Secchia, at the beginning of the 1950s, was close to creating a new majority that was ready to enshrine the mass party in a more robust structure of cadres and “professional revolutionaries,” which would have amounted to a normalization of the PCI in

¹⁵³ Original text: «[...] il tema della lotta anti-imperialista fu messo in secondo piano rispetto alla volontà di presentare anche in Occidente la nuova donna cinese diventata protagonista della costruzione del socialismo.» (De Giorgi 2017a, 696).

the panorama of European communism (Pons 2021, 135-6). These were the years of the so-called “centrism” in Italy, during which the figure of the PCI leader, Palmiro Togliatti, shapes the party's direction with an approach that emphasizes the “mass dimension” (*dimensione di massa*) of the so-called “new party.” This means abandoning a revolutionary stance in favor of a parliamentary-focused formation. The PCI, accordingly, positioned itself within the broader horizon of Italian politics a long-term “war of position”¹⁵⁴ aimed at winning a parliamentary majority (Pons 2021, 136-7). Even in the USSR, Georgij Malenkov, considered to be Stalin's possible successor, appealed for “peaceful coexistence” even before the doctrine explicitly became the Soviet line at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 (Pons 2021, 141). The doctrine consolidated the loosening of international relations experienced since 1953 and left more room for maneuvering for the Western communists. At the same time, the parable of the contradictory ‘struggle for peace’ and the related ‘mass mobilization’ and the parallel ‘conspiratorial and police activity of the Cominform,’ which was dissolved in April 1956, was ending (ibid.). A distancing from Stalin accompanied this, even the denial of his figure as the father of the socialist state, concretized in the famous rebuke of his successor at the 20th CPSU congress itself. It was a divisive choice that, on the whole, did not find consensus and split the international communist movement. There was, therefore, a greater autonomy of Western communists, expressed in the Italian context with the exposition of the ‘Italian way’ to socialism at the 8th PCI congress.

Thus, the “Italian way” was born. This doctrine embraced the concept of peaceful coexistence and, so to speak, implemented it in the national context, opening up opportunities for dialogue even with the Catholic world. In parallel, in terms of foreign

¹⁵⁴ «“guerra di posizione” a lungo termine» (Ivi, 136-7).

policies, these years have been characterized by the concept of “polycentrism.” Polycentrism which, however, the Italian leader set aside in the light of the violent rifts that emerged shortly afterwards with the popular uprisings in Poland and Hungary. In this context, Togliatti gave priority to the defence of the “socialist camp” also because of the fear, also in the light of the Suez events, of being faced with the threat of a third world conflict (ivi, 143-6).¹⁵⁵

PCI’s polycentrism, in addition to recognizing the opportunity for greater independence for the Italian movement within the international communist movement, was also the result of an analytical assessment of international changes, starting with the Chinese revolution and decolonization. In other words, it stemmed from the emergence of a third global force, which with the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, affirmed its presence and specific aspirations (ibidem). This openness of the party of reference and the global communist movement, including the WIDF, was promptly seized upon by the women’s movement and the UDI itself, which was attentive to the dialectic between the relationship and autonomy of the women’s movement (Rodano 2010, 4). This drive for autonomy emerged in the context of the 4th UDI Congress, held in Rome from April 10 to 12, 1953, paradigmatically titled “La donna italiana costruisce il suo avvenire” and designated as the Congress of the Italian Woman.

Stalin’s death also marked a shift in China. Significantly, Soviet policy under Khrushchev increased aid, sending over 1,000 experts between 1950 and 1953 and withdrawing Soviet troops from the Lüshun naval base by 1955 (Shen, Xia 2015, 121-2). This aid significantly strengthened Sino-Soviet relations, which expanded into polit-

¹⁵⁵ For this reason, the Italian leader, among others, supported the violent repression of the Hungarian demonstrations. From this act came the first defections from the party, particularly from the intellectual world that would later form the “new left” (Pons 2021, 146).

ical and diplomatic cooperation after the 20th CPSU Congress. China's global importance grew as it helped forge decolonial alliances with newly independent Third World countries.¹⁵⁶ During this period, in fact, China also began informal exchanges with Western Europe through "People's diplomacy," supported by communist and democratic organizations.¹⁵⁷

Overall, China aimed to consolidate its position within the socialist and decolonial movements by leveraging the growing prestige it had secured on the international stage during the Korean War and in the years that followed as the Soviet Union's main partner and leading nation in the Asian context. According to Shen and Xia (2014, 213), the Korean War outbreak, particularly the deployment of Chinese troops in Korea, effectively pushed Mao into leadership in the Asian Revolution. Consequently, Stalin relinquished the Soviet Union's dominant position on the Korean peninsula. Maoist China's rising role attempted to be strengthened by creating an Asian Cominform. Nonetheless, this project was abandoned given the changed international situation after the end of the Korean War, leading the Soviet Union and China to jointly adopt "peaceful coexistence" as the general line of their foreign policy. However, since China effectively controlled communications with other Asian communist parties, once a "revolutionary wave" occurred (soon after in Vietnam and Malaysia), this specter of Asian division within the global communist movement returned. This perspective demonstrates evident changes in the East-West Cold War structure, shifting from a Soviet-American confrontation to one involving the Soviet Union and China against the United States. China was becoming the pioneer in confronting the

¹⁵⁶ This pivotal role within the women's movement emerged as early as 1949 when the ACWDF hosted the Conference of the Women of Asia, which was analyzed by Armstrong (2016, 2023).

¹⁵⁷ On the relations between the PRC and Western Europe during this period, see the contributions to the volume edited by Meneguzzi Rostagni and Samarani (2014).

United States and leading the Asian revolution. In addition, if Stalin had been the supreme commander and natural leader of the global communist bloc after his death, the CCP would have replaced the CPSU as the leader of the Asian revolution. After Stalin's death, Mao gradually felt more qualified than Moscow's leaders to guide the international communist movement. This planted the seed for the later Sino-Soviet split. A crucial complication of this leadership-substitution scheme was Mao's conception of China as the "Middle Kingdom" and protector of weaker and smaller states, influencing China's relations with the countries on its periphery during the Cold War. China demonstrated openness, extending its influence to reach Western European communist movements (Shen, Xia 2010, 513-4). The decline in the Soviet leadership's prestige was thus seen as an opportunity to bolster China's leadership. China sought both to capitalize on the discontent of the Soviet satellites and to position itself as a critical ally in coordinating relations between the Soviet leadership and those very republics (Ivi, 516-7). The ACWDF played a crucial role in this context, at the forefront of establishing international relations and promoting global initiatives and bilateral exchanges.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the ACWDF underwent a key transition marked by its Second Congress, which was similarly characterized by a climate of openness – amplified by the presence of foreign journalists – and by a shift, in line with national policy, toward the phase of Socialist Transformation, coinciding with the launch of the First Five-Year Plan. The Second National Congress of Chinese Women was held at Huairan Hall in Beijing, April 15-23, counting 916 delegates. Honorary Chairperson Song Qingling, and Chairwoman Cai Chang, unable to attend due to health issues, and sent their congratulatory messages to the congress. Vice Chairperson Deng Yingchao thus took the lead and presenting the work report titled *A Basic Summary*

of the Chinese Women's Movement over the Past Four Years and the Tasks Ahead (Yang 1991, 389-90). The report paradigmatically stated:

Our great motherland has entered a new historical period; national construction has begun. The vigorous mobilization and organization of the broad masses of women, fully unleashing their latent labor potential to participate in industrial and agricultural production and in all aspects of national development, constitutes the central task of the women's movement in the period ahead.¹⁵⁸

Deng called on women workers to actively participate in the patriotic movement to increase production and practice economy, encouraged rural women to take part in the agricultural mutual aid and cooperation movement on a voluntary basis, and advocated for the education and organization of intellectual women to engage in practical work and serve production needs. The congress amended the original organizational constitution and, following instructions from the Central Committee, resolved to establish a Secretariat. It adopted both the Resolution on the Tasks of the National Women's Movement Going Forward and the revised Constitution of the ACWDF. The congress elected 125 executive committee members and 28 alternate executive committee members of the federation. It also selected delegates to attend the World Women's Congress scheduled for June of the same year. Vice Chairperson Li Dequan delivered the closing address, and Secretary-General Zhang Yun gave an important

¹⁵⁸ Original text: «我们伟大的祖国已进入一个新的历史时期，国家的建设已经开始。大力发动和组织广大妇女群众，充分发挥其潜在的劳动力量，参加工农业生产和祖国各方面的建设，是今后妇女运动的中心任务». From Deng Yingchao's report (April 16, 1953) at the Second National Congress of Chinese Women *A Basic Summary of the Chinese Women's Movement over the Past Four Years and the Tasks Ahead* 四年来中国妇女运动的基本总结和今后任务 *Si Nian Lai Zhongguo Funu Yundong De Jiben Zongjie He Jinhou Renwu* (Yang 1991, 390).

speech. During the congress, journalists from the Soviet Union, Korea, Bulgaria, the United States, Italy, and other countries were present (ibid).

After the Second National Congress, the focus of the ACWDF remained on the construction of a socialist state and the implementation of state policies at the grassroots level. However, it continued to maintain a strong connection to women's issues and needs, while also fostering significant international ties, as evidenced by the presence of representatives from various countries as guests at the congress.

If the overall geopolitical circumstances granted the women's federation empowerment, this still granted a more significant expansion of dialogue and exchanges, which, although politicized.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the global socialist women's movement was beginning to orient itself toward new challenges. On the one hand, 1954 marked the outbreak of the Algerian War—another decolonial conflict that would engage the international peace movement for years to come. At the same time, the movement became increasingly mobilized around protests against the development of thermonuclear weapons. The anti-nuclear campaign, which had lost momentum following the escalation of the Cold War in 1950, regained new energy in early 1954, in parallel with the rapid advancement of the H-bomb (Wittner 2009, 49–52).¹⁵⁹

2.1.2 The post-Geneva Conference Opening if Sino-European exchanges

¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, Rodano (2010, 100-119), former UDI president from 1956, points out how, with regard to the Algerian War, the WIDF had an ambiguous position compared to the open denunciation of other conflicts. She relates this to the policy of peaceful coexistence and the desire not to interfere in the French foreign policy.

After seventy-four days, the Geneva Conference concluded with a peace agreement that Washington had tenaciously and stubbornly opposed. The vast Asian continent, where the Americans sought to erect a curtain of iron and possibly fire around China, rejected this policy and moved towards relations based on peaceful coexistence. A new path was also being opened for Europe: even here, on our old continent, the Iron Curtain was perhaps on the verge of falling.¹⁶⁰

Ten thousand years of peace – likely referencing the Chinese saying 万年和平 (*Wannian Heping*) – is the title of the article published on *Noi Donne* after the Geneva Conference to highlight the difficult path leading to the victory of the democratic front for peace. The crucial role of China as a leading nation within the democratic front in Asia, emerged during the Korean War, is reaffirmed and emphasized in the context of the conference.¹⁶¹ The stress on the role of women in peacebuilding features in the reports from Trieu Thi Chien in Hanoi and Sylvie Bonnet in Paris. Both correspondences focus on the perspective of women, particularly mothers, in the conflict between France and Indochina.¹⁶² Chien describes the role of Vietnamese mothers who took up arms to defend their children, while Bonnet emphasizes the efforts of French mothers whose sons were fighting in Indochina as they protested for peace

¹⁶⁰ Original text: «Dopo settantaquattro giorni, la Conferenza di Ginevra si chiudeva con una pace che Washington aveva tenacemente e caparbiamente avversato. L'immenso continente asiatico, dove gli americani volevano introdurre una cortina di ferro e, forse, di fuoco, attorno alla Cina, respingeva questa politica e si avviava verso rapporti basati sulla coesistenza pacifica. Una nuova strada veniva aperta anche per l'Europa: anche qui, nel nostro vecchio continente, la cortina di ferro stava forse per cadere.» Jacoviello, Alberto, *Diecimila anni di pace* (Ten thousand years of peace), published on *ND* 31 (August 1, 1954), 5-6.

¹⁶¹ The author is Jacoviello, journalist partner of *ND*'s editor-in-chief, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi. The couple played a significant role alongside her in promoting the image of China as a guiding model. This narrative developed during those years in both the women's magazine *ND* and the communist newspaper *L'Unità*. As stressed by a recent article, the two journalists' interest in the PRC will continue in the following decades (see Galzerano 2024).

¹⁶² The two reportages are collected in the article "Un giorno indimenticabile in Indocina e in Francia." (An Unforgettable Day in Indochina and France). *ND* 31 (August 1, 1954), 7.

and the end of the conflict in their homeland. This dual perspective underscores the shared experiences of women on both sides of the conflict, united in their desire for peace.

The efforts of Italian communist women to work toward peace are evident in their activism along with their French counterparts, who were actively fighting against the European Defence Community (EDC) between 1952 and 1954. This opposition is illustrated by various posters, such as the one linked, as well as a series of articles published in *Noi Donne* (issues n. 25, n. 34, and n. 36) during the summer of 1954. Among these articles is a report by French correspondent Dominique De Santi, titled "I am proud of my people..." (*Sono fiera del mio popolo...*), which appeared in issue no. 36 on September 12, 1954 (p. 5). Desanti's article reflects on the failure of the EDC after the French National Assembly refused to ratify it on August 30, 1954, marking a significant victory for those opposing the militarization of Europe and highlighting the crucial role of communist women in advocating for peace during this period.

The editor-in-chief of *Noi Donne*, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, also attended the Geneva Conference (April 26 to July 21, 1954) as a correspondent. Upon her return to the magazine headquarters, she published an enthusiastic account of the conference, introducing Italian women to a figure who astonished her: the Chinese diplomat – and head of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs' information office at the conference – Gong Peng (龚澎). Gong is described as an ambassador of peace who is skillful and naturally at ease in fulfilling significant diplomatic responsibilities. Macciocchi

secured an exclusive interview with her, further reinforcing China's image as a peace promoter during the conference.¹⁶³



Figures 2.1; 2.2. (Left) ND cover page featuring Gong Peng photograph with the description «ambassador of peace»; (right) Gong Peng and Maria Antonietta Macciocchi shaking hands.¹⁶⁴

This strong interest in international peace and in Chinese communist women, among others, was possible in Italy in 1954 due to the atmosphere of openness and the real

¹⁶³ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Visti da vicino gli arbitri della pace." (Seen up close, the arbiters of peace). *ND* 20 (May 16, 1954), 14-7; Two of the pages of the reportage are dedicated to Gong Peng: «La personalità di Kung-Peng affascina i giornalisti occidentali.» (Kung-Peng's personality fascinates Western journalists). Additionally, a mention will be dedicated to Gong Peng in the photo reportage «Questi i volti femminili del 1954.» (These are the female figures of 1954). *ND* 1 (January 2, 1955), 3.

¹⁶⁴ *ND* 20 (May 16, 1954), cover page, and *ivi*, p. 16.

promise of building an international women's front. This is evident from the numerous events held under the auspices of the WIDF and through bilateral initiatives. In the second half of 1954 alone, an unprecedented number of international events and women's delegations took place.



Figure 2.3. Poster of the UDI Bari provincial committee celebrating the Geneva Conference results: «The Italian Women's Union welcomes the armistice signed in Geneva, which has ended the WAR in INDOCHINA, and hopes that the ITALIAN GOVERNMENT will work to ensure PEACE and DETENTE in EUROPE and the WORLD.» (See UDI 1954).

A key event was the Women's Democratic Press Editors Meeting in Berlin in early October 1954, which brought together 93 periodicals from 38 different countries and dozens of local publications. Among the attendees were Maria Antonietta Macciocchi (1922 - 2007) and Dong Bian (董边, 1916-98), who was the second of Shen Zijiu at Women of New China, and later its editor in chief from 1956 (Wang 2010, 832).¹⁶⁵ The event highlights the breadth of participation and the growing cooperation among women's movements across national borders during this pivotal period. *Noi Donne*

¹⁶⁵ Minella, Angiola, "Una famiglia di 93 giornali" (A Family of 93 Newspapers). *ND* 41 (October 17, 1954), 16-7.

enthusiastically reported on the event, providing descriptions of various periodicals, starting with the Soviet one, followed by the Chinese, Indian, Israeli, and French publications:

A good result, therefore, and moreover, in continuous progress. And indeed, for those who could have listened to what the journalists gathered in Berlin had to say, for those who could have visited the exhibition set up in the very premises of the Federation, there was reason to feel one's heart swell with emotion and pride! (Minella 1954, p. 17)¹⁶⁶



Figure 2.4. Chinese delegation at the conference, with Dong Bian at the center (Ibid.).

In the same international climate, the December issue of *Women of New China* also expressed a very positive outlook on future collaborations. In its report of the WIDF

¹⁶⁶ Original text: «Un buon bilancio, dunque, e, per di più, in continuo progresso. E davvero, per chi avesse potuto ascoltare ciò che hanno raccontato le giornaliste riunite a Berlino, per chi avesse potuto visitare la mostra allestita nei locali stessi della Federazione, c'era di che sentirsi il cuore gonfio di commozione e di orgoglio!» (Ibid.).

Executive Committee in Berlin (November 2-3, 1954) – with Zhang Yun representing the ACWDF – it enthusiastically reported the upcoming WIDF events: the upcoming Council of Geneva, scheduled for February 1955, and the World Congress of Mothers, to be held later that same year.¹⁶⁷

2.2 Beyond the Peace rhetorics: Women's Activism and Human Rights

2.2.1 The WIDF and Motherhood

Eurasian exchanges between activists within the WIDF were implemented against the political and diplomatic backdrop previously analyzed. These exchanges highlighted key moments for reinforcing and stabilizing the network created during the “struggle for peace” period, which was programmatically reoriented in light of the geopolitical scenario. In this context, the strategic potential of the motherhood liaison was not yet abandoned but further emphasized as a distinctly feminine element, creating a space for exclusively, specialized, and overall advanced women’s diplomatic action.

In this caveat, the global socialist women’s movement undertook lobbying efforts to establish a privileged political space for maternalist policies, lying on the strategic link with women’s traditional role as protector of children and, consequently, the nation’s future. Thus positioning itself as a privileged force for the defense of peace. In line with government policy, Chinese women notably emerged as new critical players in mediating the stances of the Global South and the Global North, standing as a *primus inter pares* against colonial rule, especially hinted at the Asian Women’s

¹⁶⁷ The Editor. “Guoji minzhu fulian zhao fu zhixing ju guan” 國際民主婦聯召附執行局管 (The Executive Board of the Women’s International Democratic Federation), *ZGFN* no 12, December 1954, 19.

Conference, as early as 1949. Sponsored by the WIDF and attended by 197 representatives from 23 countries, the congress represented a significant occasion for the new socialist China to present itself as the leader of women's progress (Wang 2017, 12-13) and particularly a «guiding light for their 'Asian sisters'» and in so doing affirming «the importance of the PRC on the world stage» (Nasser 2021, 63).

In continuity with their role as peacekeepers, WIDF activists embraced the traditional roles of women as mothers¹⁶⁸ and caregivers while working to infuse these roles with new socio-political meaning, in line with a modern Marxist conception of women. In this regard, the socialist women's movement aimed to extend the rights that feminist pioneers of the 1920s had theorized globally. Women's oppression and passivity in interpersonal relationships and marriage were officially condemned and replaced by the promotion of free choice and romantic love. While heterosexual love and marriage remained the standard, these were redefined as more accessible and more equal institutions, including the option of divorce¹⁶⁹. Although women's sexuality was still essentially a taboo subject, there was an effort to increase awareness of women's bodily functions through mass media¹⁷⁰. Overall, the social modernization proposed by

¹⁶⁸ Editorial from *Soviet Women* 《蘇聯婦女》社論. “Guang chai gui yu mu xing” 光榮歸於母性 (Glory to Motherhood), *ZGFN* no 6, December 20, 1949, 10; Jun Hui 君慧. “Mu qin men de jiao ao” 母親們的驕傲 (Proud and Honorable Mothers), *ZGFN* no 17, December 1950, 11; Zhang Yuan 張元. “Ge ming de mu qin Xia Niangniang” 革命的母親夏娘娘 (The Revolutionary Mother, Xia Niangniang), *ZGFN* no 19, February 15, 1951, 18; Chen Degui 陳德貴. “Mu qin men de bang yang.” 母親們的榜樣 (Proud and Honorable Mothers), *ZGFN* no 5-6, May/June 1952, 52.

¹⁶⁹ Letter to the Editor. “Qie shi jie jue fu nv li hun shi de dai chan wen ti” 切實解決婦女離婚時的帶產問題 (Effectively Solve the Problem of Property Division in Divorce Cases Involving Women), *ZGFN* no 2, February 1952, 17; Li Kangzuo 吳亮亭. “Qieshi Jiejue Funü Lihun Shi De Daichan Wenti.” 切實解決婦女離婚時的帶產問題 (Handling Divorce Cases: Responsibility to Address Women's Property Issues), *ZGFN* no 5-6, May/June 1952, 24.

¹⁷⁰ About bodily functions see Zhu jie 朱捷. “Funü wei sheng chang shi jiang hua.” 婦女衛生常識講話 (A Talk on Women's Hygiene Knowledge), *ZGFN* no 18, January 15, 1951, 30; Rong Lian 榮璉. “Yue jing de sheng li he wei sheng (funü wei sheng chang hu jiang hua er)” 月經的生理和衛生 (婦女衛生常識講話二) (The Physiology and Hygiene of Menstruation - Women's health lecture 2), *ZGFN* no 19, February 1951, 39; Lai Lian 來璉. “Yue jing de sheng li he wei sheng (funü wei sheng chang shi jiang hua san)” 月經的生理和衛生 (婦女衛生常識講話三) (The Physiology and Hygiene of Menstruation - Women's health lecture 3), *ZGFN* no 20, March 1951, 33; Zhu Lian 朱璉. “Yue jing de sheng li he wei sheng (funü wei sheng chang shi jiang hua si)” 月經的生理和衛生 (婦女衛生常識講話四) (The Physiology and Hygiene of Menstruation - Women's health lecture 4), *ZGFN* no. 21, April 1951, 36; Zhu Lian 朱璉. “Bu gui ze de yue jing l (wen hai sheng chang huo)” 不規則

socialist activists challenged the foundations of the traditional family and laid the groundwork for societal rethinking, although results were often uneven (Evans, 2021).

This was true in Italy, where conceptions of women were deeply rooted in social roles influenced by the precepts of the Christian Catholic Church and fascist heritage, making it difficult for more progressive activists to gain understanding and acceptance among their peers and male comrades as they grappled with the contradictions of "communist puritanism" (Giovannini 1980; Tonelli 2014).¹⁷¹ Similarly, in the PRC, traditional heritage imbued with Confucian norms¹⁷² influenced the enforcement and of more "modern" norms, and their nation-wide implementation. One of the most critical laws in this respects was the Marriage Law, which was the object of recent studies which went beyond the classical city/countryside divide provide a more comprehensive vision of this challenging law. Among these, Neil Diamant (2000) challenges the belief that the Marriage Law was universally ignored or limited to a narrow urban elite. He shows, through studies of rural communities and emerging urban classes with rural backgrounds, that the law was actively used to negotiate family rights and gender norms. This finding overturns earlier 1970s feminist accounts that saw the law solely as an instrument of state control and oppression. Instead, Diamant demonstrates that grassroots actors across varied settings appropriated the law to serve their own aims, revealing its real impact on everyday life. He also deconstructs any

的月經 1 (文海生常活) (Irregular menstruation 1- Health advice), *ZGFN* no 23, June 1951, 35; Zhu Lian 朱璉. "Bu gui ze de yue jing 2 (wen hai sheng chang huo)." 不規則的月經 2 (文海生常活) (Irregular menstruation 2 - Health advice), *ZGFN* no 24, October 1951, 42.

¹⁷¹ On the political use of the Christian Catholic heritage by the Fascist regime, creating the "myth" of "Christian Italy", see Moro (2020).

¹⁷² Here I do not mean to refer to an alleged single and coherent Confucian body of thought referred to as "Confucianism," but rather point out the complexity of the Chinese socio-political norms, which were undoubtedly related to both the set of Confucian norms and national construction policies. For a broader analysis, see Jensen (1997) and Ko (2007).

monolithic view of the party or state as separate from society by highlighting the diversity of state institutions and personnel according to social background, experience, and geographic location, a framework he terms the state's "political geography." In line with this approach is the study by Kimberley Ens Manning (2023) which focus on gender politics and stresses ACWDF politicians' difficulties related to creating and implementing the Marriage law and their role behind in the two state sponsored campaigns in 1950 and 1953 (ivi, 131-155).¹⁷³

Despite the internal complexities, the formally more advanced social structures of socialist states served as an ideal model for European leftist women to discuss, aspire to, and adapt to local circumstances. Accordingly, socialist achievements were often presented as flawless utopias, as a strategy to pave the way for a broader change. Although the challenges of change were acknowledged, difficulties were reductively attributed to the lingering presence of the "old," which was seen as obstructing the progress of the "new" in a materialist conception of history. Overall, the significance of the underlying mediation effort in this work should not be overlooked, particularly when examining the relationships between regions affected by colonialism and the

¹⁷³ Articles on marriage appear consistently in ZGFN, reflecting the centrality of marriage issues in the journal's agenda. Notably, there is a marked increase in both the number and prominence of such articles around the time of the promulgation of the Marriage Law of 1950, underscoring the journal's role in disseminating and reinforcing state policy. See Li Peizhi 李培芝. "Lue tan qing nian de lian ai yu hun yin." 略談青年的戀愛與婚姻 (A Brief Discussion on Youth Love and Marriage). *ZGFN* 2 (1949), 10; Dong Bian 董邊. "Lao jie fang qu nong cun hun yin de bian hua." 老解放區農村婚姻的變化 (Changes in Marriage in the Rural Old Liberated Areas) *ZGFN* 2 (1949), 12; Wen Li 溫立 and Zheng Qian 鄭潛. "Jie hun" 結婚 (Marriage). *ZGFN* 6 (1949), 40; People's Daily Editorial 人民日報社論. "Zheng que jie jue hun yin zhi du wen ti." 正確解決婚姻制度問題 (Correctly Resolving the Marriage System Issue). *ZGFN* 9 (March 1950), 12. "Ge ren min tuan ti fa bu lian he tong zhi jian jue yong hu hun yin fa." 各人民團體發佈聯合通知堅決擁護婚姻法 (Joint Announcement of Various People's Organizations to Strongly Support the Marriage Law), *ZGFN* 11 (May 1950), 6; An Ziwen 安子文. "Shi xing hun yin fa yu su qing feng jian si xiang can yu." 實行婚姻法與肅清封建思想殘餘 (Implementation of the Marriage Law and the Elimination of Feudal Thoughts). Ivi, 9. Shi Liang 史良. "Dui hun yin fa zhong yi xie wen ti de jie da." 對婚姻法中一些問題的解答 (Answers to Some Questions Regarding the Marriage Law). Ivi, 10; Meng Qingshu 孟慶樹. "Guan yu hun yin zhi du shang de xin jiu men zheng wen ti." 關於婚姻制度上的新舊鬥爭問題 (The Struggle Between the Old and New Marriage Systems). Ivi, 13; Wang Feiran 王斐然. "Cong qing zhu wu yi lao dong jie kou hao zhong kan hun yin fa." 從慶祝五一勞動節口號中看婚姻法 (From the Celebratory May Day Slogan, the Marriage Law). Ivi, 16; Xiong Tianjing 熊天荊. "Guan yu jun shu hun yin wen ti de wo jian." 關於軍屬婚姻問題的我見 (My Thoughts on the Marriage Issues of Military Families). Ivi, 18; Zhou Manning 丁鳳鳴. "Tong xing ke yi jie hun ma." 同姓可以結婚嗎? (Can people with the same surname marry?). *ZGFN* 14 (September 1950), 23.

cradle of colonial thought. Chinese Women diplomats proved skillful in mediating their needs to the international and transnational scenario to make them globally shared first. In Western Europe, at another level, women diplomats proved skillful in translating these needs and linking their local struggle to find representation in the broader national audience. In this context, Italy – with the PCI, the largest communist party in Western Europe, playing a prominent role – emerged as a central hub for promoting and spreading socialist ideas about women, navigating the tensions between tradition and innovation.

One of the main areas of innovation in this ideological effort was elevating and protecting one of femininity's most iconic characteristics: motherhood. It was promoted as a key feature of womanhood, granting women the burden and honor to protect the future of humanity, the offspring, and, by extension, the nation and the world. As shown in the previous chapter, this reconceptualization of women's role reinforced the importance of women's movement within the democratic international front as human rights champions at a personal, familial, and social level. A critical moment displaying this political planning is the World Congress of Mothers held in 1955, which led to the institution of a Permanent International Committee of Mothers two years later. The appropriation of the gendered traditional role of mothers altogether empowered the socialist women's movement with the task of diplomatic sponsors not only to promote women's rights but also of children and young people. This rigid political identification nonetheless also came with the shortcoming of self-confining in rigid traditional roles for political purposes: transforming maternage into maternalism. Direct voices of women not interested in becoming mothers and experiencing birth were absent in the resources of an official nature consulted for the dissertation. Instead, they found instances of women non-conforming with the traditional role of

the mother in unofficial sources, such as Women's Head Zhang Sumei¹⁷⁴ – interviewed in the early 2000s by Manning (2023, 152-3) – and Maria Antonietta Macchiocchi, whose prioritizing work rather than care was described as “manly” (Rinaldi 2021).

Nonetheless, the appropriation of motherhood also granted women activists the right to rethink, which was in line with emancipatory policies. Thus, the project to build a *motherocracy* did not just stop at promoting the role of those involved in high-level diplomacy – but most importantly – translated into concrete policies to alleviate women from the burdens of gender-traditional roles. Birth health issues, care and domestic work, primary education, and conciliation between housework and work outside the home were fields in which the movement proposed effective policies, as shown by WIDF, ACWDF, and UDI sources. A first step in this direction was made in 1953 at the World Congress of Women.

2.2.2 Expanding Women's Power: The 1953 World Congress of Women

The 3rd WIDF Congress was held in Copenhagen from June 5 to 10, 1953, under the name of World Congress of Women. It stands as a pivotal watershed event in the history of transnational women's relations, as remembered by Marisa Rodano (2010, 81), «[...] it seemed that a different atmosphere was emerging; in that assembly, there appeared to be an intention to overcome the “splendid isolation” stemming from previous choices regarding peace.»¹⁷⁵ This was due to the variety of participating coun-

¹⁷⁴ As Manning (2023, 320) also notes, this emerges also in Gail Hershatter's Shaanxi interviewees (2011, 206).

¹⁷⁵ Original text: «[...] sembrava iniziasse a spirare aria diversa; in quell'assise pareva ci si fosse prefisso di spezzare lo “splendido isolamento” dovuto alla scelta compiuta sui temi della pace.»

tries, but also because the Congress proved capable of solidifying alliances and collaborative strategies merged during the Korean War, demonstrating a continuity of shared objectives (Kim 2023a, 83-90). The war acted as a catalyst for the maternalist strategy within the more extensive transnational peace campaign, creating a network that not only survived the end of that conflict but expanded to address other tensions. In 1953, women from 67 countries participated in the congress, including 613 official representatives from member organizations of the WIDF and 65 observers.¹⁷⁶ The commentaries on the Congress reveal the deep involvement of the participants, whose discussions continued late into the night and until dawn on the last day, demonstrating strong engagement and the sharing of a common co-created language, which also included music, dance, and art.

Almost every country had one or two people who spoke. The conference lasted for six days, with each day starting at 9 a.m. and continuing until midnight or even 1 a.m. On the last day, the meeting continued until dawn. Despite what should have been extreme fatigue, the numerous passionate and intense moments made people forget about day and night.¹⁷⁷

This emerges from both the ACWDF and UDI reports of the Congress, which describe its critical moments and convey the participation, the vibrancy, and the intensity of the work and involvement. The congress took place during a delicate time for Italian women due to the political elections. As a result, UDI leaders – such as Maria Maddalena Rossi, Giovanna Barezzi, Nella Marcellino, Valeria Bonazzola, along with a group of young women from Bologna, Florence, and Rome – arrived together

¹⁷⁶ The data are from Rodano (2010, 259); they were also published with slight differences in “Shijie funü dahui yi jieshao.” 世界婦女大會 一介紹 (An Introduction to the World Women’s Congress). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1953), 6.

¹⁷⁷ Shen, Maojiu 沈茅九. “Shijie funü dahui buji.” 世界婦女大會補記 (Supplementary Record of the World Congress of Women). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 19-22.

with the reportedly large Italian delegation only after the proceedings had already begun.¹⁷⁸ The ACWDF also participated with a sizeable 38-member delegation headed by Li Dequan. It included women from various ethnic groups, social classes, occupations, and religious beliefs, as well as professionals such as ACWDF and party cadres, health workers, and writers.¹⁷⁹

The Cold War political divide resulted in other countries' delegations experiencing difficulties, as a distinguished group of representatives were hindered or couldn't attend the Congress. The most notable cases involved delegates from Korea, Vietnam, and Malaya, who were stopped at the frontier when the Danish government refused visas. Another dozen countries, including Panama and Peru, could also not attend because their governments refused to issue passports. Furthermore, many British delegation activists reported obstacles from within their party of reference, even threats of expulsion.¹⁸⁰ Despite the diplomatic incident, on the second day, the anticipated Korean delegation – to the surprise of attendants – appeared at the congress in the form of a recorded message:

On the 6th, during the music gala held by the Danish Women's Union, passionate Danish friends, with tears in their eyes, announced this moving news to everyone. Each person fell into stunned silence, and every heart leaped in response.

¹⁷⁸ P. P., “Difendere nel mondo i diritti delle donne” (Defend women's rights around the world). *ND* 26 (28 June 1953), p. 5. The election results arrived during the congress and indicated an increase in support for the PCI and the number of women elected to parliament. Although the majority was not achieved, the UDI women at the congress nonetheless hailed the result as a victory (Nella Marcellino's speech on the last day of the congress, in ACUDI 13, 59-4).

¹⁷⁹ As the large delegation suggests, the Congress was given broad resonance on the ACWDF mouthpiece, *Women of New China*, between June and August 1953, including a reproduction in full of its final documents. The August issues, in particular, reserved a long section for the description of the Congress by the participants. See Lin Shunchu 李順楚 (ed.). “Cong shijie funü dahui guilai” 從世界婦女大會歸來 (Returning from the World Women's Congress). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 18-23.

¹⁸⁰ G. D. P. “Rita Montagnana, president of 135 million women.” (Rita Montagnana presidente di 135 milioni di donne), *ND* 28 (July 12, 1953), 15.

As the majestic music played, we all spontaneously stood up in unison. Four Danish girls, neatly dressed, marched in rhythm with the music, holding the flag of Korea high as they entered the theater with dignity. Our hearts pounded with sincere admiration, our eyes moist with joyful emotion. Our cheers and applause surpassed the roar of spring thunder, breaking through the roof of the Royal Theatre and tearing through the night sky of Copenhagen. What use is foolish obstruction? Our hearts are connected, and the will to love peace resonates deeply. Look at the tears of emotion in every pair of eyes; these are not helpless tears of sorrow, nor are they tears of pity for the weak, but rather, they are tears of indignant protest. When they form a mighty stream, that strength can break down any man-made barrier.¹⁸¹

The centrality of the Korean issue, a few weeks before the armistice signing, is also pointed out by the organization of a “Little Congress” with members from 24 countries in WIDF East Berlin headquarters to allow the physical presence of Korean delegates right after that in Denmark¹⁸². The “little congress” was held from 13 to 16 June in parallel to the WIDF Executive Committee. The Congress’s deep connection with the Korean War is stressed in the reportage of Maria Ovsyannikova, Northern

¹⁸¹ Original text: «六號在丹麥婦聯舉行的音樂聯歡晚會上，激情的丹麥朋友眼裏閃着淚光向大家報告了這個動人的消息，每一個人都陷入了驚愕的沉默中，每一顆心都為它而跳躍了。隨着一陣雄壯的音樂，我們不約而同地肅然起立，四個服裝整齊的丹麥姑娘踏着音樂的節拍高舉着朝鮮的國旗巍然地走進了劇場。我們的心由於真摯的敬愛而跳得更緊，我們的眼睛由於感動的喜悅而濕潤了，我們的歡呼和掌聲已經超過了春雷的轟鳴，它衝出皇宮劇院的屋頂，劃破了哥本哈根的夜空。愚蠢的阻撓有什麼用呢？我們的心連着心，愛和平的意志是息息相通的。看看每一雙眼睛裏感動的淚水吧，這絕不是無助的哀傷，更不是弱者的憐恤，而是悲憤的抗議，當它們匯成一股巨流的時候，那力量是可以沖垮一切人為的障礙的。» Bai Lang 白朗. “Women de jiao ao” 我們的驕傲 (Our Pride). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 24-5:5.

¹⁸² «Korean women waited for a response of the other women at the conference: They were most victorious when they finally heard the voice of the conference. Korean representative Yu Meiyu's emotional response moved all the listeners to tears. As she ended her speech, she passionately said, "As a woman who lost all her family, I call on you: peace will not come on its own. Only by strengthening your struggle will the misfortune that befell us not fall upon you!"» Original text: «她們最感到勝利的是——終於聽到了大會的聲音。朝鮮代表俞美玉動人的答詞，使所有聽眾都感動得哭了。她在結束她的話時激動地說：.我以一個喪失了所有家人的婦女的名義向你們呼籲：和平是不會自己到來的。只有加強你們的鬥爭，和我們同樣的不幸才不至降落到你們的頭上！» Bai Lang 白朗. “Wo men de jiao ao” 我們的驕傲 (Our Pride). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 24.

Koreans women's federation magazine *Chosŏn Nyŏsŏng* (Kim 2023a, 84-9). Furthermore, Kate Fleron, a Danish journalist and observer in the delegation, personally invited the participant to the 1951 WIDF fact-checking delegation to Korea at her home. The reunion, which included Fleron, Ovsyannikova, and eight of the twenty-one commission members – such as Candelaria Rodriguez from Cuba, Abassia Fodil from Algeria, Ida Bachmann from Denmark, Monica Felton from Britain, Bai Lang from China, and Lilly Waechter from West Germany – demonstrated the lasting connections among these women, despite being separated by great distances and ideological differences (Ivi, 85). Beyond the Korean issue,¹⁸³ the WIDF action and also the ACWDF specifically showed interest in cultivating relationships with third-world countries, including Asian, African, and South American countries. This is demonstrated by the Chinese delegates organizing a political trip to China right after the conference.

¹⁸³ The Korean armistice negotiations were the main topic of the speech by the Deputy Head of the Chinese delegation, Zhang Yun. Zhang particularly pointed out that the agreement on the repatriation of prisoners of war would open the way for a peaceful resolution of the Korean issue and prepare the conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Far Eastern question. See “Shijie funü dahui yi jieshao.” 世界婦女大會 一介紹 (An Introduction to the World Women's Congress). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1953), 6.



Figure 2.5. International friends visiting China: (from right to left) Du Gengnie, Pastora Montilla, Josefina Fagart, interpreter (name unknown), Alba Calderón, Lucinda Oliveira, Floris Govis, Alice Pous, Dora Franco.¹⁸⁴

The invited delegations arrived in the PRC on July 15. These included Vietnam, Indonesia, Burma, Myanmar, Japan, Australia, and Latin American countries. Furthermore, these liaisons were reinforced at another meeting later in the year. On September 29th, the ACWDF held a symposium to welcome young representatives from India, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Vietnam, Nepal, Brazil, and other countries invited on the occasion of the National Day ceremony and visit China, presided by Vice-Chairman Xu Guangping (ILD 1995, 18).

¹⁸⁴ The Editor. “Ba shijie funü dahui de jingshen dai huiqu—chuxi shijie funü dahui houlai zhongguo cangan de guoji youren tan.” 把世界妇女大会的精神带回 – 出席世界妇女大会后来中国参观的国际友人谈 (Bring the spirit of the World Women's Congress back – Remarks from international friends who attended the World Women's Congress and then visited China), *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 24-5.

During the first journey, the participants could experience the PRC's modernizations, such as the Guanting Reservoir, including the Yongding River dam, in Hebei Province.¹⁸⁵ In their declarations during the visit, delegates emphasized the significance of Chinese women as models in the Congress, a role that – held alongside the USSR – also emerges from Chinese delegates' reportage:

Several times, when representatives from the Soviet Union, China, and other people's democratic countries spoke, the entire audience expressed their deep emotion and respect through enthusiastic applause, standing up, or shouting slogans. For example, when our delegation leader, Li Dequan, spoke, the entire audience stood up and applauded several times. In the end, everyone stood up, joined hands, and, learning from the Chinese, loudly chanted, "Peace, peace, long live peace, long live peace, long live peace." The applause and cheers continued until the conference chair said, "This is another climax; please sit down, there are still other representatives to speak." Only then did it stop.

From these moments, they saw their friends, which increased their resolve and courage to fight for peace. Through these real examples, they more profoundly understood that without peace and national independence, there would be no democratic rights or a happy life for their children. Seeing these role models and finding their path, how could they not be filled with joy and excitement?

On the night of the conference's closure, when the victory celebration began, after the "Hurrah, hurrah" slogans, came the chorus of "Long live peace, long live peace." Finally, everyone stood on their chairs, held hands, and sang the "March of the Democratic Youth," "Forward, forward," song after song, with familiar melodies and slogans, concluding the conference. The sun had already

¹⁸⁵ Xiao, Bo 小波. "Yongding heshang weida de gongcheng -- guoji youren shen guan guanting shuiku." 永定河上偉大的工程 -- 國際友人參觀官廳水庫 (The great project on the Yongding River. International friends visit Guanting Reservoir). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 26-7.

shone through the windows, illuminating the entire venue. As they supported each other and grew closer in unity, they sang “The East is Red, the Sun Rises....” The Israeli representative, who had been to China, held our hands and together sang “The East is Red, the Sun Rises....” Only then did everyone, holding blue and peaceful headscarves, leave the venue.»¹⁸⁶

The Congress had three main items on its agenda: on top of electing the WIDF leadership,¹⁸⁷ It discussed the tasks of women in the struggle for and protection of women’s rights as mothers, workers, and citizens, and the achievements and prospects of actions taken by women to defend peace and protect the interests of women and children – the first and second item on the agenda respectively.

In her opening speech, Mrs. Cotton expressed the hope for the pursuit of peace through peaceful means, supporting the intensification of diplomatic relations between countries and cooperation in economic and cultural life. Women should become ambassadors of this policy of peace and promote cooperation and friendship

¹⁸⁶ Original text: «差不多每一個國家，都有一人到二人發言。大會是共開了六天，每天都是早晨九時開到夜晚十二時或一時。最後一天，竟開到大天亮。照例應該是很疲勞的，可是多少個與奮熱烈的場面，使人忘記了白天和黑夜。幾次蘇聯、中國和其他人民民主國家代表發言時，全場用熱烈的鼓掌，起立或高呼口號來表示高度的感動和欽敬。例如當我們代表團團長李德全發言時，全場幾次起立鼓掌外，最後全體起立，手挽手，學著中國話，高喊：「和平，和平，和平萬歲，和平萬歲，和平萬歲。」的感讚，直到大會主席說，「又是一個高潮，坐下來吧，下面還有代表發言。」才停下來。從這裡她們看到了自己的朋友，增加了自己的爭取和平的鬥志和勇氣。從實際的事例中，更深刻地看到了沒有和平和民族獨立，就沒有自己的民主權利和兒童的幸福生活。見到了榜樣，找到了自己的路線，怎麼會不歡欣鼓舞呢？大會閉幕的那個晚上，當勝利的狂歡開始了，「烏拉，烏拉，」的口號過後，接著是「和平萬歲」，「和平萬歲」...的和聲。最後大家站到椅子上，手挽手，高唱「民主青年進行曲」，「前進」，「前進」的歌聲，一遍又一遍，多少熟悉的旋律和口號下，結束了大會。太陽已經透過窗戶，照亮了整個會場。在互相支持，團結得更緊密地唱出了「東方紅，太陽升....」。到過中國的以色列代表還拉著我們的手，團結得更緊密地唱出了「東方紅，太陽升....」。大家才手挽藍色和和平頭巾，離開了會場。» Shen Maojiu 沈茅九. “Shijie funü dahui buji” 世界婦女大會補記 (Supplementary Record of the World Women's Congress). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1953), 19-22, specifically the section “Jian dao le bangyang.” 見到了榜樣 (Met a role model).

¹⁸⁷ The Executive Committee of the WIDF reconfirmed Eugénie Cotton as Chair, with representatives from women’s organizations in the United Kingdom, Hungary, Germany, Egypt, India, Spain, Italy, China, Nigeria, the United States, the Soviet Union, Sweden, and Japan elected as Vice-Chairs. Mrs. Vaja-Kukuli was elected WIDF’s Secretary-General. In total, sixty-six countries joined the ACWDF. See “Shijie funü dahui yi jieshao.” 世界婦女大會一介紹 (An Introduction to the World Women’s Congress). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1953), 6.

among the peoples of different systems. This theme was also echoed in various speeches, including those of the Soviet delegate Nina Popova and the Chinese Zhang Yun:

We firmly believe that countries with different social systems can coexist peacefully and that no international dispute cannot be resolved through peaceful negotiations. We oppose all blockade and embargo policies and advocate the prompt restoration and strengthening of material and cultural exchanges among countries. We Chinese women warmly support the idea of the World People's Peace Conference.¹⁸⁸

The first agenda item was discussed thoroughly by Swedish representative Andrea Andreen. She described the situation of women in various countries, retracing recent history and pointing out that since WWII, women's intensified struggle for equality and the support of public opinion led the United Nations to proclaim the principle of gender equality and urge governments to grant women the rights they need.¹⁸⁹ However, she pointed out that implementing this principle has been far from satisfactory, as many governments ignored it, granting women only certain rights in a formalistic manner. The only exceptions are the Soviet Union, China, and the people's democ-

¹⁸⁸ Original text: «我們深信，一切不同的社會制度的國家可以和平共處，沒有任何國際間的爭端不可以用和平協商的方法取得解決。我們反對一切封鎖和禁運政策，主張儘速恢復並加強各國之間的物資和文化交流。我們中國婦女熱烈擁護世界人民和平大會的主張。」“Shijie funü dahui yi jieshao.” 世界婦女大會 一介紹 (An Introduction to the World Women's Congress). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1953), 6.

¹⁸⁹ Soon after, the WIDF will be expelled from the UN, and this will remarkably influence her scope of action and create friction.

racies. As proof of this, the speeches by Soviet representative Nina Popova and Chinese delegation leader Li Dequan were reported as warmly received by the Congress participants.¹⁹⁰

In her report, Li Dequan detailed the equal status enjoyed by women in New China after liberation, highlighting advancements in political, economic, and cultural education, as well as the state's paternal care for mothers and children. Her speech reviewed the ongoing land and marriage reforms and their implementations, as well as the achievements of women in the workforce. In the final part of her long speech, Li also addressed the issue of the Korean Armistice.¹⁹¹ The Chinese delegation came along with another Asian delegation in this request, the newly founded Japan Federation of Women's Organizations (FUDANREN).¹⁹² The speech by representative Ryo Oyama focused precisely on the Korean War armistice, along with the need to declare atomic weapons illegal, stop Japan's remilitarization and withdraw American troops from Japanese soil.¹⁹³

The content of the speeches was reflected in the Congress's Appeal to Women Worldwide, the Resolution Supporting WIDF Activities and Against Persecution. The theme of global peace is once again connected to the achievements of women's rights,

¹⁹⁰ "Shijie funü dahui yi jieshao." 世界婦女大會 一介紹 (An Introduction to the World Women's Congress). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1953), 6.

¹⁹¹ She cited role models such as Sun Hsün-chu, «one of the delegates at this Congress, who is the first female "dispatcher" of New China,» and Sheng Chi-lon, «another member of the Chinese delegation at our Congress, a woman who was oppressed and scorned under the old regime, but now serves as the vice-director of the well-known Li Shan-to agricultural cooperative, which also specializes in farm products.» Li also highlighted progress in education, stating that women were 23% literate and comprised 40% of evening school students (Speech by Li Dequan, in ACUDI 13, 59-4).

¹⁹² The FUDANREN was established on April 5, 1953, during the Korean War, with the goal of uniting women who advocate for peace. The inaugural chairperson was Hiratsuka Raicho. FUDANREN has actively campaigned for the enhancement of women's lives, rights, and status, as well as for the happiness of children, the pursuit of peace and independence, and the realization of democracy. The organization remains active today, comprising 23 member organizations and a collective membership of 900,000 individuals (Japan Federation of Women's Organizations). See FUDANREN (n.d.)

¹⁹³ Speech by Ryo Oyama, in ACUDI 13, 59-4.

which serve as a prerequisite for this goal. As evidence of this connection, the meeting also published the Declaration of Women's Rights, which the WIDF later recognized as a precursor to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (de Haan 2018, 237).

The diplomatic work to carry forward these battles was increasingly based on the development of a political infrastructure that, although not autonomous, employed a specific language and political strategies based on 'sexual' identity – a biological category whose socio-political significance was identified (what we would call gender today, although not theorized as such).¹⁹⁴ The work of the WIDF and its affiliated federations was characterized by a strong correlation to the concept of motherhood.¹⁹⁵ Women, not merely as women, but as mothers, became a new political subject. This created a space for conceptual autonomy around which they could legitimately develop a specific perspective, without stepping into overt feminist autonomy.

2.3 The Establishment of a Mother-based Diplomacy

2.3.1 Affirming a new political identity: the 1955 World Congress of Mothers

By the official name of *Congrès Mondial des Mères pour la défense de leurs enfants contre la guerre, pour le désarmement et l'amitié entre les peuples* (281), the World Congress of Mothers was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1955, 10 years after the foundation of the WIDF. The path toward the Congress finds its origins in the connection to the wartime past and is tied to the desire to build a better future. It

¹⁹⁴ The concept of "gender" was first conceptualized by the feminist philosopher bell hooks (1989).

¹⁹⁵ For example, in the opening of her article, former UDI president and then WIDF vice-president Rita Montagnana highlighted that 475 out of a total of 1,190 participants were mothers. See Montagnana, Rita. "Unite per la pace." (United for Peace). *ND* 49 (19 December 1953), 16.

emphasizes the continuity of partisan action after WWII, focusing on the need to protect the most vulnerable in society, particularly children.¹⁹⁶



Figures 2.6; 2.7. The two faces of UDI motherhood in two posters (left: UDI Digital Archive, 1950; right: Archivia, 1948).

The Congress was conceived only nine months prior, during the WIDF Executive Council, in Berlin on November 2-3, 1954, and officially unanimously agreed at the WIDF Council in Geneva in February 1955, with the aim of «defending life against death, friendship against hatred, peace against war.» (Bergamaschi 1955, 285). In the name of the unifying force of motherly love, the WIDF emphasized its duty to protect children from the threats of hunger, cold, misery, disease, and the overarching danger of war. On May 20, the WIDF informed its affiliates that June would be recognized

¹⁹⁶ A vital example of this is the Conference on the Defense of Children, held in Vienna from April 12 to 16, 1952, which focused on issues related to childhood and education.

as “Mothers’ Month,” featuring various meetings, discussions, and activities for the World Mothers’ Congress.¹⁹⁷

To symbolize this effort, the meeting venue featured a giant reproduction of a mother-and-child sculpture by the Romanian artist Lelia Zuaf, which became its towering symbolic backdrop (Kim 2023a, 102). The congress report carefully highlights the number of participants – 1,060 participants – 964 delegates, 73 guests, and 23 observers –and their geographical origin – including nine African countries, eight from the Middle East, ten from the Far East, and representatives from 15 countries across the Americas – how many among them were mothers – 835, including 128 under 30 and 68 over 60, with 266 of them having more than three children –, as well as a large number of messages received – over 2,000 – and people involved in organizing a truly unique event – 183 translators and typists, providing simultaneous translation in 12 languages (Bergamaschi 1955, 285-90). These numbers are not yet a simple list but stress the high participation and inclusiveness of representatives from diverse regions, emphasizing the seriousness and diplomatic significance of the event.

The Congress’s main output was summarized in the “Declaration of Mothers for the Defence of Children, against the Danger of War”, published in February 1956. As noted by Kim (2023a, 107) the declaration emphatically articulated what Gisella Floreanini would later describe as «a new policy of mother-love.» This concept extended beyond the biological role of women as mothers to embody «human consciousness.» The declaration called for dignity for mothers and asserted that their dedication to humanity should serve as a model for global governance. It strongly condemned war and militarism, emphasizing the need to prioritize social welfare for the benefit of

¹⁹⁷ “Shijie muqin dahui gongbao.” 世界母親大會公報 (Bulletin of the World Mother Conference). *ZGFN* 6 (June 1955), 18.

future generations. Despite the declaration's radical effort to detach motherhood from its traditional association with biological sex, the concept of motherhood remains politically charged. The artistic inspirations mentioned in the declaration focused on motherhood primarily as a biological function rather than embracing it as a new form of "human consciousness." Arguments about women's differences and equality co-existed, not as contradictions but as complementary ideas, where women's unique experiences were seen as justifying their demand for equal, if not elevated, status (Laslett, Brenner 1989).

Overall, despite the Mothers' Committee's attempts to appeal to a broader scope of women's organizations for peace to enlarge the cohort of the WIDF network, the results were patchy. In Western Europe, those advocating for peace were often labeled as communists and ostracized in the West. The WIDF vice-president Dora Russell lamented that «upon our return, we continued to face ostracism and frustration. Reflecting on those peasant women who had embraced us and thanked us for ‘coming all this way’ to bring a message of peace, I felt like a deceptive salesperson offering goods I could not deliver» (Russell 1985, 248 in Kim 2023a, 109). While Monica Felton around the same period declared some members of the Conservative and Labour parties even sought to prosecute her for treason, which was punished with death penalty. But as Felton herself is reported to say:

[...] the government won't execute me because they know that killing me would only make what I say spread even further, convincing the people of its truth, which would not help their policy of supporting U.S. aggression. They hoped

to use the death penalty as a threat to silence me, but they didn't succeed. I continue my sacred work – to defend world peace. In the end, the Labour government had to announce that the 'charges' could not be substantiated.¹⁹⁸

Nonetheless, maternal strategies proved more successful in reaffirming the unity among the peace-devoted organizations, despite their diversity and fostering cooperative efforts, particularly in support of the Third World.¹⁹⁹ Although the World Congress of Mothers was held only once in 1955, and the Permanent International Committee of Mothers became inactive by 1959 due to intense anti-communist sentiment in the West.²⁰⁰

2.3.2 Voices of Professional Mothers

The Italian delegation was among the most numerous – after the German and French – counting 64 women. It featured an inspiring group of women who exemplified maternal resilience and dedication, as well as politicians and representatives of federations, mainly from the leftist realm.²⁰¹ The senator and member of the Italian Women's Council, Lina Merlin, and the MP and UDI top leaders Maria Maddalena Rossi and Giuliana Nenni. There were mothers and wives of partisans, who symbolized the

¹⁹⁸ Original text: «費爾頓夫人的行動引起了英國政府的驚慌，他們很快的便撤消了她在國營斯蒂芬內吉公司董事長的職務。保守黨和工黨的一部分黨員甚至要以「叛國罪」對她提起公訴。在英國，對於叛國罪犯，唯一的處理辦法就是判處死刑。說到這裏，費爾頓夫人很幽默地笑着對我說：「但政府是不會把我處死的，因為他們知道把我處死祇會使我說的話，傳怖得更廣，使人民更加確信他的真實性，這對他們幫助美國侵略的政策是不利的。他們希望以死刑來威脅我，使我不再說話。但他們沒有達到目的，我繼續着我神聖的工作——保衛世界和平。終於，工黨政府不得不宣佈「起訴理由」無法成立。」»

Bang Xiu 邦秀. “Feishudun furen he yingguo funü de heping yundong.” 費爾頓夫人和英國婚女的和平運動 (Mrs. Felton and the British Women's Peace Movement). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1952), 16–17.

¹⁹⁹ The Congress proved the presence of the two most prominent international women's peace organizations, the WILPF and the WIDF (Kim 2023a, 109).

²⁰⁰ Notably, the Japan Mothers' Congress, which emerged from the World Congress, continues to be an active part of the women's peace movement, opposing Japanese militarism in East Asia (Kim 2023a, 101).

²⁰¹ The following selection is based on the interventions published in Bergamaschi (1955).

sacrifices made during the struggle for freedom. Dina Garosi, Rosa Michelini, and Irnes Cervi, respectively mothers and a widow of martyrs and gold medalists in the Resistance, stood as a testament to the strength of women commemorating their loved ones in the fight for justice. It features writers and artists as Silvia Magi Bonfanti – winner of the “Noi Donne” prize – and Renata Viganò, author of the acclaimed novels on the war period.²⁰² Representatives of various organizations and federations, including Giglia Tedesco, and Zappaterra²⁰³ from the National Committee of Italian Cooperators; the assembly of mothers at the Cassino; Countess Maria De Caporiacco represented the Italian Federation of Arts, Professions, and Business, while Edvige Bestazzi, the National Federation of Secondary Schools, focused on educational issues. For the first time to the WIDF event it was present a member Azione Cattolica, Clotilde Cassiglioli, although she precised that she wasn’t representing the organization itself, but because she was moved by an advocacy for social issues. The congress deeply moves the unofficial representative of the Catholic world:

You see before you an old woman, a simple mother who never believed in her life that, with already white hair, she could still experience such intense emotions, such exceptional reasons for deep and true joy. In this moving atmosphere where I have met over the past two days the expression of the same maternal feeling on so many different faces, I have become acquainted with women from countries, with customs new to me: Indian mothers, Korean, Russian, a Black woman with her little one, thousands of mothers of different races, from all nations, one single soul. I am old, but seeing this has profoundly moved me to the

²⁰² Notably *L'Agnese va a morire* (Agnese Is Going to Die) (Viganò 1949), and *Le donne della Resistenza* (The Women of the Resistance) (Viganò 1955), a collection of twenty-eight affectionate portraits of antifascist women from Bologna who fell during the struggle.

²⁰³ She is reported only with her family name. The author wasn’t able to retrace her first name.

depths of my heart, and I thought that it was precisely here that I felt myself to be a mother in the most universal sense of the word, a Christian mother united with her neighbor, as commanded by the Gospel, which has deeply impregnated my spirit.²⁰⁴

Cassiglioli is described by the *Noi Donne* correspondents at the congress as: «[...] a simple woman from Florence, a member of Catholic Action, shared this view. Her life has been tough; two daughters dead, a husband who barely earns enough with his shoe repair shop.»²⁰⁵ The biographical detail reveals how the maternalist strategy deeply resonated with the grief of a mother in mourning after having suffered one of the most significant losses of her life – not just one, but two daughters. This led to her being called to participate alone in the socialist congress, where their welcoming approach managed to break through, at least with her, the political barrier. This same atmosphere is conveyed by the conference accounts shared in the magazine *Noi Donne*.

It makes us think that one day someone will look back to study the exact value, in the history of humanity, of this day of rain and sunshine and will start from this date to measure the steps of progress made. This is, in fact, the exact moment when mothers decided to carry out an ideal revolution by meeting for the first time. Through the centuries, they have had songs and poems dedicated to

²⁰⁴ Original text: «Vous voyez devant vous une vieille femme, une simple maman qui ne croyait pas pouvoir dans sa vie, avec déjà des cheveux blancs, découvrir encore des émotions si intenses, des raisons si exceptionnelles d'une profonde et véritable joie. Dans cette atmosphère émouvante où j'ai rencontré depuis deux jours sur tant de visages divers l'expression du même sentiment de mère, j'ai fait connaissance avec des femmes de pays, de costumes nouveaux pour moi: des mères indiennes, coréennes, russes, une femme noire avec son petit, des milliers de mères de différentes races, de toutes les nations, une seule âme. Je suis vieille, mais de voir cela m'a profondément émue jusqu'au fond de mon cœur et j'ai pensé que c'est justement ici que je me sentais une mère dans le sens le plus universel du mot, une mère chrétienne unie à son prochain, comme le commande l'Évangile, qui a profondément imprégné mon esprit.» (Bergamaschi 1955, 168).

²⁰⁵ Original text: «[...] una semplice donna fiorentina dell'Azione Cattolica. La sua vita è stata assai dura; due figlie morte, il marito che guadagna appena quanto basta con la sua bottega di calzolaio, lei pensionata della Previdenza sociale con 6.000 lire ogni due mesi.» Dal Pozzo, Giuliana, and Cesarini, Grazia. "Tutte insieme la vita trionferà" (Together, Life Will Triumph). *ND* 29 (July 17, 1955), 4–6.

their love and their sacrifice. Today, the mothers said to the poets: "If you want, come to Lausanne as well, but to sing how we took each other's hands and closed in a loving circle around all our children so that no one can take them from us again." And a Greek poet, Peiridis, a distant descendant of Homer, who sang the grief and anguish of Trojan mothers over the lifeless bodies of their sons, listened to them: "You are all together, all together..." begins his poem, "...life will triumph."²⁰⁶

This excerpt from the Italian women's reportage in the periodical *Noi Donne* captures the enthusiasm of the large delegation while also portraying the diversity of the people present. From the testimony of reporter Giuliana Dal Pozzo, it emerges that Soviet and Chinese women are seen as models of "new," almost "futuristic" women, even though China is still a discovery for many.

The table where the Soviet women are seated seems to radiate a great serenity. They seem like grand figures, sure of themselves. We would love to sit with them for longer. The face of Zoia's mother, the heroic girl of the Soviet Union, appeared joyless. The Chinese women were a revelation for many. A lady from our delegation couldn't stop marveling at their culture and intelligence (this lady had probably underestimated the importance of what has happened in China in recent years and perhaps still thought of the Chinese women from the past, those

²⁰⁶ Original text: «Ci viene fatto di pensare che un giorno qualcuno si volgerà indietro a studiare l'esatto valore, nella storia dell'umanità, di questa giornata di pioggia e di sole e partirà da questa data per misurare i passi in avanti compiuti dal progresso. Questo è, infatti, l'esatto momento in cui le madri hanno deciso di compiere una rivoluzione ideale incontrandosi per la prima volta. Attraverso secoli hanno avuto canzoni e poemi dedicati al loro amore e al loro sacrificio. Oggi le madri hanno detto ai poeti: "Se volete, venite anche voi a Losanna, ma per cantare come ci siamo prese per mano e abbiamo chiuso in un cerchio amoroso tutti i nostri figli perché nessuno ce li strappi più." E un poeta greco, Peiridis, nipote lontanissimo di Omero, che cantava il pianto e lo strazio delle madri troiane sui corpi inanimati dei figli, le ha ascoltate: "Tutte insieme siete, tutte insieme...", comincia il suo poema "...la vita trionferà." Dal Pozzo, Giuliana, and Grazia Cesarini. "Tutte insieme la vita trionferà" (Together, Life Will Triumph). *ND* 29 (July 17, 1955), 4–6.

with feet imprisoned in tiny bindings, rather than the Chinese women ministers!).

Another discovery at this conference is the Black woman, who is described with a childlike sense of wonder, using positive adjectives that nonetheless reveal an underlying paternalism and the pervasive racism present in contemporary Italy.

At a certain moment, amid everyone's cheers, a beautiful 20-year-old black woman entered, walking confidently, from faraway French Congo. In her arms, wrapped in white clothes, was a chocolate-colored ten-month-old baby. The little girl looked around at so many different-colored faces, then began to cry, showing her tiny white teeth as big tears streamed down her cheeks. Immediately, several mothers reached out their arms to her, caressed her, and others offered her a biscuit or candy. Someone stroked her little head covered in soft fuzz, and another kissed her little black, black foot.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Original text: «Il tavolo dove siedono le donne sovietiche pare irraggi intorno una grande serenità. Ci sembrano come cose grandi, sicure di sé. Vorremmo sedere fra loro più a lungo. Spento come senza gioia il volto della madre di Zoia, la fanciulla eroina dell'Unione Sovietica. Le cinesi sono state per molti una rivelazione. Una signora della nostra delegazione non faceva che meravigliarsi della loro cultura e della loro intelligenza (questa signora probabilmente non aveva valutato l'importanza di quanto è avvenuto in Cina in questi ultimi anni e pensava forse alle cinesi di un tempo, quelle con i piedi imprigionati nelle strettissime fasce, anziché alle donne cinesi ministro!). Ad un certo momento fra le grida di entusiasmo di tutti ha fatto il suo ingresso, camminando con passo sicuro, una bellissima donna negra di vent'anni, proveniente dal lontano Congo francese. Aveva in braccio, avvolta in candidi panni una bambina color cioccolata, di dieci mesi. La bimbetta si è guardata intorno fra tante facce di colore diverso poi ha cominciato a piangere mostrando due dentini candidi mentre alcuni lacrimoni piovevano sulle guance. Subito alcune mamme le hanno teso le braccia, le hanno fatto delle carezze, altre le hanno portato un biscotto o una caramella, qualcuna le ha accarezzato la testa coperta di breve peluria, un'altra gli ha baciato un piedino nero, nero.» (Ibid.).

The Italian reports on the congress reveal details about how a sense of sisterhood and sharing was created informally. A second Dal Pozzo's article²⁰⁸ – somewhere between a chronicle and a travel narrative – is crafted as an engaging story aimed at attracting readers rather than providing a detailed conference report.²⁰⁹ The article highlights exciting details about the atmosphere perceived by the attendees, the emotions the congress evoked in participants, and the ingrained racism within coeval society. This enabled the direct recounting of a spontaneous testimony from a Turin factory worker, who was also a “top seller” of *Noi Donne*:

I cannot tell you how surprised I was when I found out I would be coming to Lausanne. Besides the Chinese, Soviet, and all the famous democratic women, those who impressed me the most were the Black women. I have only seen them in movies showing them as cooks and saying, 'Yessir.' How different reality is! And now I know what you want to hear from me: to make the Congress results known, I commit to increasing the distribution, of course!", this is what she told us at the end of the Congress.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Dal Pozzo, Giuliana, “Mamma il tuo pianto non basta” (Mom, your tears are not enough). *ND* 30 (July, 24 1955), 6-8.

²⁰⁹ This editorial line is very different from *Women of New China*, being more focused on reporting precise details to the – mostly cadre-made – public (Wang 2010).

²¹⁰ Original text: «Non so dirvi la mia sorpresa quando ho saputo che sarei venuta a Losanna. Oltre le donne cinesi, sovietiche e di tutte le democrazie popolari, quelle che mi hanno colpito di più sono state le negre. Le avevo viste solo nei film in cui si vedono che fanno le cuoche e dicono: "zi badrone". Come diversa è la realtà! Ed ora lo so che volete sapere da me: per far conoscere i risultati del Congresso mi impegno ad aumentare la diffusione, naturalmente!», così ci ha detto alla fine del Congresso.» (Ibid.).



Figure 2.8. Zhang Longji 张隆基. 'Women yunyule shengming, women yao baowei shengming!' 我们孕育了生命，我们要保衛生命！ (We have been pregnant with life, we want to safeguard life!), 1956.

The ACWDF's participation in the World Congress of Mothers was officialized on June 10, at the organization's Standing Committee meeting.²¹¹ The meeting, nonetheless, was preceded by declarations and messages of support for Congress by the ACWDF President Cai Chang and the "model mother" Yan Wenhua, published in the May issue of *Women of China*.²¹² Li Dequan (李德全, 1896-1972) – Minister of Public Health, President of the Chinese Red Cross, and since 1953, also ACWDF's

²¹¹ "Zhonghua quanguo minzh funü lianhe hui yonghu zhaokai shijie muqin dahui." 中華全國民主婦女聯合會擁護召開世界母親大會 (The All-China Women's Democratic Federation Supports the World Mothers' Congress). *ZGFN* 6 (June 1955), 19.

²¹² Cai, Chang. "Relie yonghu shijie muqin dahui." 熱烈擁護世界母親大會 (Warmly support the World Mothers Congress). *ZGFN* 5 (May 1956), 2; Yan, Wenhua 閻文華. "Wo yuan yi shiji xingdong zhichi shijie muqin dahui de zhaokai." 我願以實際行動支持世界母親大會的召開 (I support the convening of the World Conference of Mothers with practical actions). *ZGFN* 5 (May 1956), 2.

Vice President – headed the People’s China delegation at the World Congress of Mothers. During the Sino-Japanese War, Li headed the preparatory committee that led to the founding of the Wartime Children association (战时儿童保育会 Zhanshi Ertong Baoyuhui) an organization established during the early years of the Second Sino-Japanese War, initiated by the CCP and involving collaboration with the KMT and other patriotic individuals from various sectors of society. The association's primary purpose was to provide relief and care for orphaned or displaced children due to the war (Cicci 2024). According to Gu (2006, 2), the association rescued and brought nearly 30,000 war-affected children under challenging conditions over the eight years of its operation. Among the founders of the Association there was also Cao Mengjun 曹孟君, as a representative of the ACWDF Secretariat and a deputy of the National People's Congress, who was also present at the World Mothers Congress. On January 24th 1938, the Wartime Childcare Association 战时儿童保育会 (Zhanshi Ertong Baoyuhui) Preparatory Committee was established at the Hankou Christian Women's Association 汉口基督教女青年会 (Hankou Jidujiao Nü Qingnian Hui), with Li Dequan 李德全, Guo Xiuyi 郭秀仪, Zhong Kantuo 钟刊托, An Sao 安嫂, and Tang Mengcheng 唐孟城 elected as members, Lu Xiaodao 吕晓道, Yu Ruzhou 于汝洲, Zhu Hanzhu 朱涵珠, and Cao Mengjun 曹孟君 were among the nine members of the Preparatory Committee, with Li Dequan 李德全 serving as the chief committee member. Following this, the Preparatory Committee undertook a series of activities. Deng Yingchao 邓颖超 continued to promote the signing of the initiators, with notable figures such as the politician Shen Junru 沈钧儒 (1875-1963), the writer Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978), and the journalist, and political theorist

Zou Taofen 邹韬奋(1895-1944) leading the way in signing. Eventually, 184 people from various political parties and sectors were listed as initiators (Gu 2006, 2-3).

The Congress contents are recorded by Li in *Women of New China*.²¹³ Li provided the public a detailed summary of the events at the congress that highlights the value of collective struggle, its connection to the movements that developed during the Korean War, and the belief in the central role that women, as mothers, play in carrying forward the project of a better world. In her account, the Chinese delegation leader stresses the relations between antifascism and anticolonialism, linking WWII to the liberation wars in Korea and Vietnam and the overall fight against colonial oppression:

The war has also taken a deep toll on mothers around the world. The Second World War took the lives of 90 million children from their mothers. It was our mothers' beloved sons and daughters who were slaughtered and tortured in Berdeneck and Auschwitz. Dear friends! Can we tolerate a repeat of war? Are we going to let war maniacs kill our children again? No, never! We have to protect the children, we have to protect the peace! So say the hearts of millions of mothers all over the world. We Chinese mothers and women have done a lot of work together with the people of the whole country to fight against colonial aggression and strive for national independence, democracy and freedom.²¹⁴

²¹³ Li, Dequan 李德全. "Guanyu luosang shijie muqin dahui de qingkuang he chengjiu de baogao." 關於洛桑世界母親大會的情況和成就的報告 (Report on the Situation and Achievements of the World Congress of Mothers in Lausanne). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1955), 5-8.

²¹⁴ Original text: «戰爭同樣給全世界的母親們帶來了深巨創痛。第二次世界大戰從母親們的身邊奪去了九千萬子女的生命。在柏德奈克和奧斯威辛集中營裏遭受屠殺和折磨的，都是我們母親們心愛的兒女。親愛的朋友們！難道我們能容忍戰爭的慘劇重演嗎？難道我們能容忍戰爭狂人再一次來殺害我們的孩子嗎？不，決不！我們要保衛孩子，保衛和平！全世界億萬母親的心這樣堅決地回答。我們中國的母親和婦女，爲了反抗殖民主義的侵略，爭取民族獨立和民主自由，曾經和全國人民一起作了許多工作.» (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Li details worldwide initiatives to echo the congress, including excerpts from speeches, including that of the Japanese Yamaguchi Miyoko, a mother from Hiroshima, who relates to the Congress's unanimous call to abolish nuclear weapons²¹⁵ and pursue peaceful coexistence: asserting the use of atomic energy should be solely implemented for industrial purposes. This hope, she stated, is reinforced by the positive outcomes of the Geneva Conference and by the example of peace and social progress represented by the Soviet Union, a reference country showing what can be achieved by establishing socialism. But nowadays, People's China, as Li concludes, plays an important role on the global stage, as recognized also by the congress attendants:

Thanks to the great victory of the Chinese people's revolution and the great achievements of our peaceful construction, China's international status has been greatly improved. The speeches of our delegation at the Congress received enthusiastic applause from the delegates, and the opinions of our delegation were respected by the delegates from other countries. The entire delegation received a profound education in patriotism and internationalism. We love our motherland even more, and we understand the significant responsibility of safeguarding world peace. I believe that Chinese mothers have always loved peace and worked tirelessly to achieve and defend world peace. [...].²¹⁶

²¹⁵ The reference is to the appeal against atomic war, launched the previous April by the World Peace Council. The data are from Li's intervention at the World Congress of Mothers in Bergamaschi (1955, 40).

²¹⁶ Original text: «由於我國人民革命的偉大勝利，由於我國和平建設的偉大成就，我國的國際地位大大提高，我國代表團在大會的發言，受到了與會代表的熱烈歡迎，我國代表田的意見，得到了各國代表的尊重。我們代表團全體成員，受到了一次深刻的愛國主義和國際主義教育。我們更加熱愛我們的祖國，我們更加懂得在維護世界和平事業中的重大責任。我到中國母親一貫熱愛和平，精為爭取和保衛世界和平而奮鬥。」 (Ibid.).

Li's speech at the Congress dwells on the theme of peace, and motherhood by reconnecting it to that of national independence and anticolonialism: «Millions of Chinese mothers lost their children whom they had raised with so much love. [...] This is why we hate war and stand against colonialism... Chinese mothers and women fought alongside their people against colonialist aggression for national independence.»²¹⁷ The protection of motherhood and childhood thus connects directly to the protection of Chinese borders, which, Li specifies, is pursued with peaceful means. As proof, national liberation grants great achievements are the tangible improvements in China since 1949. These are illustrated through data of the achievements in public health, especially regarding gynecology and childbirth; and through the testimony of a mother, «Tan Yen-tseng», whose story of liberation is presented to the international audience.

Today, Tang Yen-tseng lives in a new China under peaceful conditions: thanks to her efforts and those of her husband, her 13 children study and work. They will no longer be threatened by hunger and cold and will no longer taste the bitterness of being deprived of education. The three youngest are now in primary school, two in secondary school, and two others attend the Institute of Higher Education, while the six eldest work in factories, banks, and public administrations.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Original text: «Des millions de mères chinoises ont perdu leurs enfants qu'elles avaient élevés avec tant d'amour. C'est pour cela que nous haïssons la guerre et que nous nous dressons contre le colonialisme... Les mères et les femmes chinoises ont lutté aux côtés de leur peuple contre l'agression colonialiste, pour l'indépendance nationale.»

²¹⁸ Original text: «Aujourd'hui, Tang Yen-tseng vit en Chine nouvelle dans des conditions de paix: grâce à ses efforts et à ceux de son époux, ses 13 enfants étudient et travaillent. Désormais ils ne seront plus menacés par la faim et le froid, et ne goûteront plus l'amertume d'être privés d'instruction. Les trois cadets sont maintenant à l'école primaire, deux à l'école secondaire, et deux autres vont à l'Institut Supérieur, alors que les six aînés travaillent dans des usines, des banques et des administrations publiques.» (Bergamaschi 1955, 38).

2.4 The rise of mothers?

2.4.1 The Legacy of the World Mothers Congress

Among the outputs of the World Congress of Mothers was the establishment of an International Mothers' Standing Committee to implement the Congress's resolutions. The first meeting of the Standing Committee took place from February 2 to 4, 1956, in Lausanne, attended by representatives from 36 countries (just over half of those at the Congress),²¹⁹ including delegates from the PRC and Italy.²²⁰

During this meeting, participants discussed strategies to implement the World Congress of Mothers resolutions. Three significant documents were adopted: the "Declaration of Mothers Protecting Their Children and Opposing the Dangers of War," the "Call to Support the Declaration of the International Mothers' Standing Committee," and the "Message to the Governments of the United States, Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom." (Ibid). The Declaration emphasizes that, despite some progress towards peace, the danger of war continues to threaten the world. It specifies that the existence of large-scale destructive nuclear weapons poses a significant threat to children, including unborn infants, and thus to the future of humanity.

Recent historiography has focused on the "collateral" effects of the use of nuclear weapons in colonial territories. The so-called 'nuclear colonialism' has been used to refer to the use of areas within colonized countries for testing the development of

²¹⁹ The number varies from report to report, but it is between 64 and 66 countries. This latter data is reported in Li Dequan. See "Guanyu luosang shijie muqin dahui de qingkuang he chengjiu de baogao." 關於洛桑世界母親大會的情況和成就的報告 (Report on the situation and achievements of the World Conference of Mothers in Lausanne). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1956), 5-8.

²²⁰ "Muqin men baowei haizi fandui zhanzheng weixian de xuanyan." 母親們保衛孩子反對戰爭危險的宣言 (Declaration of mothers defending their children against the dangers of war). *ZGFN* 4, April 1956, 14.

nuclear warheads. Some studies underline how one such area was the Algerian Sahara for the French and the Kazakh steppe for the Soviets (Hennaoui, Nurzhan 2023; Cooper 2022).

The Call to Support the Declaration emphasized enhancing global friendships, calling for negotiation and cooperation at all levels: «We urge you to call on all parents, educators, writers, editors, and everyone concerned with children to condemn publications, radio programs, and films that promote war, crime, and racial superiority. This will help ensure that children grow up in an atmosphere of peace and friendship with people from other countries.»²²¹ China took this invitation seriously, as it was already significantly engaged in organizing visits and delegations and would soon host the first WDF executive committee meeting outside Europe. The meeting received open support from the ACWDF, as demonstrated by the support telegrams sent by its top leaders Song Qingling, He Xiangning, Cai Chang, Deng Yingchao, Li Dequan, Xu Guangpin, Shi Liang, Zhang Yun, Lin Qiaozhi (林巧稚), and Xie Bingxin (謝冰心), particularly supporting the to support the “Declaration of Mothers to Protect Children against the Dangers of War.”²²² Additionally, the meeting received quite broad coverage on *Women of China*, in the following spring issues.

The coverage of the first meeting of the International Mothers' Standing Committee is little in Italy compared to the PRC. However, the meeting is still publicized in a

²²¹ Original text: «我們向你們呼要号召所有的家長們、教育工作者、作家、編輯和一切关心兒童的人們來證貴那些宣揚战争、罪行和种族优越的童报刊、廣播節目和影片，这样就能使兒童們在和平、在和其他國家人民友好的气氛中撫育長成.» “Yonghu guoji muqin chang weiyuanhui xuanyan de haozhao shu.” 擁護國際母親常委員會宣言的號召書 (Call for Support of the Declaration of the International Standing Committee on Motherhood). *ZGFN* 4 (April 1956), 15.

²²² “Songqingling deng zhidian guoji muqin baowei ertong changshe weiyuan hui zhichi “muqinmen baowei haizi fandui zhanzheng weixian de xuanyan.” 宋庆龄等致电国际母亲保衛兒童常設委員會支持“母亲們保衛孩子反对战争危險的宣言 (Song Qingling and Others Sent a Telegram to the Permanent International Committee of Mothers for the Defense of Children to Express their Support for the "Declaration of Mothers to Protect Children Against the Dangers of War). *ZGFN* 11 (November 1956), 16.

meaningful article by Luciana Viviani.²²³ She emphasizes the desire to establish a "Permanent International Mothers' Committee for the Defense of Children Against the Danger of War," which would «serve as a vigilant reminder, an intelligent stimulus so that the will for peace of Mothers becomes a conscious, organized, and driving force.»²²⁴ Notably, the role of mothers discussed coincides with a professional, skilled womanly position elevated by a match of sex/gender belonging and specialized diplomatic expertise. They reversed the biological fragility related to motherhood to produce a discourse where they are empowered by this experience. The transnational socialist women's movement thus undertakes an initiative that overturns the traditional semantics of motherhood as a state of exclusive fragility and emotional involvement, emphasizing the positive contributions this condition can bring to society: «The discussion, therefore, was elevated, political, scholarly. They spoke, indeed, of mothers, but these were women who represented political movements, cultural and religious currents, women's and pacifist organizations with a long and glorious tradition, professionals, jurists, writers.»²²⁵

Notably, the picture next to the article displays a group of Chinese women in a square, wearing headscarves and lifting flowers, with the caption: «These Chinese women are celebrating the victories of peace and socialism,»²²⁶ with a mention of the arrival

²²³ Viviani, Luciana. "Le strade della pace." (The Roads of Peace). *ND* 9 (February 26, 1956), 5.

²²⁴ Original text: «rappresenti il richiamo vigile, lo stimolo intelligente affinché la volontà di pace delle Madri diventi forza propulsiva, cosciente e organizzata.» (Ibid.).

²²⁵ Original text: «La discussione quindi, è stata elevata, politica, dotta. Hanno parlato, sì delle madri, ma queste erano donne che rappresentano movimenti politici, correnti culturali e religiose, organizzazioni femminili e pacifiste di lunga e gloriosa tradizione, professioniste, giuriste, scrittrici.» Then Viviani mentions the illustrious names who attended the conference: Swedish doctor Andrea Andreen, American Florence Gowgiel, president of the 'save our children' committee, British magistrate Phoebe Cusden and activist Dora Russel; Erna Liebermann, president of the Austrian Methodist women's group; Czechoslovakian Frida Kolarova, director of an orthopaedic clinic, Cuban writer Edith Garcia Buchaca, founder of the Cuban women's movement Ceza Nabaraoui, and Italian MP Lina Merlin (ibid.).

²²⁶ Original text: «Queste donne cinesi stanno celebrando le vittorie della pace e del socialismo» (ibid.).

of a delegation from the ACWDF in Italy, led by World Congress of Mothers' champion Li Dequan.

Overall, the international socialist women's movement undertakes a strategic operation that extends the biological function of reproduction into its symbolic meaning as a protection of life and physical well-being, expressed through the safeguarding of human rights. The role of women as guarantors is affirmed through their participation in key international events, engaging in dialogue with major institutions such as the United Nations, and collaborating with the World Peace Council. When the Cold War dynamics intensified, also causing the expulsion of the WIDF from the UN, the movement tried to reinforce internally its gender-specific network. This operation also included interactions with national and local entities dedicated to health, well-being, and the protection of women, children, labor, and human rights in general. To this end, the movement collaborated with organizations like the IRC, cultural and diplomatic associations (such as writers' associations and the China Center), trade unions, and religious groups (such as the Catholic Association and the CIF in Italy, see Pojmann 2013) for specific campaigns and struggles. Despite being pushed to confinement by geopolitical circumstances, the socialist women's network was never isolated but proved open and capable of forging new alliances that were instrumental in advancing its struggles. Although not always conciliatory and sometimes marked by disagreements, this dialogue aimed to create a robust and professional image of the women's movement as a new, unprecedented force. This force, through the innate qualities of women – summed up in the essence of motherhood – was seen as uniquely capable of shaping a new world order.

This narrative challenges the prevailing historiography that portrays the movement as passive in the face of socialist party directives, instead positioning it as a body that,

while certainly influenced by those orientations, actively develops strategies to align political goals to its own advantage. As long as these strategies were adequate for the growth of a global movement aligned with local objectives, they found space and opportunity to cultivate dialogue, even outside the framework of the international federation, by developing bilateral relationships. Despite challenges, the strategy of uniting under the banner of maternal feminism partially succeeded, for instance, in bridging the gap between previously separate groups – such as the two largest international women's organizations advocating for peace, the WILPF and the WIDF – leading to cooperative efforts, particularly in support of the Third World. A sign of this shift was the WIDF Council holding its first meeting outside Europe in 1956 (Kim 2023a, 109).

2.4.2 Recentering Asia: The WIDF Council in Beijing 1956

The international centrality of Asian and particularly Chinese women as ambassadors of a new society, inspiring examples of a new womanhood, is emphasized by the choice of Beijing as the venue for the WIDF council held from April 24 to 30, 1956. This event marked the first WIDF council outside of Europe and the USSR. The choice of Beijing did not seem random, especially after the shockwave that struck the international communist movement following the denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February of the same year. The decision to host the council in Beijing, a symbolic capital of the new, unblemished communist power, might have been made to reinvigorate the international democratic women's movement and its globalist character, which sought to expand beyond European borders and strengthen internal alliances. As a proof of this, at the Beijing council, the WIDF

also issued a public apology, reversing the 1949 expulsion that took place at the Moscow council meeting. WIDF president Cotton acknowledged that the previous decision had been unjust. The Federation admitted to having «“made mistakes” and that they should “learn to respect points of view that differ from our own, and remember to preserve the unique character of the federation”» (Kim 2023a, 113). The proposal was supported by representatives from the Soviet Union, Italy, and Czechoslovakia and was unanimously approved with applause. In her closing remarks, Madame Gordon emphasized the importance of cooperation among women's organizations in different countries and within countries. She is reported to have said, «We must embody the Bandung spirit in our work; broad cooperation is the guiding spirit of the activities of the Women’s International Democratic Federation.»²²⁷

This could have also been an attempt to reinforce the anti-colonial front under the WIDF banner, as previously done in the context of the 1949 Asian Women’s Congress.²²⁸ After this council, it would take until 1960 for another WIDF meeting to take place outside Europe or the USSR (Gradszkova 2022).

Regarding international meetings in Asia, it is essential to note the two earlier regional events that took place on the continent: the Asia Pacific Peace Conference (1952) and the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung (1955). Among the participants at the 1952 conference was the Italian Carmen Zanti, then secretary of the UDI within the WIDF, who wrote an article for *Women of new China* published in November

²²⁷ “Heping youyi hezuo guoji minzhu fulian lishihui beijing hui.” 和平、友誼、合作 —— 国际民主妇联理事會北京會 (Peace, Friendship, Cooperation: Minutes of the Beijing Meeting of the Women’s International Democratic Federation Council). *ZGFN* 5S (May 1956), 46–47.

²²⁸ On the specificity of the 1949 Asian Women’s Conference compared to other women's regional meetings, see Armstrong (2016).

1952. While these events had an international impact, they did not prominently involve Western powers. This is notable despite the fact that, according to Kim (2023a, 112), the Asia Pacific Peace Conference outlined principles of peaceful coexistence in much greater detail and with broader universal application than the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which three years later became the foundation of the Bandung Conference.



Figure 2.9. Representation bodies of the WIDF at the Beijing Council. Notably recognized is President Eugenie Cotton (5th from the left), with ACWDF president Cai Chang to her left, WIDF secretary Angiola Minella to her right, and UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi (UDI Archive Pesaro, Bocci, Appendix 1, Uncatalogued.)

The WIDF's Council in Beijing was held in late April 1956 and was attended by 48 member States and 183 members and guests.²²⁹ It featured the presence of top leaders

²²⁹ The Editor. "Jin yibu fazhan le shijie funü de youyi he hezuo." 進一步發展了世界婦女的友誼和合作 (Further Developed Friendship and Cooperation among Women of the World). *ZGFN* 5S (May), 1.

from the ACWDF and the CCP. Vice-Chairperson Deng Yingchao attended the meeting as the head of the Chinese delegation as well as Chairperson Cai Chang, and Vice Chairpersons Li Dequan and Xu Guangping, Shi Liang (Yang 1991, 85). The ACWDF President Cai Chang addressed a welcome speech after Mrs. Eugenie Cotton's opening. Premier Zhou Enlai hosted a banquet for all WIDF Council members. The ACWDF President Cai Chang first attended WIDF meetings in February (21-27) 1947, during the first WIDF council meeting held in Prague, leading the delegation of Chinese Women of the Liberated Areas. During the meeting, Cai Chang delivered a report to the women's representatives from around the world titled *On the Struggle of Chinese Women for Independence, Democracy, and Peace*, presenting the current situation of the Chinese women's movement and expressing that the primary goal of Chinese women's hard work and struggle was to safeguard national independence and achieve democracy and peace. Upon returning to China, she published a written report on the first WIDF council meeting, conveying the support and encouragement of women around the world to women in the liberated areas, enhancing their understanding of the international progressive women's movement, and laying the foundation for Chinese women's engagement in international exchanges and their active role in them (Ji, Luo 2020, 50). Although she no longer led ACWDF delegations to WIDF meetings, Cai remained a diplomatically crucial figure in international relations during this period.

ACWDF Honorary President Song Qingling also sent a congratulatory message. The relevance of the Council for the ACWDF is demonstrated by the fact that the federation dedicated to it an entire special issue of *Women of China* in May 1956, roughly three times the length of a regular issue, including various speeches. On top of those of WIDF's top leaders – Mrs. Lidya Petrova, Mrs. Dora Russell – it included speeches of delegates from Soviet satellites: Mrs. Zora Dragoicheva of Bulgaria, Mrs. Stella

Enniscu of the Romanian People's Republic, Mrs. Aneska Hedinova-Spurna of Czechoslovakia; and speeches from decolonized countries of Asia – Mrs. Suharto of Indonesia, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Ten of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Mrs. Carlson Tenyani from India –, Africa – Mrs. Ransome-Kuti from Nigeria, Mrs. Ma Bamba of Ivory Coast – and South America – Mrs. Blanca Fiallio from Brasil and Mrs. Adela Desanez from Costa Rica.

The council outcomes reinforced both the anticolonial and maternal strategies displayed in previous WIDF meetings. It includes the "Appeal to Asian and African Women", proclaiming the adhesion to the principle of peaceful coexistence proclaimed at the Bandung Conference, calling for peaceful methods to oppose colonial aggressions.²³⁰ A second key document resulting from the congress is the "Statement on Cooperation with Women's Groups" calling for establishment cooperation, in line with the efforts of the World Congress of Mothers.²³¹ Overall, the meeting was deemed a success, with these concluding documents serving as testimony to the creation of a united front and mobilization for peace against colonial oppression, transcending differences. The documents reveal the WIDF's ambition to represent all

²³⁰ The document acknowledges the new forms of colonization spreading even after proclaimed national independence by stating: «In the countries where colonial powers have suffered significant defeats, they are now using new methods to jeopardize freedom. They aim to provoke racial and religious prejudices, displace people from their homes, prepare for war, strengthen aggressive military pacts, establish military bases, provide so-called economic aid with attached political, economic, and military conditions, and conduct dangerous nuclear weapons tests.» (Original text: «在亞非遭到嚴重失敗的殖民國家，正在採用新的方法危害自由。它們抱着這種目的，挑撥種族和宗教偏見；把人民驅出家鄉；糟戰爭準備；加強侵略性的軍事條約；建立軍事基地；提供附帶政治、經濟和軍事條件的所謂經濟援助；進行着可怕的核子武器的試驗。»), in "Gao yazhou, feizhou funü shu." 告亞洲、非洲婦女書 (Appeal to Asian and African Women). *ZGFN* 5S (May 1956), 52.

²³¹ "Guanyu he funü tuanti hezuo de shengming." 关于和妇女团体合作的声明 (Statement on cooperation with women's groups). *ZGFN* 5S (May 1956), 52.

women, including other international women's realities, to coordinate a global effort for peace.²³²

The Council heard two key reports: "The Tasks of the WIDF in the Struggle for Women's Rights, Peace, and the Happiness of Children," and "The Aspirations and Activities of Women in Asia and Africa." These reports «[...] emphasized the significant role the WIDF has played in achieving these successes, which have strengthened the women's movement and contributed to progress in cooperation based on the spirit of peaceful coexistence and international detente.»²³³ The Council called on all national member organizations to intensify their efforts in developing new activities and approaches that enhance mutual understanding among women and unify their collective actions. It emphasizes the importance of directly engaging with various groups, such as rural women, workers, employees, housewives, intellectuals, and professionals, to support their demands and rights. Furthermore, the Council encourages organizations to actively seek opportunities to collaborate with other women's groups and prominent women, facilitating discussions and joint decisions on shared actions or campaigns.

The *Women of China* special issue recalled the Council closing in concluding with the publication of the poem *Raise the Banner of Peace Even Higher* by the famous

²³² This is clearly expressed in the editorial "Jinyibu fazhanle shijie funü de youyi he hezuo." 進一步發展了世界婦女的友誼和合作 (Further Developed Friendship and Cooperation among Women of the World). *ZGFN* 5S (May), 1; and in the ACWDF President Cai Chang article *Unite More Broadly for Lasting Peace and the Happiness of Women and Children* published in *Women of the Whole World* (Ji, Luo 2020, 52).

²³³ Original text: «[...] 着重地指明自從上次理事會會議以來，婦女運動在團結婦女保衛和平、保衛婦女權利、保衛兒童方面所獲得的成就以及國際民主婦聯在取得這些成就方面所起的重要作用。這些成就加強了婦女運動的發展，有助於在根據和平共處原則的精神進行合作方面和援和國際聚張局勢方面獲得進展。」 "Guanyu guoji minzhu fulian renwu de jueyi." 關於國際民主婦聯任務的決議 (Resolution on the mandate of the Women's International Democratic Federation). *ZGFN* 5S (May), 53.

children's literature writer, screenwriter, and director of the China Writers Association Jin Jin 金近²³⁴ (Li 2019). The poem was recited by a “little friend” named Wang Shuqin 王淑琴 at the closing of the meeting.

Beijing wears its colorful spring attire,
Welcoming dear guests from across the seas.
There's no need to introduce your names,
For you are the world's greatest mothers and grandmothers.
Your children are more than any could count,
From India's dawn villages to Iceland's fishing towns,
From the banks of the Mississippi to the shores of the Volga.
Your children are spread across the whole world.
We too are your children,
Today we meet you for the first time,
Thank you for your care and love,
We will always hold you in our hearts.
Now let's talk about our dreams:
Some want to be doctors, some wish to farm,
Yet we feel a little anxious,
Wishing we could grow up faster.
In our cities, the buildings rise,
Even faster and taller than spring bamboo shoots,
Our farms and factories appear one by one.
We are learning new skills,
Preparing to take over for our fathers and mothers.

²³⁴ Jin, Jin 金近. “Ba heiping qizhi ju de geng gao.” 把和平旗帜举得更高 (Raise the Banner of Peace Even Higher). *ZGFN* 5S (May), 56.

We will learn well, and aim even higher,
 We should be stronger than those who came before us.
 Happiness brings us even greater dreams,
 Peace is our deepest wish.
 We live in joy and peace,
 And hope that all children around the world
 Can live just like we do.
 Dear mothers, dear grandmothers,
 How strong you are holding the banner of peace!
 Raise it even higher,
 Let it wave proudly under the golden sun.²³⁵

The Italian account of the Council is reported in a short article on Noi Donne authored by writer Elsa Bergamaschi, who was also the author of the book on the World Congress of Mothers. The account starts by stressing the role of the PRC as a crucial actor in rethinking a *new* global order and women's role in it.

This time, we have turned our backs on old Europe and gone far away to the country of the oldest civilization, *the newest country in the world, China* [emphasis mine]. The Women's International Democratic Federation, which had held its meetings in various European cities for the past ten years, convened its

²³⁵ Original text: «北京披上色的春装，/ 迎接海外來的貴客，/ 客人的名字不用介紹，/ 反正都是世界上最好的媽媽和奶奶。/ 你們的孩子比誰都多，/ 从印度的晨家到冰島的漁鄉，/ 从密士西比河到伏尔加河。/ 你們的孩子遍于全世界。/ 我們也是你們的孩子，/ 今天第一次行个見面礼。/ 多謝你們的关心和爱护，/ 我們要永远把你們記在心里。/ 現在談談我們的理想，/ 有的要做医生，有的想進農場，/ 可我們心里有点着急，/ 怪自己長得太慢。/ 我們城市里的大楼，/ 長得比春笋还快，还多，/ 我們的農庄和工厂，/ 也一个跟着一个出现。/ 我們要学好本領，/ 准备着給爸爸媽媽接班，/ 本領学得好，还要好，/ 應該比爸爸媽媽都强。/ 幸福，帶給我們更美好的理想，/ 和平，是我們最大的願望，/ 我們过着幸福、和平的生活，/ 希望全世界的小朋友都像我們一样。/ 親爱的媽媽們，親爱的奶奶們，/ 你們高举着和平大旗多有力量！/ 把这旗帜举得更高吧，/ 在金色的陽光下呼啦啦地揚。」(Ibid.).

Council in Beijing. No place could be more suitable to signify our Federation's global role now, as it gathers and expresses the immense force of renewal represented by women's movements. Today, the Chinese woman has a stronger sense of freedom precisely because the abyss that separates her from the slavery of the past is more profound than it is for men. Her drive toward the future, confidence, self-assurance, and the will to harness all her abilities are more evident and pronounced. For this reason, the representatives of the women's movements and associations affiliated with the F.I.D.F. found in the environment of Beijing confirmation of the validity of their ideals and the possibility of realizing them. This facilitated the work of the Council, which was called to discuss very complex situations. Indeed, improving the international atmosphere does not diminish; instead, it increases the necessity and importance of the activities of national women's organizations and the international federation.²³⁶

The main themes of the congress are then outlined: now that the fear of war following the end of the Korean conflict and that in Indochina seems to have eased the concerns of a global conflict, it is possible, it is said, to focus more on issues of women's emancipation. This emerged both from Cotton's and Angiola Minella – the WIDF general secretary – speech and was reaffirmed in the intervention of women from decolonized countries where the fear of conflicts was still present, making the debate – is declared

²³⁶ Original text: «Questa volta abbiamo voltato le spalle alla vecchia Europa e siamo andate lontano, nel Paese di più antica civiltà, *nel più nuovo Paese del mondo, la Cina* [corsivo mio]. La Federazione Democratica Internazionale Femminile, che nei dieci anni dalla sua fondazione aveva sempre tenuto le sue riunioni in varie città europee, ha convocato il suo Consiglio a Pechino. Nessun luogo poteva essere più adatto a significare la funzione mondiale che alla nostra Federazione compete oggi, in quanto essa raccoglie ed esprime l'immensa forza di rinnovamento rappresentata dai movimenti femminili. La donna cinese ha oggi più vivo il senso della libertà, proprio perché l'abisso che la separa dalla schiavitù del passato è più profondo che per l'uomo. In lei appare più evidente, più scoperto, lo slancio verso l'avvenire, la fiducia, la sicurezza di sé, la volontà di impegnare tutte le sue capacità. Per questo, le rappresentanti dei movimenti ed associazioni femminili aderenti alla F.I.D.F. hanno trovato nell'ambiente di Pechino la conferma della validità dei loro ideali, della possibilità di realizzarli. E questo, penso, ha facilitato i lavori del Consiglio, il quale era chiamato a discutere situazioni assai complesse. Il miglioramento dell'atmosfera internazionale, infatti, non diminuisce, anzi accresce la necessità e l'importanza dell'attività delle organizzazioni femminili nazionali e della federazione internazionale.» Bergamaschi, Elsa. "Incontro di Pechino." (Meeting in Beijing). *ND* 23 (June 3, 1956), 21.

– «[...] extremely interesting due to the diversity and variety of situations and experiences expressed, particularly regarding the sensitive issue of the ongoing conflict between Arab countries – Egypt, Jordan, Syria – and the State of Israel.»²³⁷ It emerges that achieving political stability is the basis for facilitating women's rights. This is well expressed in the testimony shared by a delegate from the first women's association formed in the colonial territory of Cameroon (at that time, until 1960, divided between French and British colonial rule) regarding the message issued by the WIDF on World Children's Day, June 1:

“What is the significance of a Children's Day?” A woman from Cameroon asked, disheartened, at the start of the discussion, representing the newly formed association in her African country for the first time. “What for? In our country, 50% of children die, and the others have no schools... what can we do?”²³⁸

This brief testimony illustrates the contrasts and conflicts between women from different social conditions and political contexts and the acknowledgment – by Bergamaschi, and by other delegates – that the struggle for women's emancipation could not be separated from a broader geopolitical effort to support colonial countries in their fight for independence. This theme, as mentioned, was also addressed in one of the resolutions and an appeal launched by the council, revealing attention and will of sharing the concern of “sisters” from colonial countries. The disposition of the wom-

²³⁷ Original text: «[...] di un estremo interesse per la diversità e la varietà delle situazioni e delle esperienze che vi si sono espresse, per i risultati raggiunti su questioni assai delicate quale quella del conflitto in corso fra i Paesi arabi, Egitto, Giordania, Siria,, e lo Stato di Israele.» (Ibid.) A conflict that is still partly open nowadays and which would have soon been enhanced by the Suez Crisis.

²³⁸ Original text: “A che vale una giornata dell’infanzia?”: disse, sfiduciata, all’inizio della discussione, una donna del Kamerun, che per la prima volta rappresentava la sola associazione appena costituita nel suo paese africano. “A che serve? Da noi, il 50% dei bambini muore, gli altri non hanno scuole... che fare?”» (Ibid.).

en's movement to accept the discontent of the representatives from colonial governments, and indeed to become their spokespersons on the global stage, leads the Cameroonian representative to change her attitude towards the topics – support for women's emancipation and advocacy for children – discussed during the council meeting: «We have not yet done anything because we are few and did not know what and how to do it... But we must start doing all we can right away, and in the meantime, we must grow in number and unite. Then we will obtain medicines and schools...»

Another account of the Council was provided by Maria Maddalena Rossi, who described her journey to Kunming.²³⁹ This account, more of a travel narrative, is relevant to creating the imagery of China as a model for women and beyond. Rossi meticulously describes the geographical features of the city, renowned as the "city of eternal spring" for the Chinese, as it is situated on a hillside, on a plateau, surrounded by lush nature and fields cultivated with "four harvests," characterized by a mild climate. She also notes the city's "semi-colonial" past, as Kunming had been one of the centers for opium poppy cultivation and was significantly affected by this issue, which was reportedly eradicated only a few years after liberation. The confidence displayed in describing the PRC's geography, history, and present comes from the fact that, as a friend of the people of China, this was her second visit to the communist country. As a welcomed guest, she could uniquely experience the country. Her first opportunity to visit the PRC was during the journey she undertook in 1955 as the leader of a UDI delegation, invited by the ACWDF. Another element that characterizes Rossi's narrative is the use of the category of "semi-colony," drawn from the Leninist philosophical tradition and widely employed by Mao to describe China's

²³⁹ Rossi, Maria Maddalena. "Il paese dell'eterna primavera." (The Land of Eternal Spring). *ND* 26 (June 1956), 17.

condition—a term that thus gained broad circulation within that ideological context. Nowadays, historiography emphasizes the highly political stakes still associated with this concept, which ultimately does not formally reflect China's actual status during the colonial period, as the country in fact retained its independence (Yang 2019; Zeller 2021).

Conclusions

The background for the development of maternal discourses shows how the post-war geopolitical context, particularly the end of the Korean War and the easing of international tensions, created fertile ground for the development of maternalist discourses within the international women's movement. Maternalism, presented as a strategy to expand women's rights and foster international diplomacy, positioned women as central figures in peacebuilding efforts. This discourse strategically utilized traditional notions of motherhood while reconfiguring them within a socialist feminist framework. The intertwining of maternal and anti-imperialist narratives was used to forge transnational alliances, demonstrating how the politics of peace and human rights were intrinsically connected to women's roles as mothers and protectors of future generations.

The geopolitical framework was crucial after the end of the Korean War. The death of Stalin in 1953 and the conclusion of the Korean War in July marked a pivotal moment in international relations. This period saw the rise of China as a significant global player, particularly in socialist and decolonial movements, as its victory over U.S. forces in Korea shifted its position on the world stage. This new geopolitical reality allowed for an expansion of international women's diplomacy, with organiza-

tions like the ACWDF playing a leading role in transcultural exchanges. These developments, however, were framed against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts, such as the Indochina War and the Algerian War, which extended the global peace movement's focus.

The research has shown how organizations like the WIDF adapted to these geopolitical shifts, balancing the drive for peace with the growing anti-imperialist sentiment. The internationalism promoted by the women's movement at this time, particularly through events like the World Congress of Women in 1953 and the World Congress of Mothers in 1955, reflected the broader goals of socialist diplomacy. These congresses facilitated transnational cooperation and the advancement of women's rights, but also exposed ideological divisions, particularly concerning the role of anti-imperialism within the peace movement.

In the Sino-Italian political situation, the relationship between Italy and China evolved. Italy's communist movement, under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti, adopted a stance of peaceful coexistence, in contrast to more revolutionary elements within the PCI. This "Italian way" of communism, focused on parliamentary engagement, mirrored broader shifts in international communism, including the rise of polycentrism. China, under Mao's leadership, capitalized on these changes, positioning itself as a central actor in global socialist and decolonial movements, and fostering alliances with newly independent countries. The ACWDF became a key player in these efforts, promoting global feminist interactions and establishing bilateral exchanges with Western European countries like Italy.

The post-Geneva Conference opening in 1954 represented a turning point for international diplomacy, fostering hopes for global peace and creating new opportunities

for collaboration between socialist and non-socialist countries. Women's organizations played a significant role in this period of détente, with figures like Gong Peng from China emerging as symbols of peace and diplomacy. The research has shown how these women's organizations, particularly the ACWDF and the UDI, used this moment to expand their influence and establish themselves as key players in global peace efforts.

The period following the Geneva Conference also witnessed the rise of a global women's diplomatic front. Women's delegations, such as those from Italy and China, became important vehicles for fostering transnational connections. These journeys not only strengthened political and economic relations but also affirmed women's status as independent political agents capable of transcending ideological divides. The success of these delegations was evident in events like the 1955 World Congress of Mothers, which led to the establishment of a Permanent International Committee of Mothers. This initiative underscored the strategic use of maternalist discourses to advance both feminist and anti-imperialist agendas.

The overarching atmosphere of global solidarity, fostered by maternal feminist bonds, enabled the women's movement to transcend differences and collaborate across diverse geopolitical, religious, and political contexts. Women were united under the shared goals of peace, motherhood, and sisterhood, leading to some of the most significant and impactful encounters, often facilitated through political visits and delegations. This unique historical moment, shaped by favorable geopolitical circumstances and years of groundwork to strengthen women's alliances, positioned women activists as not only advocates but also skilled cooperation specialists and diplomats. These women played a pivotal role in advancing their countries' diplomatic efforts,

as demonstrated by the three key delegations between Italian and Chinese women from 1954 to 1956.

These bilateral exchanges, alongside the global events discussed earlier, were a vital part of the extensive efforts that laid the foundation for the optimism and collaborative spirit displayed at the 1956 WIDF Council in Beijing. This meeting highlighted the growing strength and influence of women's movements across diverse political landscapes, just before the global context began to shift dramatically later that same year.

The findings of this research highlight the intricate connections between geopolitical developments and the evolution of maternalist discourses within the international women's movement. The events of the 1950s, particularly the Korean War, the Geneva Conference, and the rise of China as a global leader, provided a backdrop for the strategic repositioning of women's activism on the global stage. Through transnational alliances, women's organizations like the WIDF, ACWDF, and UDI sought to redefine the roles of women in both domestic and international politics, using the language of motherhood to frame their struggles for peace, human rights, and social justice.

The legacy of these maternalist strategies continues to resonate, as they laid the groundwork for new forms of feminist diplomacy that extended beyond the traditional confines of gender and national borders. The creative reimagining of women's roles during this period not only challenged prevailing political structures but also set the stage for the continued evolution of global feminist interactions in the decades to come. The maternalist discourse, with its focus on peace and protection, remains a

powerful tool in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and human rights on the global stage.

3. Women Models: Mediating the Communist Dream of Liberation

3.1 A Breach in the Curtain: The Fragile Expansion of Sino-European Contacts

3.1.1 Developing Postwar Women's Delegation

In early June 1954, the UDI headquarters received the visit of the first Indian delegation to the country, which was also the first Asian women's delegation to visit Italy. Indian representatives included Violet Alva, a member of the Indian Parliament, Piroja Wadia, and Ali Zaheer. The three were returning from a trip to the USSR, a country which impressed them, as emerged from the comment of Piroja Wadia:

In the short weeks I spent in the USSR, the women's sense of responsibility and confidence struck me. They work in every field, and it is no surprise that they defend peace as mothers and wives. Only peace can protect all the great and beautiful things they are building.²⁴⁰

The USSR delegation's visit model effectively developed fruitful bilateral relations in this phase. It consisted of a specific structure designed to present a particular image of the socialist country, intended to leave a positive impression on visitors and ensure they returned with clear-cut testimonies of their visit to be shared home. As Paul

²⁴⁰ Original text: «Nelle brevi settimane trascorse nell'URSS sono rimasta colpita dal senso di responsabilità e dalla sicurezza delle donne. Esse lavorano in ogni campo e non deve sorprendere che come madri, come mogli esse difendano la pace. Solo la pace può proteggere tutto ciò che di grande, di bello esse stanno costruendo» in G.D.P. "Donne nuove della vecchia India" (*New Women of Old India*). ND 26 (June 27, 1954), 6.

Hollander (1981) aptly described, they were true “political pilgrimages,” settled to create confidence in the successful outcome of the socialist project.

The USSR was also the first to lead in opening female exchanges outside their country.²⁴¹ Soviet women had already visited Italy in April 1947: the delegation visited the Italian capital, where, during this post-war political openness, they were even received by the DC Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi. The delegation included Vera Fomina, a professor of philosophy at Moscow University and head of the delegation, Nina Giavaschisvili, a doctor and member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Eugenia Gigulenko, an aviator from the only female regiment of the USSR and an war hero, Polina Kesakeva, Tatiana Ivanova, and Nadia Roscina, a young worker.²⁴² Later, the delegation toured various Italian cities, where local UDI delegates welcomed them.

These women represent another world, and their delegation is a fragment of that country where women do not know social inequality and poverty, whose lives carry all the allure of a marvelous mystery. It was only natural that we bombarded them with questions, eager to hear new and unknown stories from their voices, confirmations of what we know about their existence, which we observe with admiration.²⁴³

²⁴¹ On this see Varga-Harris (2022).

²⁴² In Rinaldi, Dina. “Da Mosca a Roma sei donne sovietiche” (From Moscow to Rome, Six Soviet Women). *ND* 6 (April 15-30, 1947), 8.

²⁴³ Original text: «Queste donne rappresentano un altro mondo, e la loro delegazione è un frammento di quel paese dove la donna non conosce disuguaglianza sociale e miseria, la cui vita ha tutto il fascino di un interrogativo meraviglioso. Ed è naturale che le assalissimo di domande, che volessimo sentire dalla loro viva voce notizie nuove e ignote, conferme di quello che sappiamo della loro esistenza a cui guardiamo con ammirazione».



Figure 3.1. Russian women's delegation visited «...a sort of creche» in the presence of municipal councilor Annaluisa Cerqueti, and Mayor Fastiggi. In the center, the aviator Eugenia Gigulenko is holding a kid (UDI Pesaro, Appendix 1.)

This same trust is evident in the reports of the extensive Italian delegation's trip to the USSR, which took place two years later in November 1949 on the occasion of the WIDF Council in Moscow. Enthusiastic accounts, such as those by the socialist Rosetta Longo,²⁴⁴ highlight the Soviet literary heritage; or by Ada Alessandrini,²⁴⁵ a spokesperson for the socialist Catholic wing of the federation.²⁴⁶

This search for models began with the Soviet example but also sought "reflections" elsewhere, further afield.²⁴⁷ As already discussed in the previous chapter, after the

²⁴⁴ Longo, Rosetta. "I libri sono i migliori amici dei cittadini sovietici." (Books are the best friends of Soviet citizen). *ND* 50 (December 25, 1949), 13.

²⁴⁵ Alessandrini, Ada. "Discorso chiaro sulla religione." (Clear Discourse on Religion). *ND* 1 (January, 1950), 13.

²⁴⁶ Other articles of this sort is "Studiano Dante gli studenti sovietici" (Soviet Students Study Dante), by the socialist lawyer Elena Gatti Caporaso, on *ND* 2 (1950, 13), which focuses on Soviet schooling. Additionally, there are reports from UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi, such as "Lieve Ulanova come una farfalla." (Lieve Ulanova Like a Butterfly) in *ND* 5 (1950, 11), which covers Russian ballet.

²⁴⁷ On the inspiration constituted by state-socialist women during this period see Gradska (2020).

Geneva conference, the women's movement highlighted the voices of emerging Asian powers and their "new" women. In this context, Chinese women, who had already aligned with Soviet women on several occasions as their "second," became more closely known.

3.1.2 The creation of the imagery of the new communist China in *Noi Donne*

People's China is indeed present in various articles on the main UDI media through firsthand accounts of journalists, correspondents from the communist country, and participants in international delegations. One of the earliest first-hand accounts of the PRC is that of Lidia Maiorelli, – then Secretary in charge of the Italian Girls' Association (CIA 1950) – one of the two Italian representatives from the World Federation of Democratic Youth delegation visiting China in early September 1950. Maiorelli describes her encounter with the faraway country:

We all tried to imagine what we would see and encounter in the coming days in this fabulous country of the Far East, so little known to the world's people. In my mind, I reviewed the comic books and cartoons that Italian children read and certain Hollywood films, which, to justify colonial oppression in China and to ensure that people did not question the injustice of this oppression, portrayed the Chinese people as both cunning and evil. The images of Chinese people with

grim faces stabbing passersby in the dark corners of the streets, or those of Chinese women with sharp nails ready to poison for revenge, are well known to our people.²⁴⁸

After dispelling prejudices about China, the report continues with a description of the new country the delegation encountered upon arrival. While visiting the northwestern area, the WFDY delegation was warmly welcomed by the Chinese branch, greeted with flowers, songs, and a warmth that «needed no interpreter».²⁴⁹ The account describes the delegation's visit, led by a 20-year-old tractor driver, to a collective farm, where praises were sung for the increase in production. Maiorelli then returns to describe the Chinese people, stating that their reality is in stark contrast with the image by which they are viewed in Italy:

[...] simple, modest, strong because long struggles have tempered it; it is a new people that redeems itself from oppression and exploitation under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, building a new society and freeing itself from poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, and obscurantism. In short, it is a people who have freed themselves from American imperialist domination and are building their lives, progressing rapidly, almost visibly.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Original text: «Tutti cercavamo di immaginare ciò che avremmo visto e incontrato nei prossimi giorni, in questo favoloso Paese dell'estremo Oriente tanto poco conosciuto dai popoli del mondo. Nella mia mente passavo in rassegna i giornaletti, i fumetti che leggono i ragazzi italiani e certi films hollywoodiani, che per giustificare l'oppressione coloniale in Cina e per far sì che i popoli non si ponessero il problema dell'ingiustizia di questa oppressione, presentavano il popolo cinese come furbo e malvagio allo stesso tempo. Sono ben note alle nostre genti le figure di cinesi dallo sguardo torvo che pugnalanano i passanti negli angoli bui della strada, o quelle di donne cinesi dalle unghie aguzze pronte ad avvelenare per vendetta.» Maiorelli, Lidia, "Tsi-Tsi-Hao prima tappa" (Tsi-Tsi-Hao First Stop). *ND* 43 (October 29, 1950), 11.

²⁴⁹ The theme of the breaking down of language barriers in the encounter with the warmth of a festive crowd and the kindness shown by the hosts is found in many of the trip reports.

²⁵⁰ Original text: «[...] semplice, modesto, forte perché temprato nelle lunghe lotte; è un popolo nuovo che si riscatta dall'oppressione e dallo sfruttamento sotto la guida del Partito Comunista Cinese, esso costruisce una società nuova e si libera dalla miseria, dell'analfabetismo, dall'arretratezza e dall'oscurantismo. È, insomma, un popolo che si è liberato dalla dominazione dell'imperialismo americano e costruisce la sua vita, progredendo rapidamente, quasi a vista d'occhio.»

The theme of the Chinese anti-imperialist struggle and the liberation from colonial ties had been present in *Noi Donne* since the reportage on the 1949 Asian Women's Conference held in Beijing. The article by Lina Fibbi, then secretary of the WIDF in Paris, stresses the symbolic and practical value of the Conference, described as a pivotal moment to concretize an imaginary of equality for women's population represented by the fierce presence of 165 delegates.²⁵¹ The improvement of women's rights and role in society, is not conceptualized as an end. Still, as a means to advance the protection of children, a purpose is ultimately identified as the true root of the women's anti-colonial struggle. The struggle for equity can be pursued following the example set primarily by the USSR and now by new Asian socialist bastions, China, Mongolia, and Korea.

How can we not believe, then, in the fervor, the enthusiasm with which Chinese, Mongolian, Korean women, etc., fight with all their people for national independence? How can we not understand with what joy and tenacity the Soviet women of Asia participated in the socialist construction of their government, which, above all else, works for children's happiness?²⁵²

Soon after, in the UDI magazine appears an article dedicated to New China's political reforms, specifically on their impact on women.²⁵³ Specific topic is the dismantling

²⁵¹ She stresses the broad regional area represented at the Congress, including delegates from the Soviet Republics of Central Asia, China, Mongolia, Burma, Siam, Malaysia, India, Iran, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Indonesia, and several other countries from Europe, Africa, and America (ibid.).

²⁵² Original text: «Come non credere allora al fervore, all'entusiasmo col quale le donne cinesi, mongole, coreane, ecc., si battono con tutto il loro popolo per l'indipendenza nazionale? Come non comprendere con quale gioia e tenacia le donne sovietiche dell'Asia parteciparono all'opera di costruzione socialista del loro governo, che prima di ogni cosa lavora per la felicità dell'infanzia.»

²⁵³ Colorni, Giorgio. "Storia triste e lieta di 1250 donne cinesi." (Sad and happy story of 1,250 Chinese women). *ND* 15 (April 9, 1950), 11.

of the Beijing brothel and the reeducation efforts of the prostitutes employed there.²⁵⁴

The main protagonist of this renewal process in this phase is Song Qingling, presented to the Italian public in the series *Brave Women* (the only Asian alongside Pak Den Ae).²⁵⁵

Furthermore, the image of the new China is presented to the Italian women's audience through the cultural products produced by the socialist regime. Specifically, the films presented at the Festival of Democratic Cinema in Karlovy Vary, including *Daughter of China* (中国女儿) by Ling Zifeng (凌子风) and Zhai Qiang (翟强).²⁵⁶

Reports on the communist country continued in the early 1950s. In 1953, was published a photo report of the communist government by the French journalist Hélène Pascal.²⁵⁷ The report focuses on childcare, describing an overall image of China as highly safe for the female population and its offspring – contrasting with the problematic life of Chinese women portrayed in the novel *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck. These women are guaranteed proper care for their children's upbringing and education and are promised a future of prosperity and peace, as shown by the cover photo of the reportage (the only one in color), which once again depicts the image of two children with a dove.

²⁵⁴ These women will later be portrayed in the socialist film *Yanhua nü'er fanshen ji* 烟花女儿翻身记 (The Liberation of the Prostitutes) del 1950, directed by Tang Mo 唐漠 and Yu Lan 于蓝.

²⁵⁵ “Donne coraggiose.” (Brave Women). *ND* 10 (March 8, 1952), 7.

²⁵⁶ Giordano, Maria Stella. “Films cinesi al festival cinematografico di Karlovy Vary.” (Chinese films at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival). *ND* 34 (September 2, 1950), 16.

²⁵⁷ Pascal, Hélène. “La buona terra” (The Good Earth). *ND*, 35 (September 9), 16-7.



Figures 3.2; 3.3. Left: Cover of the article by Helene Pascal; Right: Poster by Que Wen 關文, titled 'Women reai heping.' 我們熱愛和平 (We Warmly Love Peace), 1952 (Chinese-posters 1952).

Knowledge of the new China is also promoted during this period through original cultural works by Italian authors, starting with the long novel *The Bride of Shanghai* (La sposa di Shanghai) by Felice Chilanti.²⁵⁸ It is interesting to dwell on the reasons the author claims led to the writing of the novel.

²⁵⁸ The novel was published in installments starting from issue ND 10 of March 7, 1954. Chilanti was a correspondent first in Korea, during the war, and then in China for *Paese Sera*, an afferent magazine of the communist horizon born in 1948. Chilanti is known in Italy as the first journalist to cover the Mafia (Dovizio 2019), little attention has been paid in academic circles to his long-standing interest in the PRC, to which he dedicated the book *La Cina fa parte del mondo* (1954) (China is Part of the World) and *Lettera da Pechino* (1982) (Letter from Peeking), dedicated to his wife Viviana, who died in the Chinese capital two years earlier; later buried in the cemetery of revolutionary heroes Ba Bao Shan (Babao Shan Geming Gongmu 八宝山革命公墓) (Bertacchini 1988).

I wrote the story of Nai Nai because I promised Nai Nai I would write it one evening in the city where she lives. I did meet “The Bride of Shanghai”; she lives in one of the new neighborhoods that have sprung up in her city for the workers; they are neighborhoods of red stone, laid on bare earth, which at sunset appear like flames. Sometimes, I think I didn’t write an honest novel: it is, in fact, a relieved reality that my imagination only reached and understood and that I tried to tell the Italian women in the best way I could. This is what is lovely about Nai Nai’s life: she lived as a young girl in a feudal world and can today develop her personality in a modern society of free men. I promised her I would tell, in Italy, how she won her “struggle for life.” And so my novel for Noi Donne was born.²⁵⁹

It is a story of female emancipation and personal triumph, set against the backdrop of a future filled with new opportunities ensured by communist China.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Original text: «Ho scritto la storia di Nai Nai perché ho promesso a Nai Nai di scriverla, una sera, nella città dove ella vive. Ho conosciuto davvero ‘La Sposa di Shanghai’, vive in uno dei nuovi quartieri sorti nella sua città, per gli operai; sono quartieri di pietra rossa, posati sulla nuda terra, che al calar del sole appaiono simili a fiammate. A volte penso di non aver scritto un vero e proprio romanzo: si tratta infatti di realtà rivissuta che la mia immaginazione ha soltanto raggiunto, capito, e che ho cercato di raccontare alle italiane nel modo migliore che mi è stato possibile. Questo vi è di meraviglioso nella vita di Nai Nai: ha vissuto fanciulla in un mondo feudale e può oggi sviluppare la sua personalità in una società moderna, di uomini liberi. Io le ho promesso di raccontare in Italia come ella ha vinto la sua ‘lotta per la vita’. E così è nato il mio romanzo per Noi Donne.» Chilanti, Felice. “La sposa di Shanghai.” (The Bride of Shanghai). *ND* 6 (February 7, 1954), 3.

²⁶⁰ This is also the theme of a short two-page photo novel by Wang Shun Yong, *Un amore tra i mandorli in in fiore* (A Love among the almond blossoms), published in issue no 17 of *ND* on April 25, 1954. It is a brief story told in the first person by the protagonist, the first in her village to have a free marriage and to choose her own husband, after the enactment of the marriage law, and concludes with prospects of future prosperity and happiness for her children. «When I see Lu and Shao tumbling around the house, I feel moved at the thought that their lives will be even freer and more beautiful than the, albeit happy, one that Jen and I have already achieved. Our story continues with our children, who now represent the new and free China.» The centrality of the correlation between the liberation of Chinese women and the care of children emerges through various reports, such as the second one by WFDY delegate Lidia Maiorelli, “Ore serene per i bambini cinesi” (Serene Hours for Chinese Children).

3.1.3 Chinese interest in Western Europe: seeking partnerships

The first bilateral ACWDF delegation to Western Europe occurred in February 1954²⁶¹ in the United Kingdom at the invitation of the President of the British Women's Congress. Despite the diplomatic relevance, the journey had little resonance within China. The ACWDF activists flew to London after a visit to the USSR led by Cao Mengjun, Secretary of the Secretariat of the ACWDF, who visited London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds, England. Political leaders of the British Women's Congress, the UK-China Friendship Association, the Committee for the Defense UK-China Friendship Association, and the Committee for the Defense of Peace met with the delegation (ILD 1995, 19; De Giorgi 2014, 696).²⁶² This trip appears to be purely concerned with the association's international policy, not the national one, as it was not publicized in the ACWDF magazine except as one of several trips made to strengthen international ties.²⁶³

A second ACWDF delegation to Western Europe occurred in the same year, in December 1954. This time the Chinese women activists visited France, led by Zhang Yun, Vice Chairman of the ACWDF, and included Lei Jie, Associate Professor at Beijing College of Political Science and Law; Long Shijia, Professor at Peking University; women's worker Huo Yun; and Zou Dexin, editor of *China Women*. They conducted a ten-day goodwill visit to France. The article dedicated to this trip reflects the determination and confidence of the French people in opposing the revival of

²⁶¹ In August 1954, British Labour Party member Mrs. E. Summerskill visited the ACWDF. With the encouragement of these visits, Chinese women sent delegations to Britain and France later that year – becoming the first Chinese delegations to visit these countries. In April 1955, a British women's delegation headed by Mrs. Freda Graham-Boff, Honorary Secretary of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Secretary-General of the National Nursery Association, visited China. In September and October of the same year, a Belgian women's delegation visited China and was received by Song Qingling, Vice Chairwoman of the NPC Standing Committee and Honorary President of the ACWDF, and Vice Premier Chen Yi (ACWFRI 2017).

²⁶² On the diplomatic exchange between the PRC and Western Europe see also Romano and Zanier (2017).

²⁶³ Deng, Yingchao 鄧穎超. "Jinian sanba guoji funü jie." 紀念三八國際婦女節 (Commemorating the 'March 8th' International Women's Day), *ZGFN* 3 (March 1954), 4.

German militarism.²⁶⁴ This delegation attracted more interest from Chinese women's media compared to the previous one. This is likely due to the fame of the UFF, a founding member of WIDF, and the involvement of WIDF president Eugenie Cotton in the journey.

In this period, the prominent socialist cultural references indeed came from the Soviet world, but the PRC rapidly advanced its cultural proposals as well. This was more evident in the regional relations with other Asian countries, centered on anti-colonial principles. Looking at those with India, for instance, since 1951, mainly through the founding of the Sino-Indian Friendship Association, there have been exchanges in this regard. In capitalist Western Europe, the countries prioritized for establishing relations were those that had recognized the People's Republic of China, such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. In this sense, gaining recognition through cultural relations with countries that had not yet established formal ties with China was crucial. Italy also fits into this context.²⁶⁵

The first international delegations that took place after China's involvement in the Korean conflict – during a time when trade with China was subject to an embargo – are described by Capisani (2013, 421) as subjected to even more restrictions than those with the Soviet Union. In the Italian context, however, there were efforts to go beyond Atlanticist limits and open up trade with the People's Republic of China due to the potential this new market represented. These initiatives were driven by private entrepreneurs, the first of whom was the socialist Dino Gentili, one of the closest

²⁶⁴ Zou, Dexin 鄒得心. "Cong bali guilai." 從巴黎歸來 (Returning from Paris). *ZGFN* 1 (January 28, 1955), 23.

²⁶⁵ Yang (2020, 24) reports on the exchange between socialist leader Pietro Nenni and Zhou Enlai in which this aim is explicitly expressed. Furthermore, this becomes evident from the documentation on the Cultural Counter for interactions with China (De Giorgi 2014).

collaborators of socialist Pietro Nenni, among the founders of the World Peace Council, in foreign policy oriented towards diplomatic and therefore commercial recognition with the PRC (Meneguzzi Rostagni 2014, 20). He started trade relations with China as early as August 1952, however, he soon realized that government support was needed to expand trade between the two countries.

Political ties undermined the initiative of some members of the leftist realm, who founded, at the end of 1953, the Centre for Economic and Cultural Relations with China (Centro per le relazioni economic e culturali con la Cina, hereafter China Center).²⁶⁶ The aim of the center was to encourage exchanges with the country and mutual understanding between China and Italy, presenting itself as an apolitical entity. It was precisely the Centro Cina that supported several cultural delegations of intellectuals to the People's Republic of China (Samarani 2014a), at a time when China had assumed a new international position following its prominent role at the Geneva Conference in 1954. Moreover, these visits had a highly symbolic value for Chinese diplomacy, strongly backed by Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai and the establishment of a series of ad hoc structures to facilitate and promote exchanges both within and beyond the socialist horizon, formal and informal (people's diplomacy), between 1952 and 1954 (De Giorgi 2014, 122-5). Cultural delegations, a crucial tool for fostering a positive image of the People's Republic, flourished from 1954 to 1960, with at least 20 such delegations during this period.²⁶⁷ Tendentially divided by areas of specialization, the delegations involved scientists, doctors, artists, journalists, politicians, and female activists. The visits of the delegations were usually centered

²⁶⁶ In fact, the composition of the centre saw in its ranks intellectuals from various backgrounds, but tending to the left, including Ferruccio Parri, Piero Calamandrei (together in the Popular Unity movement), Sergio Segre of the PCI and university professors, artists and intellectuals (Samarani 2014a, 95).

²⁶⁷ On Italian-Chinese exchanges in those years, see, among others, De Giorgi (2014), Samarani and De Giorgi (2011), Pini (2011), Marinelli and Andornino (2014).

around key locations in the development of the People's Republic, from the capital, Beijing, to Shanghai, Hangzhou, Canton, and even Shenyang. They also extended to villages, where the results of rural collectivization efforts were showcased. From these initial exchanges and the circulation of Chinese literary works in Italy, and vice versa, more structured activities began, such as art exhibitions, the direct sale of Chinese literature, translated into Italian, for the general public, and more recreational activities, like the circus, which performed in several European cities, including Italy, in 1956. This cultural diffusion through exchanges, from a particular perspective, crystallized Chinese identity for diplomatic purposes, though with evident contradictions.

Particular resonance had a cultural delegation of Italian intellectuals, which occurred between September 24 and October 24, 1955, led by Piero Calamandrei. The delegation was part of the Italian government's moment of openness to relations with the People's Republic of China, as Calamandrei himself declared (1956, 16): «Continuing to ignore China, as the Italian governments have done for the past ten years, is madness».²⁶⁸

The delegates' experiences were collected in the special issue of the magazine he led, *Il Ponte* ("The Bridge"), published in April 1956.²⁶⁹ The special issue, over seven hundred pages long, also contains participants' contributions to other delegations to China, such as those by Ada Prospero and Ada Alessandrini, who participated in the first women's delegation of the previous year. The importance of cultural changes like this one, of artists and writers, were part of what De Giorgi (2014, 127) defined

²⁶⁸ Original text: «Continuare a ignorare la Cina, come hanno fatto in questi dieci anni i governi italiani, è una follia».

²⁶⁹ The delegation's long-term impact is also evident from the fact that parts of the resulting book have been republished, both in Italian, by Silvia Calamandrei (2020a) (Piero Calamandrei's niece), and in Chinese, by the Italianist Sun Yanhong (2020), on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between China and Italy in 2020.

as the construction of a «literary and artistic cultural pantheon of the socialist and pacifist world,» which aimed primarily to present a high-level culture in contrast to mass culture, seen as a symbol of U.S. capitalist immorality. In this perspective, bilateral relations focused on women were also developed.

3.2 Back to the future: Italian women visiting the ambassadors of Liberation

3.2.1 The first Italian women's delegation to the PRC



Figure 3.4. UDI Delegation 1954: Bottom, from left: Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and Ada Alessandrini. Above, from right: Ilia Bocci, Cao Mengjun, Rosetta Fazio Longo, Ada Prospero Gobetti (UDI Siena, Bocci, A-10).

As observed in the previous chapter, ties with China intensified before the Geneva Conference, which followed the World Congress of Women in June 1953. The expansion of bilateral contacts after Congress was concretized in the form of delegation exchanges, representing the first direct contacts after the foundation of the PRC.

The organization of the first travel is made upon the initiative of the UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi, as emerges in a letter sent by Zhang Yun (章蕴), Vice President of the ACWDF, to Rossi, on August 17, 1953 (ACUDI 14, 67-1). The message mentions that «due to technical difficulties,» they would not be able to fulfill Rossi's request – formulated precisely during the World Congress of Women in Copenhagen – to host an Italian delegation for that year's anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Zhang also added that the UDI president's interest would not be ignored and would be kept in mind for the future, in fact, the first UDI trip to China took place the following year.²⁷⁰

The UDI delegation's official invitation came from Cai Chang via a telegram dated July 30, 1954. The ACWDF leader invited seven activists for a three-week stay to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the founding of the PRC, specifying that the ACWDF would cover all expenses (ACUDI 16, 77-2). The delegates were selected by Nilde Iotti, head of the PCI Women's Commission, who signed as head of the organizing committee, and Carmen Zanti, from the Department of Management and Education (Ufficio Quadri e Scuola). Among those invited to join the delegation were Simona Mafai from the Women's Association of Messina, Eros Manni from the Sicilian Women's Association, Gisella Signori from the UDI branch in Ravenna, and the farmer Ottavia Giolito, who had been recommended by the PCI section of Asti

²⁷⁰ Further evidence of Italian women's interest in China can also be found in a correspondence between the central UDI and the UDI Siena, in the person of Ilia Coppi, on October 6, 1953, who reports the organisation of a conference on China to be hosted by Monica Felton, a former member of the WIDF commission in Korea, entitled 'For World Peace the People's Republic of China is Recognised', (ACUDI 14, 67-1).

for her tireless work, described as “working like a man.” However, she was ultimately unable to travel due to delays in obtaining her passport (ACUDI 16, 77-2).

It must be clarified whether the organization involved the China Centre, a crucial reality in establishing relations with the PRC at a time when Sino-Italian relations ought to develop on an informal basis (Samarani 2014a). The UDI archive documentation doesn’t provide precise indications of the mediation behind this trip. The only document evidencing a mediation reality preserved in the file is a pamphlet from the Association of International Trade Operators in Rome (Associna), which reports speeches given in October 1954 by Senators Giovanni Battista Bertone (DC) and Egisto Cappellini (PCI) about the benefits of opening trade with China.

The final delegation was also composed of five high-profile activists on an intellectual and political level: Ada Marchesini Gobetti, Ada Alessandrini, Rosetta Fazio Longo, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, and Ilia Bocci. Despite their differing personal positions – particularly Ada Alessandrini, who was Catholic, while the others were Communists and Socialists – they were all women who had played a leading role in the anti-fascist resistance, engaged both in the peace mobilization front and in women's emancipation, also through their activism in the WIDF.

The delegates arrived in China on September 29 and stayed for about a month, returning between the end of October and the beginning of November.²⁷¹ The delegates' journey included several stops, which Maria Antonietta Macciocchi described in great detail in her diary, capturing the exotic charm of each location. The delegation departed from Rome on the morning of September 23 for a five-day journey – making stops in Frankfurt, Berlin, Minsk, Moscow, Kazan, Ekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk), Omsk,

²⁷¹ The exact return date is not preserved in the UDI documentation, nor in the travel reports. We can assume to have been at the end of October, given that the first travel report published by Macciocchi in *ND* was already published on October 24.

Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Ulan Bator, and Sainshand – finally arriving in Beijing around 4:30 PM local time (FG 25, 198). Despite the short (four-hour) stop in Minsk, Lidia Petrova and Maria Ovsiannikova, leaders of the ACSW, greeted the delegation (Macciocchi 1954).²⁷² The long journey was filled with descriptions of steppe landscapes, the taiga, the Gobi Desert, and finally, the low mountain ranges of Hebei, the Great Wall, and the lush territories with a continental climate. The lengthy trip was punctuated by stops at recently constructed airports, with safety conditions very different from today's.²⁷³ Upon arriving in Beijing, the delegation was greeted by a band playing the Chinese national anthem and ACWDF president Cai Chang.

On the third day of their stay, the delegation attended a reception organized for the 5th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, where they met Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. «[...] the extraordinary leaders of the Chinese government still seem to us like something unreal, part of a dream, where certain aspects of our extraordinary journey remain wrapped, too beautiful and grand to seem real. Yet it was so.»²⁷⁴ However, the Italian delegation did not receive the same interest from the Chinese politicians.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. “Abbiamo brindato con Ciù-En-Lai.” (We Toasted with Zhou Enlai). *ND* 42 (October 24, 1954), 5-7.

²⁷³ Macciocchi's notes an averted plane crash involving an aircraft that took off shortly before theirs from Ulan Bator (Ibid).

²⁷⁴ Original text: «[...] gli straordinari capi del governo cinese, questo ancora ci sembra far parte dell'irrealta, del sogno in cui certi aspetti del nostro straordinario viaggio sono ancora avvolti, troppo belli e grandi per sembrare veri. Eppure è stato così.» (ibid). It is interesting how, in Macciocchi's account, the excitement for the meeting with the Chinese leaders far surpasses that with the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, who was also present at the celebration.

²⁷⁵ As Macciocchi recounts, after greeting them, Zhou Enlai asked where the Indian delegates were and went over to toast with them. Similarly, the Italian delegation received only a brief mention in the report about the celebrations published in *ZGFN*. See “Women de guibin zai beijing.” 我們的貴賓在北京 (Our Distinguished Guests are in Beijing). *ZGFN* (October 1954), 20-2.

In Yang Nanying 杨南莺. *Forty Years of the All-China Women's Federation (1949-1989)*, the Italian visit is recalled with a brief note:

October 8: The All-China Democratic Women's Federation convened a forum to receive the women representatives from the delegations of Korea, Vietnam, Italy, and France who had come to attend the National Day celebrations in our country. The meeting was presided over by Vice Chairperson Zhang Yun. Deputy Secretary-General Luo Qiong introduced the situation of women's work in China.²⁷⁶

The Italians were part of seventy female foreign guests from fifteen countries who had arrived in Beijing, emphasizing the cultural variety: «They wore different clothes, spoke different languages, came from countries with different systems, and represented a broad range of backgrounds.»²⁷⁷ Among them were representatives from Burma, Indonesia, South Africa, Mongolia, Korea, Israel, India, Vietnam, Pakistan, Japan, Thailand, France, Lebanon, and a delegation of women from Ceylon, which is specified to be invited by the ACWDF and the Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (對外文協聯 *Duiwai Wenxie Lian*). Additionally, a representative from the WIDF was present, further emphasizing the federation's will to sponsor global solidarity among women. The celebration description in the ACWDF magazine stresses the variety of representatives prioritizing the interest in cultivating regional relations with Asian women, whose comments and impressions are carefully registered. Later, the importance of the anniversary ceremony was also highlighted in the speech by Xu Guangping, head of the Chinese delegation to the WIDF Council

²⁷⁶ Original text: «全国民主妇联召开座谈会，招待前来参加我国庆观礼的鲜、越南、意大利、法国代表团中的女代表。会议由章蕴副主席主持。罗琼副秘书长介绍了中国妇女的工作情况。」(Yang 1991, 67-68).

²⁷⁷ Original text: «她們穿着不同的服裝，說着不同的語言，來自不同制度的國家，代表着廣泛的階底。」(ibid.).

in Geneva in February 1955 (ACUDI 19, 84). In her remarks, Xu particularly emphasized the presence of Asian delegations, underlining the continuity with the effort to build a geopolitical regional network preceding the Bandung Afro-Asian conference of the following April.

After attending the National Day celebrations, the delegation was guided to visit significant sites such as the Guanying Reservoir, the National Cotton Factory No. 1 in Shanghai, state-owned farms, agricultural machinery factories, and a women's embroidery production cooperative. Their itinerary also included visits to libraries, the Forbidden City Museum, schools, nurseries, and health centers, where they interacted with workers' and farmers' homes. Several delegates, including the Italian ones, were invited to observe the inaugural session of the First National People's Congress and toured the Soviet Exhibition Hall. In addition to major urban and commercial centers, the Italian delegation visited various cities in the heavy industry district of Liaoning, from the provincial capital Shenyang (Mukden) to Fushun, known for its mineral resources, and Anshan, renowned for its steel industry.²⁷⁸ The representatives attended seminars on women's and children's issues, general elections, rural work, and marriage matters. Additionally, they had the opportunity to visit Beijing's renowned historical sites, immersing themselves in the city's rich cultural heritage.²⁷⁹ This gathering underscored the importance of international solidarity among women and the shared commitment to fostering understanding and cooperation across borders by the ACWDF.

As historian Laura De Giorgi (2017a, 697) pointed out, the ACWDF's goal was to allow comrades from capitalist countries to directly witness the progress made in the

²⁷⁸ "Donne nuove della Cina" (New Chinese Women). *L'Unità* (November 11, 1954).

²⁷⁹ "Women de guibin zai beijing." 我們的貴賓在北京 (Our Distinguished Guests are in Beijing). *ZGFN* 10 (October 1954), 20-2.

PRC regarding gender equality. To this end, starting in 1953, the ACWDF began publishing the English-language magazine *Women of China* to strengthen its international communication, supporting its intention to make women's emancipation a central theme of its global outreach. However, nothing could contribute more effectively to spreading a positive image of women's status in the new China – and of the PRC as a country rapidly advancing on social, cultural, and economic progress – than direct contact.

3.2.2 Back home: Narrating Chinese women

Upon the delegation's return, telegrams were promptly sent (on November 9) to the prominent Italian national newspapers to hold a press conference on the trip. The press meeting was to be held the following day under the title *New Women of the People's China* (Donne nuove della Cina popolare).²⁸⁰ As the left-wing newspaper *Paese Sera* highlighted, it delved on: «[...] many different topics were addressed – cultural, religious, artistic, agricultural, historical, economic, and political – and each one was covered with such clarity and expertise as to inspire envy in even the most well-informed professional ambassadors certainly.»²⁸¹ In addition to the press conference, the delegation organized a series of conferences in the following months. For December 1954 alone, 35 cities were listed, mainly located in north-central Italy, but including southern centers as well – including Palermo and Cagliari, Lecce, Reggio Calabria – and Trieste, which had only recently become part of Italian territory (ACUDI 16, 77-2).

²⁸⁰ The conference was held at the headquarters of the National Artistic Association in Via Margutta, 54 (ACUDI 16, 77-2).

²⁸¹ Original text: «[...] sono stati toccati molti argomenti diversi di carattere culturale, religioso, artistico, agrario, storico, economico e politico ed ognuno di essi con tanta chiarezza e competenza da fare certamente invidia al più informato degli ambasciatori di professione.» B. “Le grandi realizzazioni della Cina progressiva” (The Great Realizations of Progressive China). *Il Paese Sera* (November 7, 1954).

The bipolar horizon in which the UDI women's exchange is placed is reflected in the national newspapers' descriptions of this important journey, whose voices are sometimes diametrically opposed. The newspaper organ of the DC, 'Il Popolo' publishes *From home to the factory: Chinese women are nothing but slaves*,²⁸² while the leftist periodical *Il Paese* titles *The great achievements of progressive China*,²⁸³ and *Hymn to the regime of the four star*.²⁸⁴ The conservative and moderate daily, *Il Tempo*, comes out with the headline *The new Marco Polo explained to the people*,²⁸⁵ which, ridiculing in particular the account of Ada Gobetti, the head of the delegation, emphasizes how it was devoid of criticism. The mocking and reductive tone of the narrative leaves aside the question of human and women's rights, a crucial issue for the women's delegation. It completely ignores the history of People's China, crystallizing a version contrasting that of the UDI delegates. At the other end of the journalistic spectrum, *L'Unità* headlines *New Chinese Women*²⁸⁶, giving details of the delegates' journey and those present at the press conference, from UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi to various personalities, intellectuals, and politicians of the left.²⁸⁷

In addition to the press conference and the various meetings organized by the UDI throughout the country, the enthusiastic accounts of the participants were organized

²⁸² Gu. P. "Dalla casa alla fabbrica: le donne cinesi non sono che schiave." (From Home to the Factory: Chinese Women are Nothing but Slaves). *Il Popolo* (November 7, 1954).

²⁸³ B., "Le grandi realizzazioni della Cina progressiva." (The great achievements of progressive China). *Il Paese* (November 7, 1954).

²⁸⁴ F. M. "Inno al regime delle quattro stelle." (Hymn to the regime of the four stars). *Il Paese* (from November 11, 1954).

²⁸⁵ "Spiegato al popolo il nuovo Marco Polo." (The new Marco Polo was explained to the people). *Il Tempo* (November 11, 1954).

²⁸⁶ "Donne nuove della Cina" (New Chinese Women). *L'Unità* (November 11, 1954).

²⁸⁷ It included the UDI activists Luciana Viviani, Gisella Floreanini, Giuliana Nenni, the PCI deputies Anna Grasso, Leonilde (Nilde) Jotti and Camilla Ravera, Father Andrea Gaggero, among the leading figures of the pacifist movement, the poet Sibilla Aleramo, the novelist and translator Paola Masino, lawyer Zara Algardi, writer Joyce Lussu.

in the pamphlet *She Also Owns the Good Earth* published in 1955.²⁸⁸ The evocative title recalls Pearl S. Buck's celebrated volume *The Good Earth*, which delivered to Western readers the image of Chinese women's suffering in early 20th century China.²⁸⁹ The novel is centered on the life of the peasant Wang Lung and his journey of redemption and 'liberation' from extreme poverty. Accordingly, the UDI pamphlet aims to convey, through this well-known image, the message that Chinese women, too, have been liberated. The document, about a hundred pages long, is divided by topics according to the interests and specializations of the participants and is accompanied by photos and illustrations. The authors are the participants to the 1954 delegation. They delve into the profound transformations within Chinese society, especially concerning the role of women.

Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, in *New Women in New China* (*Donne nuove nella Cina Nuova*), discusses the emergence of a new female identity shaped by socialism and national progress, recounting her encounter with the Minister of Justice, Shi Liang (史良), and the labor model «Tsu Fa-ti». The meeting with Shi – a prominent figure in the patriotic mobilization against the Japanese and a historic leader of the Democratic League – provided the opportunity to emphasize that, in the PRC, there were no barriers based on supposed female “emotionality” that prevented women from entering the judiciary in coeval Italy.²⁹⁰ The socialist Rosetta Longo contributes an insightful piece titled *The Red Flag with Five Stars Frees the Chinese Woman from Centuries-Old Servitude* (*La bandiera rossa dalle cinque stelle svincola la donna cinese da servitù secolari*), discussing the role of Chinese Revolution role in women's

²⁸⁸ *Anche lei possiede la buona terra* (*She Also Owns the Good Earth*). Edizioni Noi Donne. Roma 1955.

²⁸⁹ The novel was first published in 1931 and translated into Italian in 1933. For an analysis of how the novel contributed to the imagery of a feudal China in which women are subjugated, see Felix and Kumar (2021).

²⁹⁰ In Italy women had to wait for Law no 66 of February 9, 1963, to gain access to the judiciary.

emancipation and including the description of a divorce trial. Ilia Bocci's *The Chinese Peasant Woman Possesses Good Land* (La contadina cinese possiede la buona terra) examines the rural reforms that granted Chinese women access to land ownership and economic empowerment.²⁹¹ The socialist Catholic Ada Alessandrini, in *The Flower Blooms* (Il fiore fiorisce), reflects on the broader implications of these social reforms, emphasizing the newfound opportunities for women's growth and participation in public life, highlighting the role of cultural life, education, and religion. Ada Marchesini Gobetti's contribution, *Children, the Future of China* (I bimbi, avvenire della Cina), underscores the importance of education and youth in building China's future, highlighting the country's commitment to raising a new generation with socialist values. Lastly, the pamphlet closes with *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Il viaggio di Marco Polo), emphasizing the historical ties of Sino-European relations.²⁹²

In addition to the pamphlet, reports from the participants were soon published in left-wing media. For instance, Rosetta Longo's *That Morning in Mukden*²⁹³ discusses a village where an agricultural cooperative had been established and how the inhabitants' lives had improved since then, including a photo of smiling children, which ties into the WIDF's discourse on motherhood and childhood. This discourse is present also in other accounts, such as Macciocchi's, *A mother from Shanghai*.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Bocci is a UDI leader of the Siena province, whose agricultural workers were very much politically active during that period, including women peasants fighting for equal pay.

²⁹² For a detailed account of the pamphlet contents, see also De Giorgi (2017a).

²⁹³ Longo, Rosetta. "Quella mattina a Mukden." (That Morning in Mukden). *Avanti!* (November 24, 1954).

²⁹⁴ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Una madre di Sciangai." (A Mother from Shanghai). *L'Unità* (December 18, 1954). The article refers to her contribution to *She Also Owns the Good Earth*, in which she depicts the life story of the labor model «Tsu Fa-ti».

Macciocchi was the most prolific of the participants in promoting this and the concept of the 'new Chinese woman.' Even before her departure, Macciocchi had already published a long article titled *A Divorce Law for the Empowerment of Women*, on the Chinese marriage law.²⁹⁵ Macciocchi's interest goes beyond the political façade; she was one of many women in Italy at that time who were de facto separated from their husbands but had to resort to various loopholes to obtain a divorce effectively.²⁹⁶ Drawing strength from her role as director of *Noi Donne*, after her return in 1954, she offered an in-depth view of China and its social transformations. Her reports highlight Macciocchi's editorial skills in choosing evocative titles: *We Toasted with Zhou Enlai*,²⁹⁷ *Let All the Flowers Bloom*,²⁹⁸ *Tame Rivers, and Forge Steel*,²⁹⁹ *Return from China*,³⁰⁰ *The Fiancée of the River God*,³⁰¹ *Chinese Village*,³⁰² and finally, *Thanks, China*.³⁰³ I contenuti di questi reportage si ritroveranno successivamente anche in altri articoli.³⁰⁴ The numerous and detailed articles testify to Macciocchi's jour-

²⁹⁵ "Una legge sul divorzio per l'emancipazione della Donna." (A Divorce Law for the Empowerment of Women). *Rinascita* (October 1954), 672-6.

²⁹⁶ Selvi (2009, 31) reports that Macciocchi and Pietro Amendola – then leader of the Neapolitan PCI – had to divorce in San Marino and have the deed recognised in Italy.

²⁹⁷ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Abbiamo brindato con Ciu'En-Lai." (We Toasted with Zhou Enlai). *ND* 42 (October 24, 1954), 4–7.

²⁹⁸ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Lasciate che tutti i fiori fioriscano." (Let All the Flowers Bloom). *ND* 44 (July 11, 1954), 16–17.

²⁹⁹ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Domano i fiumi e forgiano l'acciaio." (Tame Rivers, and Forge Steel). *ND* 45 (November 14, 1954), 5–7.

³⁰⁰ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Ritorno Dalla Cina." (Return from China). *ND* 46 (November 21, 1954), 3.

³⁰¹ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "La Fidanzata del dio fiume." (The Fiancée of the River God). *ND* 47 (November 28, 1954), 16–17. The same issue comes with the poem *I colori della Cina* (The Colours of China) di Ada Prospero Gobetti, in *ND* 47 (November 28, 1954), 17.

³⁰² Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Villaggio cinese." (Chinese Village). *ND* 48 (May 12, 1954), 16–17.

³⁰³ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Grazie Cina" (Thanks, China). *ND* 49 (December 12, 1954), 16–17.

³⁰⁴ Macciocchi, Maria Antonietta. "Nelle mani di una donna la legge eella nuova Cina." (In the Hands of a Woman, the Law of the New China). *L'Unità (Milano)* (January 5, 1955) and "La scrittrice Tsao-Ming tra gli operai di Mukden" (The Writer Tsao-Ming among the Workers of Mukden). *L'Unità (Milano)* (January 12, 1955).

nalistic talent and her strong commitment to recounting the experiences and transformations in China, particularly concerning Chinese women. Her reports provided the Italian public with a direct and engaging vision, portraying Communist China as a socialist paradise where women had achieved equality and were fighting alongside men for the betterment of society. The core of the representation of female emancipation in China was primarily centered on women's participation in work outside the domestic sphere. This theme was particularly relevant for Italian feminists, as post-war Italy had witnessed significant marginalization of women in the labor market, with priority given to their maternal and domestic roles. The limited participation of women in productive work, their exclusion from certain sectors, and wage disparities were perceived by the UDI as one of the main obstacles to achieving gender equality, even within the family, in an Italy where female labor was still largely hidden (Betti 2010; 2020). The analysis of Chinese female workers indicates that work and active participation by women were essential to asserting gender equality and female dignity, a central aspect of State socialism. Macciocchi's interest in China and its women went beyond mere propaganda, viewing them as protagonists of a true transformation, capable of acting in society on an equal footing with men (De Giorgi 2017a, 699).



Figure 3.5. The radiant face of the new China on the cover of the first volume of ND containing reports of the trip (ND 42, October 24, 1954).

Overall, in the representation of the new post-revolutionary society, the female icon emerges as the activist of the ACWDF. Embodying the commitment to building the new society with a direct role on the socialist front, Chinese activists inspired Italian women, particularly in their journey toward the conquest of women's rights. The image of these activists represents a model of engagement that encourages UDI activists to fight for equality and parity, suggesting that emancipation is not just an aspiration but an achievable goal through collective action and mutual support. The ACWDF activists played a crucial role in protecting women from the remnants of the feudal male mentality, encouraging them to work both in factories and in the fields. In addition to carrying out educational and propaganda activities, they were particularly active in supporting women during divorce proceedings, helping them in the complex social and legal context.

3.3 «Chinese women are irreplaceable in constructing a new society»³⁰⁵



Figure 3.6. The UDI delegation with Chinese political personalities. Front row, from left: Luciana Viviani, Graziella Carpi Sonnino, Zhou Enlai, Maria Maddalena Rossi, Giuliana Nenni, Rina Picolato, Deng Xiaoping, Elena Gatti Caporaso. Second row, from left: Xu Guangping, possibly Zhang Wentian³⁰⁶, Deng Yingchao, Bruna Conti, Zhang Yun, Cao Mengjun, Cai Chang.

3.3.1 The second Italian women's delegation

A second UDI delegation traveled to China from August 22 to October 7, 1955. The invitation, signed by Li Dequan, was sent on July 10, 1955, specifically addressed to Maria Maddalena Rossi and Giuliana Nenni invited to come with «eight other

³⁰⁵ Maria Maddalena Rossi's speech during the farewell reception before leaving the PRC (ACUDI, 20, 88-1).

³⁰⁶ The recognition was made by the author as it was not specified in the original source. Zhang Wentian (张闻天) was appointed as the first deputy minister of foreign affairs of the People's Republic of China to assist Zhou Enlai in diplomatic affairs in 1955 (Cheng 1993, 500).

friends» (ACUDI 20, 88-1).³⁰⁷ The three met at the Congress of Mothers held during those same days (July 7-10), suggesting the invitation may have been delivered by hand. Soon after, the UDI informed the PCI of the new invitation, stressing its exceptional nature.³⁰⁸ First of all, the invitation was sent in advance to allow UDI members of Parliament to accept it while respecting any potential parliamentary commitments. Furthermore, as with the previous trip, all expenses were fully covered by the ACWDF. The travel, again taking place in a context of informal diplomacy, had to seek special ministerial approval, and the request was motivated «to study Chinese educational organizations on-site.»³⁰⁹

This trip was distinctly bilateral compared to the previous one. The delegation was led by UDI president Maria Maddalena Rossi and eight other members, who, at the request of the ACWDF, were «specialized and qualified» women (ACUDI, 20, 88-1). The request for the participation of specialized and qualified women is also retraceable in the aforementioned Soviet strategy regarding cultural delegations and their "propagandistic" value. An example of it can be found in the Italian delegation to the USSR in September 1954. The composition of the delegation already included prominent figures: among the delegates were the writer Annamaria Ortese, professors Gianna Cuaz and Teresa Maretto, UDI administrative secretary Luigina Le Pira, midwife Giuseppina Norese, lawyer Piera Angeli, doctor Eletta Porta Olivo, textile worker Olga Perrone, metalworker Anna Anselmo, teachers Emma Cerceo and Luigia Chiola, and lawyer Franca Bergamini. The delegation travel was described in a series of articles in *Noi Donne* (no. 38 and 40) of 1954. The participation of this

³⁰⁷ Original text: «huit autres amies».

³⁰⁸ Letter from the UDI secretariat to the PCI secretariat on July 22, 1955 (ACUDI 20, 88-1).

³⁰⁹ «studiare sul posto le organizzazioni scolastiche cinesi» from a telegram of the head of police to the cabinet of the Minister of the Interior (January 26, 1956). (ACS MI 235).

diverse group must have been the result of careful selection aimed at including expert voices from various fields, who could then validate the narrative upon their return. This mechanism had already been proven, as it was also used in the case of the delegation of experts monitoring the use of nuclear weapons in Korea. The content of the articles recounting the visit to the USSR is often flattering, with targeted insights into each participant's field of expertise. This approach is likely to have been considered in requesting this second Italian delegation's trip to China. It included members of the UDI secretariat, the Socialist parliamentarians Giuliana Nenni, Elena Gatti Caporaso, the Communist Luciana Viviani, along with Bruna Conti. The others included Caterina (Rina) Picolato, head of the women's commission of CGIL; Tullia Carrettoni Romagnoli, a teacher and member of the Executive Committee of the middle school teachers' union and of the UDI; Ernestina Bertolé, factory worker, member of the Olivetti Factory Council and Municipal Councilor of Ivrea; and Dr. Graziella Carpi Sonnino, member of the National Women's Union (Unione Femminile Nazionale).³¹⁰

Overall, the delegation's itinerary was similar to the previous year. After visiting the main historical sites – the Great Wall, China Nationalities Museum – and innovations – as the Guanting reservoir – in Beijing, they visited the industrial and mining centers in Manchuria, Shenyang factories, Shanghai, and Hangzhou.³¹¹ This suggests that the trip followed a carefully planned itinerary designed to convey a specific image of the PRC and had a distinctly diplomatic purpose. This is further evidenced by the statements of Premier Zhou Enlai, whom the delegates met along with other prominent

³¹⁰ Founded in 1899, the National Women's Union was set up in Milan by women of middle-class extraction with socialist sympathies. Dissolved by the fascist regime and refunded in the aftermath of WWII, it is the longest-lived feminist association still active today. For an in-depth study, see the volume edited by Bartoloni (2020).

³¹¹ The itinerary has been traced by confronting the information in the journey reportage with the pictures preserved in UFN Carrettoni, Uncatalogued.

members of the CCP, including Deng Xiaoping, as well as the leadership of the ACWDF, from President Cai Chang to Vice Presidents Deng Yingchao, Xu Guangping, Zhang Yun, and Deputy Secretary General Cao Mengjun.

The delegates' trip is reported in a single article on *Noi Donne*.³¹² The report focuses on details related to childbirth and women's health care – an essential topic in Italy as well, where childbirth was still largely managed by non-specialist midwives (*levatrici*) – who generally performed home births, and accordingly operated under precarious conditions.³¹³

One day, we met this child, this woman, and this Tibetan nurse. We learned that after liberation, in the forty-seven regions of the national minorities, once abandoned to ignorance, poverty, and the most pernicious diseases, modern and precious health centers specializing in gynecology have been installed. Thanks to them, a child, a healthy child, is no longer a dream, as it once was.³¹⁴

The narrative emerging from the documents regarding the travel enlightens the strategies through which the bonds of “maternal friendship” are reinforced by the UDI delegates bringing the Chinese an album with photos of Florentine children and an embroidered flag from Reggio Emilia.³¹⁵ The maternal narratives also pervade the

³¹² “A Pechino attendono il teatro dell’opera.” (In Beijing They Await the Opera House). *ND* 43 (October 30, 1955).

³¹³ For an overview see Filippini (2017).

³¹⁴ Original text: «Un giorno conoscemmo questo bambino, questa donna e questa infermiera tibetani. Apprendemmo così che, dopo la liberazione, nelle quarantasette regioni delle minoranze nazionali, un tempo abbandonate all’ignoranza alla miseria e alle malattie più perniciose, sono stati tra l’altro installati moderni e preziosi centri sanitari, specializzati in ginecologia. Grazie ad essi un bambino, un bambino sano non è più, come una volta, un sogno.»

³¹⁵ Copy of the message from the UDI secretariat to the UDI Firenze secretariat (August 6, 1955) and UDI Reggio Emilia (August 9, 1955) in ACUDI, 20, 88-1. The first letter specifies, «It is not necessary, of course, for it to be expensive; the item can even be modest, as long as it is original to the place.»

report of the trip. This emerges in the account of the visit to an agricultural cooperative outside Beijing. The president, «Pen Pen Er,» describes his attachment to the land this way: «[...] we love the land because it is good, because it is ours, like a child. The government helps us and provides technicians, schools, and resources.»³¹⁶

3.3.2 Women Diplomats



Figure 3.7. The Italian delegation at a banquet hosted by the ACWDF. In the center of the photo, Tullia Carrettoni Romagnoli and Cao Mengjun are making a toast. (UFN, Carrettoni, uncatalogued).

The diplomatic nature of the meeting is highlighted in the report: «One of the memories is this one: one evening, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai said to us, among other things, “It’s time for the Italian government to say goodbye to Chiang Kai-Shek’s

³¹⁶ Original text: «“[...] amiamo la terra perché è buona, perché è nostra, come un figlio. Il governo ci aiuta, fornisce tecnici, fornisce scuole e mezzi.”» “A Pechino Attendono Il Teatro Dell’opera.” (In Beijing, They Await the Opera House). *ND* 43 (October 30, 1955).

representative.”»³¹⁷ The Chinese Foreign Minister also openly called for the opening of trade relations with Italy, mentioning cultural products such as «De Sica's films.» As for the previous trip, a press conference was held to publicize the contents of the journey. Nonetheless, the coverage of this second women's trip in the Italian national media landscape was limited compared to the previous one. Furthermore, the trip accounts mainly focused on the commercial aspect of the diplomatic journey, thus locating it in the lively national debate on opening trade with China.³¹⁸ The left-wing newspapers title *Will Lambrettas Replace Old Rickshaws?*,³¹⁹ *Ships, Cars, and Textiles Requested by China from Italy*,³²⁰ *Fertile Prospects for Development in Trade between Italy and China*.³²¹ On the contrary, right-wing newspapers ridiculed the press conference, describing it as a mere propaganda act, as does the almost-satirical article of the liberal newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, titled *The Chinese Want Scooters and Ships in Exchange for Fish Meal for Horses*.³²²

The above mentioned article on *Noi Donne* also stresses the importance of the aperture towards the PRC, characterized by rapid technological and logistical development. This development involves not only child and maternal care – as mentioned before – but also agriculture, industry, and commerce. This was aimed at encouraging contact with Communist China. In so doing, women activists did not renounce their

³¹⁷ Original text: «Tra i ricordi, questo: il primo ministro Ciu En Lai una sera ci disse, tra l'altro: "Sarebbe ora che il governo italiano dicesse addio al rappresentante di Chiang-Kai-Shek".» (ACUDI, 20, 88-1).

³¹⁸ This economic strategy was adopted to achieve diplomatic interest. For further discussion, see Capisani (2013), Meneguzzi (2014), and Samarani (2014).

³¹⁹ “Le lambrette sostituiranno i vecchi ricsjo?” (Will Lambrettas Replace Old Rickshaws?), *Avanti!* (October 13, 1955).

³²⁰ “Navi, automobili e tessili chiesti dalla Cina all’Italia.” (Ships, Cars, and Textiles Requested by China from Italy). *L’Unità* (October 13, 1955).

³²¹ “Feconde prospettive di sviluppo nel commercio tra Italia e Cina.” (Fertile Prospects for Development in Trade between Italy and China). *Il Paese* (October 14, 1955).

³²² Gi. Pred. “I cinesi vogliono motorette e navi in cambio polvere di pesce per cavalli.” (The Chinese Want Scooters and Ships in Exchange for Fish Meal for Horses). *Il Giornale d’Italia* (October 14, 1955).

role as women and human rights champions but instead broadened its scope. Women activists are actively negotiating their position within the overall leftist environment, collocating within it as a new category of professional diplomats, operating outside – but in continuity – with their “women’s work,” protagonists of the future socialist world. In these respects, Chinese women represent a vivid source of inspiration for the UDI activists. This emerges clearly from Maria Maddalena Rossi farewell speech:

Dear friends, as we leave your great country with the most profound regret, we want to again express our warm and fraternal gratitude to you, who represent millions of workers, farmers, housewives, technicians, intellectuals, and artists. Our journey, so wisely and sensitively organized and attended down to the most minor details, has allowed us to understand the multiple aspects of the Chinese people's lives. [...] *Chinese women are irreplaceable in constructing a new society* [Italiacs mine]. For us, coming from a country where women are still fighting for the achievement of some essential rights, it has been a source of admiration and pride to meet exemplary workers, factory directors, presidents of courts, and ministers and to feel the vibrant and active presence of women in every sector of political, economic, and cultural life. Among all the valuable experiences of our swiftly passed stay, one of the most useful has undoubtedly been understanding how you, leaders of the Democratic Federation, have built strong and deep ties with the women’s masses: you interpret their needs day by day, helping them develop their awareness and personality. Wherever we went, among ordinary women and men or conversing with the most authoritative political leaders, we felt a unanimous aspiration for peace and friendship among people. We have seen how strong and deep the friendship between the Italian

and Chinese people is and how artificial and vain the barriers that still wish to keep us apart are.³²³

The trip's content and the UDI's portrayal of Chinese women were later disseminated through a new cycle of conferences held between December and January 1955 in various cities. Women from the previous delegation participated in these conferences, presenting *She Also Owns the Good Earth*, which was published in the preceding months.³²⁴

In the following months, two translations of Chinese short stories were published. *Noi Donne. A Foreigner's Note* by Lin Yutang³²⁵ and *My Old Home* (故乡 Guxiang) by

³²³ Original text: «Care amiche, nel lasciare, con il più vivo rinascimento il vostro grande Paese, vogliamo ancora una volta esprimere a voi, che rappresentate milioni di operaie, di contadine, di casalinghe, di tecniche, di intellettuali, di artiste, il nostro caloroso e fraterno ringraziamento. Il nostro viaggio da voi con tanta sapienza e sensibilità organizzato e curato fin nei minimi dettagli, ci ha permesso di conoscere i molteplici aspetti della vita del popolo cinese. [...] le donne cinesi, elemento insostituibile nella costruzione di una nuova società. Per noi, che veniamo da un Paese in cui le donne ancora lottano per le conquiste di alcuni diritti essenziali, è stato motivo di ammirazione e di orgoglio incontrare lavoratrici modello, direttrici di fabbrica, presidenti di tribunali, ministri, e avvertire in ogni settore della vita politica, economica e culturale la presenza viva e operante delle donne. Tra tutte le esperienze preziose del nostro soggiorno, così rapidamente trascorso, una delle più utili è stata, senza dubbio, la conoscenza di come voi, dirigenti della Federazione Democratica, abbiate creato legami solidi e profondi con le masse femminili: ne interpretate giorno per giorno le esigenze, le aiutate a sviluppare la loro coscienza e personalità. Ovunque ci siamo recate, tra le donne e gli uomini semplici o a colloquio con i più autorevoli dirigenti politici, abbiamo sentito vibrare una aspirazione unanime, quella della pace e della amicizia tra i popoli; abbiamo constatato quanto forte e radicata sia l'amicizia tra il popolo italiano e il popolo cinese e come artificiose e vane siano le barriere che ancora si vogliono mantenere fra noi.»

³²⁴ It is noted that the UDI emerged as a parallel operator, though not overlapping with Centro Cina, in organizing these conferences. This is indicated in one correspondence with a local branch, which mentions Centro Cina's organization of a conference titled *L'emancipazione della donna cinese* (The Emancipation of Chinese Women) on the same days as the UDI's event.

³²⁵ "Il biglietto del forestiero." (A Foreigner's Note). *ND* 48 (December 4, 1955), 14-5. The original title of the essay in Chinese could not be retrieved, but it is likely a work by the renowned writer, translator, philosopher, and inventor Lin Yutang 林語堂, known as "the Man Who Brought China to the West." Lin wrote about the Chinese language, culture, philosophies, and religion in English. He was not a writer from contemporary communist China but a cosmopolitan intellectual who lived in Europe, the United States, and, in the last part of his life, in Taiwan. A fervent Catholic, he is also known for his writings on religion. It is interesting to note that selecting one of his stories can provide insight into him, as seen in the recent work by Long (2023). His works were also widely distributed in Italian in the 1950s, notably *Shenghuo De Yishu* 生活的藝術 (The Importance of Living) (Lin, 1940).

Lu Xun – erroneously indicated as a section of *The True Story of Ah Q*.³²⁶ Both essays provide brief and, at times, inaccurate information about the authors and their novels. Despite being small, this selection aims to portray an image of China that bridges the ancient and the modern while introducing some of its key authors, regardless of the political significance of the stories. It reflects an interest and fascination with the Chinese cultural universe and the concrete difficulties in bridging the cultural gaps between such distant universes.

³²⁶ “Vecchia casa” (My Old Home), *ND* 51 (December 25, 1955), 14-5. Lu Xun's short essay, written in 1921 and originally published in the May issue of *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (New Youth), is one of his most famous works. It reflects on the disillusionment and changing values in early 20th-century China through the narrator's return to his rural hometown after many years away.

3.4 Hearing something a hundred times is not as good as seeing it once (百闻不如一见)³²⁷

3.4.1 The first delegation of Chinese activists to Italy



Figure 3.8. The ACWDF delegation to Italy while visiting Siena. In the front row can be recognized Li Dequan (second from the left), Guo Lanying (fourth from the left), Ilia Bocci (fifth from the left); in the second row are Lei Jieqiong (second from the left), Siena UDI leader Giorgina Scalacci (fourth from the left) and Zou Dexin (fifth from the left). (UDI Siena, XXV).

³²⁷ The saying is found used in the welcoming speech of Li Dequan, head of the ACWDF delegation in Italy (ACUDI 21, 99-1).

«We will always be on the same barricade to shout "long live peace," to triumphantly combat evil? I, despite being so rich in experience, hope so.»³²⁸ Thus, the president of the Italian section of the ICR concluded his remarks after meeting with the head of the first and only delegation from the ACWDF to visit Italy between February and March 1956. The UDI invitation to host a delegation of four ACWDF activists who were «interested in cultural matters»³²⁹ was sent on July 19, 1955, on behalf of President Rossi and Secretary Nenni (ACUDI 20, 88-1). The official response from the ACWDF to the UDI arrived on November 10, 1955.³³⁰ This message followed another one, the previous month, addressed to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs by ACWDF President Cai Chang, which included the list of participants.³³¹ This correspondence reveals the diplomatic difficulties behind the organization of the travel, which continued the following months.

In the subsequent message that Rossi sent to Foreign Minister Gaetano Martino on December 21, 1955, the UDI president once again requested the issuance of visas for the participants, stressing the cultural motivation of the journey.³³² The message again included the list of participants and urged a response from the minister, referencing previous meetings and communications with Interior Minister Tambroni. Overall, the correspondence reveals a meticulous diplomatic effort involving calls

³²⁸ Original: «Saremo sempre sulla stessa barricata per gridare «viva la pace», per combattere trionfalmente il male? Io, pur tanto ricco di esperienza, spero di sì.» In Longhena, Mario. "Nel Segno Della Croce Rossa La Solidarietà Di Tutto Il Mondo." (In the Name of the Red Cross, the Solidarity of the Whole World). *La Giustizia* (March 3, 1956).

³²⁹ Original: «s'intéressant de questions culturelles».

³³⁰ Letter from ACWDF Vice President Zhang Yun to UDI dated November 10, 1955 (ACUDI 20, 88-1).

³³¹ Copy of the letter from Cai Chang to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated October 1955 (ACUDI 20, 88-1). The original letter is also preserved in ACS MI 325.

³³² Copy of the letter from Maria Maddalena Rossi to Gaetano Tambroni on December 21, 1955 (ACUDI 20, 88-1).

and in-person visits, which ultimately led to the approval of the visas for the participants.³³³ Given the informal relations between the two countries, the UDI played a central role in fostering cultural diplomacy. These exchanges collocate in a broader effort from the democratic sphere to open up new avenues of comprehensive exchange, striving to eventually achieve diplomatic recognition.

Despite Rossi's request to the minister for the trip to take place in the second half of January, allowing the diplomats to fulfill their political commitments, the discussions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued until late in the year. This delay was not coincidental but reflected the significant diplomatic importance of the trip. As indicated in parliamentary documentation, the trip could set a potential precedent that might be invoked by «[...] other countries that are in a similar situation (such as the so-called People's Republic of East Germany)»³³⁴ to attempt extending diplomatic relations and assert their political significance. Additionally, it was emphasized that the cultural delegation «[...] could easily be used for propaganda purposes, especially towards those categories that do not embrace revolutionary ideas but are inclined to sympathize with representatives of communist countries when they present themselves as bringers of peace and culture.»³³⁵ However, despite the "diplomatic risk" the ACWDF delegation finally got to visit Italy for a month between February 17 and March 16.

³³³ Instances of the tenacity of UDI activists in pursuing their battles in Parliament is recorded in the article by Grazia Cesarini titled "Palazzo Madama assediato dalle donne." (Palazzo Madama besieged by women), *ND* 8 of February 20, 1955, 5, which reports on delegations of women from all over Italy filling the Parliament building and protesting against the attempted creation of the Western European Union.

³³⁴ «[...] altri Paesi che si trovano in situazione analoga (come la così detta repubblica popolare della Germania orientale).» Telegram dated December 28, 1955, addressed to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, unsigned (ACS MI 325).

³³⁵Original text: «[...] potrebbe agevolmente essere utilizzata a fini di propaganda, in particolare nei confronti di quelle categorie che non accolgono le formule rivoluzionarie ma sono invece portate a simpatizzare con i rappresentanti dei paesi comunisti quando questi appaiono in veste di apportatori di pace e cultura.» (Idib).

February 2nd: The Chinese Women's Cultural Delegation, led by Li Dequan, Vice Chairperson of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation, consisting of 4 members, visited Italy.³³⁶

During their stay, the prefects closely monitored the delegation's activities in the various locations they visited, keeping the Ministry of the Interior informed.³³⁷

The delegation was led by Li Dequan, Minister of Health, President of the Red Cross, deputy, and Vice President of the ACWDF since 1953. Other members included Hon. Lei Jieqiong (雷结琼, 1905-2011), deputy and Deputy Dean of the Peking Institute of Political Science and Law and member of the Standing Committee of the ACWDF; actress Guo Lanying (郭兰英, 1929-), also a deputy to the National People's Congress; and Zou Dexin (邹得心), Deputy Director of the Propaganda and Education Department of the ACWDF, along with two interpreters, whose names are transcribed as «Chung Chih-ming» and «Tai Li-chin». The original list also included ACWDF cadre Kang Keqing 康克清 (1911-1992) and writer Chen Xuezhao 陈学昭 (1906-1991).

The selection of Li Dequan was not coincidental: particularly after 1953, Li played a central role within the Party, especially in the context of health reforms, as well as in the women's federation. Internationally, she also emerged as a key figure, leading delegations to other major international events.

³³⁶ «以全国民主妇联副主席李德全为团长的中国妇女文化代表团一行4人，应意大利妇女联盟的邀请，赴意大利进行友好访问»Yang (1991, 82).

³³⁷ The communications from local prefects to the Ministry of Interior, such as the Palermo and Milan ones, are preserved in ACS MI 325.

The professionalism of Li Dequan emerged during the Sino-Japanese War, as the founder of the China Wartime Children's Welfare Association 中国战时儿童保育会 (Zhongguo zhanshi ertong baoyuhui) alongside Cao Mengjun in 1938 (Gu, 2006).



Figure 3.9. Photo of China Wartime Children's Welfare Association officials in Hankou (Wuhan), May 1938. Front row (left to right): Huang Zhuoqun 黄卓群, Lü Xiaodao 吕晓道, Chen Jiyi 陈纪彝, Shen Zijiu 沈兹九, Xu Jingping 徐镜平, Qian Youhe 钱用和, Chen Yiyun 陈逸云; middle row (left to right): Zhang Aizhen 张蔼真, An'e 安娥, Zhuang Jing 庄静, Song Meiling 宋美玲, Li Dequan 李德全, Xie Lanyu 谢兰郁, Zhao Qingge 赵清阁, Wu Yifang 吴贻芳; back row (left to right): Meng Qingshu 孟庆树, Liu Qingyang 刘清扬, Tang Guoying 唐国桢, Shen Huilian 沈慧莲, Cao Mengjun 曹孟君, Guo Xiuyi 郭秀仪, Shi Liang 史良, Deng Yingchao 邓颖超 (AJWMN 2017).

When Li Dequan was appointed as the new Minister of Health in 1949, she garnered considerable respect across various circles. While her husband had been the more

prominent figure (she was known as Madame Feng Yuxiang in international settings), Li established a strong domestic and international reputation as an effective administrator of relief services during and after the anti-Japanese War. In the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Li Dequan actively advocated for enhanced healthcare delivery in rural areas, a stance that was not universally shared at the time (Manning 2023, 137). Under her leadership, the Ministry of Health (MOH) implemented guidelines to strengthen the development of grassroots health stations and promoted epidemic prevention efforts. Her significant role in the campaign to eliminate the 'four pests' further underscored her impact on public health. At a time when the MOH, influenced by Western practices, was primarily focused on high-level medical care, Li Dequan was laying the foundation for a new national disease prevention program. Additionally, she strongly emphasized women's health, consistently reminding deputy ministers and medical directors, "Don't forget about women and children." In the early 1950s, the PRC achieved a significant milestone that few other developing nations had accomplished: a substantial reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates. This success was attributed mainly to Li Dequan's dedicated and strategic efforts, the networks she was part of, and an expanding grassroots infrastructure of women birth attendants, enabling the new regime to systematically improve health outcomes within a few short years (Ivi, 154).



Figure 3.10. The 1955 UDI delegation to the PRC, most likely during a conference. In the center, Maria Maddalena Rossi (left) and Li Dequan (right) shaking hands (UFN Carrettoni, uncatalogued).

The delegation's trip began in Rome – where they arrived via Switzerland – accompanied by Bruna Conti and Maria Maddalena Rossi as their guides. The delegates then traveled to Naples, with Luciana Viviani as their guide; Palermo, with Carmen Zanti; Milan, accompanied by Rossi; Venice, with Rosetta Longo; and then Ferrara and Bologna, guided by Giuliana Nenni, and where they celebrated IWD on March 8. They also visited Florence and Siena with Bruna Conti, before returning to Rome, from where they departed back to Beijing. During their journey, the Italian delegates engaged in representative cultural activities – attending the opera and visiting historical monuments in various cities and major Roman churches guided by Alessandrini.

They also visited workplaces and working-class neighborhoods, such as the "Borgata" in Rome, guided by Marisa Rodano, and the Kalsa district in Palermo.³³⁸

The first Chinese women's delegation to the Italian peninsula represented an important diplomatic and political moment. Accordingly, the guests attended various diplomatic meetings and visits. They were hosted in multiple UDI provincial offices and the headquarters of Noi Donne, and participated in discussions with mayors, politicians, trade union leaders, and local figures – leaders of the PCI, collaborators from the Centro Cina, and political representatives from other parties, primarily from the left but not exclusively. They were hosted at the Senate of the Republic, where they were received by President Merzagora, Vice President Molè, Hon. Maria Jervolino, Undersecretary for Public Instruction Hon. Tessitori, the High Commissioner for Hygiene and Health, and the President of the Italian branch of the International Red Cross (ICR), Hon. Mario Longhena – the latter two being Li's counterparts.³³⁹

Additionally, Longhena escorted Li Dequan during a visit to the pavilion of Villa Battisti Hospital, as he later recounted.³⁴⁰ In the pavilion, forty young individuals with disabilities were receiving care, and Longhena noted Li Dequan's interest in this type of assistance, which was, as she declared, not yet available in China. Longhena's report reflects both frustration with the bipolar orientations of the Cold War and the hope of building bridges beyond it, thanks to figures «of uncommon intelligence and rare energy» like Li Dequan. Li's visit was not the first sign of collaboration aimed

³³⁸ The visit to Palermo is documented in a short article in *L'Unità*, dated February 28, 1956, attached to a detailed report on the delegation's stay in the Sicilian capital. This report was sent by the Prefect of Palermo, Eduardo Zappia, to the Ministry of the Interior on March 5, 1956 (ACS MI 325).

³³⁹ "Le delegate della Cina popolare hanno lasciato ieri la Capitale." (The delegates from People's China left the capital yesterday). *L'Unità* (February 28, 1956).

³⁴⁰ Longhena, Mario. "Nel segno della Croce Rossa la solidarietà di tutto il mondo." (In the Name of the Red Cross, the Solidarity of the Whole World). *La Giustizia* (March 3, 1956).

at breaking down barriers within the IRC.³⁴¹ As Longhena reports, in the preceding days, a donation was also made by Professor Miterev, the head of the Soviet branch. These signs of collaboration beyond the Iron Curtain led the IRC president to emphasize that such actions «should not overlook the clear distinction I demand between the limiting idealism of the party and the boundless idealism of the Association.» Despite this preface, however, the meeting with Li Dequan seemed to dispel any doubts in the president, managing to transcend cultural boundaries and convince him of her authenticity.

And I said to myself: here are two equally ancient civilizations, rich in depth, thought, and solid life experience, represented by two individuals who are currently united by the same sense of duty and the same human need: to silence every other reason for difference and to gather every effort to combat the evil that, both in the East and in the West, strikes humanity, to address the needs that oppress those who speak a monosyllabic language and those who use a flexible one. Confucius and Lao-tze, Christ, and the worldwide Red Cross have words that sound different but are identical: help your brother, assist your companion, support those you do not know, bring joy to them with your smile, even to your enemy.³⁴²

³⁴¹ The Red Cross is a formally non-partisan organisation, but given its Christian roots and its links with the national establishment (as Longhena himself emphasises - contradictorily - 'the Red Cross has no links with governments, except that of appointing the members who govern it and controlling every administrative act') it is susceptible to communist realities on a bipolar horizon. Consequently, the IRC's missions are oriented towards supporting Atlanticist troops. This is also the case in the Korean War, which also saw the Italian section deployed on the southern front of the peninsula (Cannonero, Pianese 2021).

³⁴² Original text: «E dicevo fra me: ecco due civiltà del pari millenarie, piene di profondità, di pensiero e di salda esperienza di vita, rappresentate da due persone che sono al presente attraversate dallo stesso sentimento di dovere e dallo stesso bisogno umano: far tacere ogni altro motivo di differenza e raccogliere ogni sforzo per combattere il male che, ad oriente come ad occidente, colpisce l'uomo, per andare incontro alle necessità che opprimono chi parla una lingua monosillabica e chi maneggia un linguaggio flessivo. Confucio e Lao-tze, Cristo e la Croce Rossa mondiale hanno parole che suonano diversamente, ma identiche per significato: soccorri il fratello, aiuta il compagno, sorreggi chi non conosci, rendili lieti con il tuo sorriso, anche il nemico.»

Li Dequan herself, on behalf of the ACWDF, also donated twenty million lire to aid the victims of the exceptional cold wave and snowfall of February 1956.³⁴³

The Chinese Federation also convinced Flora Antonioni – the left-oriented newspaper *Il Messaggero* correspondent – whose article followed the press conference upon the delegation’s departure.³⁴⁴ At the meeting, journalists questioned the delegates on crucial issues related to women’s emancipation: marriage, divorce, labor rights, and leadership positions held by women. Overall, from Antonioni’s report and others from conservative newspapers,³⁴⁵ the impact of Chinese women’s differences in customs and manners became apparent. The contrast was noted between the elegance of their qipao and their heavy work shoes and the firmness in their responses and tones compared to the calm and orderly Italian manners. The Italian public was also struck that the delegates did not dwell on the beauty of the places visited in the “Beautiful Country.” Instead, what emerged as of most significant interest to the visitors was another woman – the mayor of Ferrara, the only woman in the country leading a provincial capital.

3.4.2 The narratives of a welcomed visit

The article *Chinese Women* presents the narrative for the Italian female audience in the periodical *Noi Donne*.³⁴⁶ The article strongly emphasized China as a model of change and Chinese women as the driving force behind this transformation: in their simplicity, being «small,» «calm,» and «humble,» they represented the prototype of

³⁴³ “La delegazione cinese ha lasciato l’Italia.” (The Chinese Delegation Has Left Italy). *L’Unità* (March 17, 1956).

³⁴⁴ Antonioni, Flora. “Incontro romano con le dolci damine di Mao Tse.” (Roman meeting with the sweet little ladies of Mao Tse). *Il Messaggero* (March 17, 1956).

³⁴⁵ Monti, Egle. “Donne con gli occhi a mandorla parlano di emancipazione sociale.” (Women with almond-shaped eyes talk about social emancipation). *Il Tempo* (March 18, 1956).

³⁴⁶ “Donne cinesi.” (Chinese Women). *ND 10* (March 4, 1956), 2.

the activist, fulfilling their public role in alignment with the goals of female liberation, while still adhering to traditional notions of femininity. They did so without altering their character or demeanor, demonstrating humanity and understanding, as experienced during their meeting with the women of the Roman working-class suburbs. The author of this account was once again Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Noi Donne* director and a leading figure in shaping the Chinese narrative also beyond its scope. She reserved this piece for her editorial column *Ms. Maria, Do You Have a Moment?* (*Signora Maria ha cinque minuti di tempo?*), in which she discussed contemporary Italian and international events in a way that offered a more “direct” interaction with the audience. Her depiction of Chinese activists as engines of change in their home context also became a call to action, a battle cry, and a programmatic agenda for Italian women. Thus, in Macciocchi’s account, the fight against smallpox, yellow fever, and cholera led by Health Minister Li Dequan became synonymous with the power of science and technology – led by women in the Chinese context – over nature. Macciocchi drew parallels to China’s great projects for river control and agricultural use, suggesting that these represented the possible path for all countries: the path of socialism.

But you tell us, Madam Li Te-chuan, if the ills of nature cannot be tamed; tell us, you who have raised the levees around the Yellow River and the Blue River, who have harnessed the waters of the most turbulent rivers in the world, who have protected the lands of the farmers and the wives of Chinese families from the shame of famine, from the cold, and epidemics. What a miracle, Madam Li Te-chuan, they will say. Well, in this “Land of Miracles,” you explain, Madam, that the miracle accomplished by you is not of an otherworldly nature but is

called the triumph of popular rights over the forces of privilege and class oppression.³⁴⁷

This structural aid to society is paralleled with the efforts carried out by the DC government to support the Italian population affected by frost and unprecedentedly cold weather. These efforts are portrayed as disorganized and paternalistic, relying on the goodwill and generosity of individuals – already poor themselves – rather than on the deployment of funds and resources in a structured and programmatic way. Macciocchi continues:

The radio is broadcasting hundreds of appeals these days, urging us to gather our old clothes and the little money we have to help the victims of the cold. The Italians seem to help other poor Italians. It's always been this way. Meanwhile, the government has the police fire on those among the Italians who raise their voices: yesterday, Rocco Girasole was killed, and today, Paolo Vitale, a laborer and father of five children.³⁴⁸ But your presence here now brings to mind another old question: the ills of a people cannot be healed with the small palliatives of charity and almsgiving, but through the modification of its social structures,

³⁴⁷ Original text: «Ma ditelo dunque voi, signora Li Te-chuan, se i mali della natura non possono essere domati, dillo voi, che avete alzato gli argini attorno al fiume Giallo e al fiume Azzurro, che avete imbrigliato le acque dei fiumi più tempestosi del mondo, che avete protetto le terre dei contadini, le mogli di famiglie cinesi dall'onta delle carestie, dal gelo, dalle epidemie. Che miracolo, signora Li Te-chuan, le diranno. Ebbene, in questo «Paese dei miracoli» spieghi lei, signora, che il miracolo a voi compiuto non è di natura ultraterrena, ma si chiama trionfo dei diritti popolari sulle forze del privilegio e dell'oppressione di classe.»

³⁴⁸ The reference is to the 'facts of Comiso', in which Paolo Vitale was killed on February 20, 1956 following protests that broke out among farm labourers in the Agrigento area. The editorial in L'Unità of the following day, entitled *Un bracciante ucciso a Comiso da una carica della polizia al termine di una assemblea popolare contro la miseria* (A farm labourer killed in Comiso by a police charge at the end of a popular assembly against poverty), was dedicated to the event.

by giving the economy an honest and fair course that takes into account not the few privileged, but the needs and the miseries of the entire population.³⁴⁹

In the final part, the connection and admiration for the Chinese delegates are openly affirmed, portraying them as a source of inspiration and a model, messengers «of peace and of solidarity and understanding between your great people and Italy,» becoming a global model: «but also the messengers of a world that has overcome so much misery and suffering.»

The ACWDF delegation hosted a banquet to farewell the delegation. The banquet guest list, preserved in the UDI archive, included over three hundred attendees. In addition to UDI leaders and left-wing party representatives, there were also figures from the Christian Democrats, many women from the Union of Jurists and Journalists, and personalities from the arts, including directors, painters, and writers.

Li Dequan announced the Farewell declaration of the ACWDF delegation on 16 March 1956.³⁵⁰ After highlighting the visits and exchanges organized between China and Italy in recent years, which have greatly helped foster mutual understanding, Li thanks the individuals met for the dialogues and the great hospitality the Italian people showed.

³⁴⁹ Original text: «La radio ci lancia centinaia di appelli, in questi giorni, per dire che dobbiamo raccogliere i nostri indumenti vecchi e il poco denaro che abbiamo per aiutare le vittime del gelo. Gli italiani ci sembrano aiutano gli altri poveri italiani. È sempre così. Intanto, il governo fa sparire su quella, tra gli italiani, che fanno sentire alta la loro voce: ieri, è stato ucciso Rocco Girasole, e oggi, Paolo Vitale, un bracciante padre di cinque figli. Ma la vostra presenza qui ci ripone ora alla mente un altro, vecchio interrogativo: i mali di un popolo si sanano non con i piccoli palliativi dell'elemosina e della carità, ma con la modifica delle sue strutture sociali, con il dare all'economia un corso onesto e giusto che tenga conto, non dei pochi privilegiati, ma dei bisogni e delle miserie di tutto un popolo.»

³⁵⁰ A copy of the transcript of the speech was sent by Chief of Police F. Carcaterra to the Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Public Security, on March 29, 1956, in a message titled “Women’s Delegation from the People’s Republic of China in Italy” (ACS MI 325).

[...] above all, we will always remember the peace-loving Italians who actively work for world peace. They will also remember all those Italians who kindly welcomed us into their homes and the numerous people who asked us various questions about China, thus showing their interest in our country. We were deeply moved by the warm welcome extended to us everywhere; we are so touched that it is difficult to express in words. We know that the affectionate welcomes given to us by the Italians are not only directed at us personally but are directed at the entire Chinese people.³⁵¹

Li continues, like her Italian counterparts before her, by promoting exchanges not only of a cultural nature – which she traces back to Marco Polo – but also commercial ones:

Both of our peoples love peace, both of our peoples need peace, and both of our peoples have a rich cultural tradition. Italian culture has reached such a high level that it serves as a point of reference for our culture. On the other hand, we know that Chinese culture offers the Italian culture valuable sources from which to draw. Italy has many industrial products that China needs, and China, for its part, has many products that Italy requires.³⁵²

Li concludes by stating:

³⁵¹ Original text: «[...] soprattutto non dimenticheremo mai gli italiani amanti della pace, che lavorano attivamente per la pace nel mondo. Ricorderanno anche tutti quegli italiani che ci hanno gentilmente accolti nelle loro case e le numerose persone che ci hanno rivolto domande di vario genere sulla Cina, manifestando così il loro interesse per il nostro paese. Ci ha profondamente commosso il caldo benvenuto portoci in ogni luogo; siamo commosse in modo tale che è difficile esprimere con le parole. Sappiamo che le affettuose accoglienze tributateci dagli italiani non sono solo dirette a noi personalmente, ma sono dirette a tutto il popolo cinese.»

³⁵² Original text: «Ambedue i nostri popoli amano la pace, ambedue i nostri popoli hanno bisogno di pace, ambedue i nostri popoli hanno una ricca tradizione culturale. La cultura italiana ha raggiunto un così alto livello che essa serve da punto di riferimento alla nostra cultura. Sappiamo d'altra parte che la cultura cinese offre a quella italiane fonti preziose alle quali attingere. L'Italia ha molti prodotti industriali di cui la Cina ha bisogno, e la Cina dal canto suo ha molti prodotti di cui l'Italia necessita.»

According to an old Chinese saying, it is “Hearing something a hundred times is not as good as seeing it once.” Our experience this month has fully confirmed the truth of this saying. In order to strengthen the relations of friendly cooperation between our two countries, we hope that after we have been the first messengers of peace and friendship, many more of our compatriots will be able to visit Italy.³⁵³

The trip taken by the Chinese delegation appeared to establish a strong foundation for greater openness, ensuring extensive media coverage even in the People's Republic of China. Despite Li's remarks, the Chinese delegation did not gain visibility in the PRC, in the *People's Daily*, or in *Women of China*. In general, not only the 1956 delegation but also the previous Italian delegations to China did not receive specific media attention from the PRC media outlets. The ACWDF delegation to Italy was mentioned solely in an article emphasizing the federation's efforts to establish solidarity networks and exchanges, with women leading these initiatives. Italy, along with 17 other countries visited by ACWDF activists, was highlighted as part of this broader effort.³⁵⁴ Other mentions of the journey and of contacts with the UDI are absent throughout the period. This was true for other women's federations from Western Europe, with the exception of the French UFF, which received more attention in the ACWDF accounts, particularly when discussing WIDF events.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Original text: «Secondo un vecchio detto cinese è "meglio vedere una cosa una volta che sentirne parlare cento volte". L'esperienza da noi fatta in questo mese ha pienamente confermato la verità di questo detto. Al fine di rafforzare i rapporti di amichevole collaborazione tra i nostri due paesi, noi ci auguriamo che dopo di noi, che siamo state le prime messaggere di pace e di amicizia, potranno visitare l'Italia molti altri nostri connazionali.»

³⁵⁴ Deng, Yingchao 鄧穎超. “Jinyibu fazhan geguo funü de youyi.” 進一步發展各國婦女的友誼 (Further Develop the Friendship Among Women from Different Countries). *ZGFN* 4 (April 4, 1956), 1.

³⁵⁵ Notably, the UFF received acclaim due to Eugenie Cotton, the WIDF President and its top representative.

As observed in the previous chapters, Chinese women's transnational efforts were focused on creating and strengthening regional relationships during this historical period. A country receiving mediatic attention at a bilateral level was Japan. In November 1954, the Chinese branch of the ICR was invited by the Japanese counterpart to conduct a lengthy and tightly scheduled journey around Japan, visiting cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagoya, and Kobe. The delegation included 12 people and, as with the Italian one, was led by Li Dequan. A summary of the delegation was published by Li herself in *Women of New China*.³⁵⁶ In her report, Li not only expressed regret over the Japanese crimes in China but also highlighted the challenging conditions faced by the Chinese population. In the final section of the article, she emphasized the solidarity expressed by the various committees of the Japanese Women's Federation she met. She noted: «[...] all Japanese women longed for peace and wanted free interaction with the new, radiant China. Indeed, through this visit, we deeply felt that people from all sectors of Japanese society, especially mothers, longed for peace and sought friendship with China.»

Conclusions

The period from the post-World War II era to the early Cold War marked a fragile yet significant expansion of Sino-European relations, particularly in the realm of women's diplomacy and cultural exchange. These exchanges were rooted in a shared

³⁵⁶ Li Dequan 李德全. "Lüejì fāng yuē guāngān." 略记访日观感 (Brief Thoughts on Visiting Japan). *ZGFN* 12 (December 1954), 18. The delegation followed another one of the Japanese ICR to the PRC in late July 1954. See "Zhongguo hong shizi hui zong hui huizhang lidequan jiejian riben heping daibiao tuan he guohui yiyuan daibiao tuan." 中國紅十字會總會會長李德全 接見日本和平代表團和國會議員代表團. (Li Dequan, President of the Red Cross Society of China, Received the Japanese Peace Delegation and the Delegation of Parliamentarians). *People's Daily* (July 31, 1954).

socialist ideology, yet they were characterized by the complexities of navigating political landscapes dominated by Cold War tensions, national independence movements, and differing interpretations of socialist feminism.

The Soviet Union played a pioneering role in initiating exchanges between socialist women from Europe and Asia. These early delegations, such as the 1947 visit by Soviet women to Italy, laid the groundwork for a structured form of cultural diplomacy, with carefully organized tours designed to impress and inspire their counterparts. These political pilgrimages, as described by Paul Hollander, served to solidify the image of the Soviet Union as a model socialist state, one where women played a central role in building and defending peace.

The documents on the bilateral exchanges between the UDI and the ACWF between 1954 to 1956 highlight how the exchange of delegations, as moments of lively and concrete transcultural interaction, led to an intensification of narratives, discussions, and debates, both on relations between the two countries and on the specific topic of women's emancipation. This was especially evident in the Italian context, where there was an initial informal opening in relations with the PRC. The narratives brought by the Italian activists were encouraged by this climate of openness and became a space, particularly within the communist sphere, to engage with topics dear to them, such as women's emancipation and broader transcultural – religious, linguistic, pedagogical – exchange.

In this context, women also took on the role of diplomatic ambassadors. It is, therefore, no surprise that these women, within their speeches and their "women's work" (a concept that can be cautiously extended to the Italian context regarding work on women's and children's issues), also brought up topics of greater interest within the

party and politics in general. This expansion of issues was a way to extend their political action beyond the confines of specifically female-related activities, thus breaking down gender barriers and making their overall actions, including those on "women's" issues, more credible in the eyes of their party comrades, parliament, and the Italian population at large. Chinese activists were a credible and concrete example of this effort. Activists like Li Dequan, being ACWDF member, Ministry of Health, and head of the Chinese branch of the IRC, represented what UDI activists were striving to prove: women can be equally competent to men, and maybe even more, in light of their maternal innate attitude.

In the Chinese context, the challenge was not broadening consensus but rather the more complex issue of internal consensus and legitimacy for women's work within the delicate balances of the party-state. This is why the limited visibility given to exchanges with women from Western European countries must be understood – especially in contrast to the extensive visibility given to exchanges with women from other Asian countries. The ACWDF worked carefully to maintain credibility and advance women's emancipation policies because they were part of a broader class liberation. In this sense, the representation of Western women found little space in a socialist reality that positioned itself as both a model and a guide. Contrary to the equality and sisterhood promoted in WIDF meetings, the focus had to be on specific contexts over others – especially those underrepresented in global politics, affected by colonial occupations and decolonization processes, which offered new opportunities for exchange beyond the bipolar framework of the great powers.

4. Unveiling the Limits of Maternalist Feminism: Mediating Coexistence and Resistance

4.1 The 1956 Trauma in the Global Socialist Movement

4.1.1 Tranquility Amidst the Chaos

Since 1956, significant changes emerged within the global context, prompted by two pivotal events: the 20th Congress of the CPSU, which marked the beginning of de-Stalinization, and the Hungarian Uprising, where anti-Soviet protests were brutally suppressed by military intervention. A process of distension between the two blocs began. This distended Soviet policy under Khrushchev came into direct conflict with the growing militancy in the Third World, particularly amid the escalating conflicts in Vietnam and Algeria (Kim 2023a, 112), and, as previously mentioned, the distance between China and Soviet leader Khrushchev grew increasingly larger.

China, in the context of the Hungarian Revolution, also supported Soviet military intervention (Shen, Xia 2010, 517). This would have served to assert Chinese status and prestige in the Soviet and East European context. The Chinese position on the denunciation of Stalin's crimes was not one of open opposition to the Soviet establishment, but Mao, like Togliatti, did not agree with the denunciation. Mao of Stalin's denunciation shared, in particular, the cult of personality, distinguishing between the practice and the specific Stalinist case. Internally, Khrushchev's secret speech was published and Mao proposed the 3/7 formula in assessing Stalin, stating that he had been 30 percent wrong and 70 percent right (Shen, Xia 2015, 147).

The Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, held from 15 to 27 September 1956, marked a pivotal moment in the CCP's self-understanding and strategic direction. It officially declared that the socialist system had been fundamentally established in China and recognized that the Party's early efforts at exploring the path of socialist construction had made a promising start.

In parallel, 1956 was also a year of ideological re-evaluation for both the CCP and the CPSU. The CPSU's 20th Congress, in particular, played a decisive role in prompting internal debate. With its public criticism of Stalin's leadership, the CPSU openly addressed the limitations of the Stalinist model, a development closely observed by Mao Zedong. Zhou Enlai would later reflect on this moment by noting that «Mao Zedong's thinking is a summary of the experiences of the Chinese revolution and construction, which is based on the experiences and lessons of the CPSU's criticism of Stalin's mistakes.» (Shen, Xia 2015, 151).

The 20th Congress left a profound impression on Mao, who interpreted the Soviet message – regardless of Khrushchev's intent – as a tacit endorsement of pluralism in the paths to socialism. If the Soviets themselves were departing from the Stalinist blueprint, Mao reasoned, then China too could and should forge its own route. This interpretation became a cornerstone of Mao's political vision. It was within this context that Mao introduced the notion of “using the Soviet Union as a mirror” suggesting that China should critically examine Soviet developmental experience – especially under Stalin – not for imitation, but for adaptation. As he successively publicly disclosed, in 1956 Mao was thinking: «Both the Soviet Union and China are socialist countries. Is it possible for us to pursue a faster and better road? Could we adopt a faster, better and more economical way for socialist construction?» (ivi, 152). By February 1957, he had articulated the idea that China's model of industrialization might, and perhaps should, diverge from that of the USSR.

This line of thought laid the conceptual groundwork for the launch of the Great Leap Forward and the mass steel-production campaign of 1958. Mao's call to use the USSR as a mirror ultimately served as a declaration of intent: China should not merely follow the Soviet Union – it should surpass it (ibid). Informed by these ideological shifts and further galvanized by the Hungarian crisis, Mao concluded that China's revolution required deepening, particularly in the political and ideological domains (Chen 2001, 69). These developments had a strong influence on the ACWF, shaping its trajectory from 1957 onward in both domestic and international arenas. It was because of the ongoing wars in the third world that the concept of peace, on which transcultural and transnational connection between women had been based, started becoming the reason for the distancing of women from the different "blocs": as Manning (2023, 134) pointed out, «Ultimately, the mobilization of maternalism and militancy would prove to be a deadly combination.»³⁵⁷ In the following paragraphs are explored the factors that will lead to this conclusionary rupture.

In 1956, the WIDF Bureau held in Rome approved the draft of a new statute emphasizing the importance and necessity of developing cooperation among women's organizations to improve «[...] women's rights, child welfare, and the defense of peace, which remains seriously threatened.»³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ On China's central role in 1953 see article in *L'Unità* of 7 March 1953, 7 on Stalin's death: "La Cina e le Democrazie Popolari salutano il portabandiera della liberazione del popolo" (China and People's Democracies salute the standard bearer of people's liberation), where China is put in the foreground.

³⁵⁸ UDI Press release, 30 October 1956, in ACUDI (21, 94): «[...] diritti delle donne, del benessere dell'infanzia, della difesa della pace ancora una volta così gravemente minacciata.»



Figure 4.1. From left to right, seated: Italian Jolanda Musci, Indian delegate and Vice President Pushpamoyee Bose, Chinese delegate Yang Yunyu, Canadian delegate Crystall, British delegate Pritt, and an interpreter; standing on the left the Indonesian delegate Moedikkio (*ND* 46, 1956, 9.)

At the Bureau were made several decisions, including convening the next WIDF Congress in December 1957, holding a meeting of the WIDF Council in June 1957, supporting the Conference on the prohibition of the A-bomb and H-bomb and for disarmament – as proposed by the Nagasaki Conference –, and participating in the children's film festival organized by UNESCO.

The Bureau results exposed in the press release of November 5th were reported in the Italian communist newspaper *l'Unità* the following day.³⁵⁹ Space in the women's magazine *Noi Donne* was given with a one-week delay, briefly presenting the results

³⁵⁹ *L'Unità* (November 6, 1957).

in the section dedicated to international news.³⁶⁰ It is probable that delaying the communication of the congress results was a strategic decision, as two events occurred in the days leading up to the Bureau's session that were set to significantly shape the international landscape: the Hungarian Revolution and the Suez Crisis. The previous issue of *Noi Donne* had featured a supplement titled *The Dramatic Days of Budapest*, dedicated to the Hungarian Revolution – an article clearly at odds with the spirit of international collaboration promoted by the WIDF Bureau – as well as a brief piece on Imre Nagy.³⁶¹ Both short articles presented a neutral image of the events, sympathetic to the protesting population, mourning the victims.

The tragic uprising in Budapest, which began on October 23 and lasted until the 29th, started with a peaceful demonstration in support of recent decisions made in Poland and the return of former Prime Minister Nagy to the Hungarian government. It then escalated into bloody clashes, as the Hungarian government unfortunately did not recognize in time the urgent need for a timely and radical series of reforms, which the people had demanded to improve living and working conditions and democracy in the country. The movement quickly spread to other provinces, until on the 28th, Minister Nagy ordered a ceasefire; in the less tense atmosphere that followed, it was possible to reach agreements with the insurgent groups to establish a common platform for the recovery of life in the country. Thousands have fallen victim to this immense tragedy, which, if it does not shake the social achievements made by the Hungarian people – as we hope – such as the abolition of feudalism, land distribution to peasants, and industrial reorganization, it has shown through the bloody days of street fighting the tragic necessity of raising the living conditions of workers and advancing democracy in the country. In this time of great mourning for the Hungarian people, the Italian Women's Union expresses its

³⁶⁰ On the issue of *ND* 46 (November 18, 1957), 9.

³⁶¹ In the section 'Personalità della settimana.' (Personality of the Week). *ND* 45 (November 11, 1956), 10.

deepest condolences to the families of the fallen, and to all Hungarian women who have seen their loved ones fight and die in the streets. Our hope is that the bloodshed will ensure a new and more democratic unity for the entire Hungarian people, so that the social progress achieved may emerge strengthened.³⁶²

At this stage, there is no mention of the reactionary forces, as those who led to the armed clashes would later be labeled. On the contrary, Nagy himself is presented as a positive figure: «During recent events, there has been a call for his return to the leadership of the country: his presence in the Hungarian government gives hope that the necessary economic and social reforms will be implemented.»³⁶³

An accusatory tone, however, characterizes the short piece dedicated to the event in the following issue, where the «white terror» and the «return of the old fascist elements» are denounced.³⁶⁴ Overall, from the content and tone of the articles, the shock caused by the event in the international arena is evident. As proof of this, there is no trace of the maternal language, which had by then become a standard to enable the wider female public to empathize with international tragedies, the denunciation of which was the responsibility of women, champions of peace. Such language, however,

³⁶² Original text: «La tragica insurrezione di Budapest, iniziata il 23 ottobre e durata fino al 29, ha avuto inizio da una pacifica dimostrazione in favore delle recenti decisioni prese in Polonia e del ritorno al governo dell'Ungheria dell'ex Primo ministro Nagy, e si è trasformata poi in scontri sanguinosi, perché purtroppo il governo ungherese non aveva compreso in tempo la necessità di una tempestiva e radicale serie di riforme, quali erano state richieste dal popolo, per un miglioramento delle condizioni di vita e di lavoro e della democrazia nel Paese. Il moto si estese fulmineo ad altre province, finché il giorno 28 il ministro Nagy diede ordine di cessare il fuoco; così in un'atmosfera meno tesa fu possibile venire ad accordi con i gruppi di insorti, onde stabilire una comune piattaforma per la ripresa della vita nel Paese. Migliaia sono le vittime di questa immane tragedia, che se non scuote, come auguriamo al popolo ungherese, le conquiste da esso compiute in campo sociale, abbattimento del feudalismo, assegnazione delle terre ai contadini, riorganizzazione industriale etc., ha dimostrato attraverso le sanguinose giornate di combattimenti per le strade, la tragica necessità di elevare le condizioni di vita dei lavoratori e di avviare un maggiore sviluppo della democrazia nel Paese. In un momento di così grande lutto per il popolo ungherese, l'Unione Donne Italiane esprime il suo profondo cordoglio alle famiglie dei caduti, a tutte le donne ungheresi che hanno visto i loro cari combattere e morire per le strade. Il nostro augurio, è che questo sangue versato assicuri una nuova e più democratica unità a tutto il popolo ungherese, affinché le conquiste compiute sulla via del progresso sociale ne escano rafforzate.»

³⁶³ Original text: «Nel corso degli ultimi avvenimenti è stato richiesto il suo ritorno alla direzione del Paese: la sua presenza nel governo ungherese fa sperare che vengano attuate le necessarie riforme economiche e sociali.»

³⁶⁴ «Ungheria senza pace» (*Hungary without Peace*). ND 46 (November 18, 1956), 18.

can be found, for example, in the editorial of the same issue of the magazine, dedicated to the Suez Crisis, titled *The Mother of the Egyptian Soldier*,³⁶⁵ which shows a photo of a mother bidding farewell to her son departing for war and reads:

[...] even if we do not know this woman, we imagine the words she would like to say but perhaps cannot pronounce: 'You will return, my son.' We could have been at peace, but instead, you, so good, are forced to take up a rifle and kill other men... The drama of this farewell and this fear seems as severe and painful to us as the more sensational ones that occur directly on the battlefields. With all our hearts, we wish that this woman may find peace, that the ceasefire, ordered by the UN to the French-English invasion forces, brings back to her – and all mothers, wives, and fiancées – peace and tranquility: that, once fear is conquered, simple and good feelings may flourish again – joy at the birth of a child, the anticipation of his growth, and pride in his progress. Only the certainty that peace will also be restored in Egypt can ease the anxiety that has resurfaced in us during these terrible days due to the memories of the war we knew and suffered in our cities. Peace is indivisible, and so is the fear of war: the anxiety of a conflict in any part of the world today, in the atomic era and with the constant opposition of political and military blocs, becomes the anxiety of the danger of a general conflict.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ “La madre del soldato egiziano.” (*The Mother of the Egyptian Soldier*). *ND* 46 (November 18, 1956), 3.

³⁶⁶Original text: «[...] anche se non conosciamo questa donna, immaginiamo le parole che vorrebbero, ma forse non riescono a pronunciare: “Tornerai, figlio mio.” Potevamo stare tranquilli e invece tu, così buono, sei costretto a prendere un fucile e ad uccidere altri uomini... Il dramma di questo saluto e di questa paura ci sembra grave e doloroso quanto quelli più clamorosi che si svolgono direttamente sui campi di battaglia. Con tutto il cuore desideriamo che questa donna sia rasserenata, che la cessazione del fuoco, intimata dall’ONU alle truppe franco-inglesi di invasione, riporti a lei, e a tutte le madri, spose e fidanzate, pace e tranquillità: che vinta la paura tornino a fiorire i sentimenti semplici e buoni, la gioia per la nascita d’un bimbo, la trepidazione per il suo sviluppo, la fierezza dei suoi progressi. Soltanto la certezza che la pace torni ad imporsi anche in Egitto potrà valere ad affievolire nuovamente in noi l’angoscia, risorta in questi terribili giorni, per i ricordi della guerra che conosciamo e soffriamo nelle nostre stesse città. La pace è indivisibile, ed indivisibile è la paura della guerra: l’angoscia d’un conflitto in un qualsiasi punto della Terra diventa, oggi, nell’era atomica e nella permanente opposizione dei blocchi politici e militari, angoscia del pericolo di un generale conflitto.» (ibid.).

On the other side of the world, the ACWDF briefly records its participation in the Bureau. On October 31, a Chinese Women's Delegation, led by Yang Yunyu, ACWF Secretary of the Secretariat attended the Executive Bureau meeting of the WIDF in Rome. The meeting discussed the cooperation between the WIDF and other international women's groups, as well as proposed amendments to the federation's constitution (Yang 1991, 90).

The bureau is not echoed by *Women of China*. The Chinese federation is mostly focused on internal affairs, and as expected its international section is predominantly occupied by articles focused on the decolonization processes, mirroring the line it had taken since the beginning, supporting a liberation war against a war of aggression.³⁶⁷ In November 1956 an article was published about President Sukarno's visit to Beijing.³⁶⁸ and in December we can find two articles dedicated to the transnational support for Egypt, one about the historical journey of the "liberation" of Egyptian women up to the Nasser regime ³⁶⁹ and a second one discussing the anti-government protests that erupted among the English and French populations, linked to the aid provided by the ACWDF in support of the Egyptian people:

In China, to support Egypt's resistance against aggression, the "China People's Support for Egypt Resistance Committee" was established. The broad masses

³⁶⁷The following article addressing the themes of the international federation meetings will focus on the Bureau in Berlin (April 2-5, 1957). See "Guoji minzhu fulian jianxun." 国际民主妇联简讯 (Brief from the Women's International Democratic Federation). *ZGFN* 7 (July 1, 1957), 19.

³⁶⁸ Xiao Li 蕭离, Jin Qiao 金桥. "Su jia nuo zong tong zai Beijing." 苏加诺总统在北京 (President Sukarno in Beijing). *ZGFN* (November 1, 1956), 18.

³⁶⁹ Ms. Raghab 拉加卜夫人. "Aiji de funü." 埃及的妇女 (Women of Egypt). *ZGFN* 12 (December 1, 1956), 18.

of Chinese women participated in various gatherings and demonstrations, protesting the aggression by Britain, France, and Israel. Women expressed that if needed, they were ready to offer everything to help their Egyptian sisters.³⁷⁰

4.1.2 Hungarian Revolution: October-November 1956

The consequences of the military intervention in Hungary and the related position of the PCI led the UDI to lose the prominent support of some of its early representatives, such as the Catholic socialist Ada Alessandrini. The Hungarian Revolution received minimal coverage or commentary in *Noi Donne's* women's magazine, with only a few neutral-toned photographs and brief articles. However, a few brief reports and statements stand out, beginning with the issue of December 1956.³⁷¹ One short article reports on the peaceful demonstrations of Hungarian women in Budapest protesting against the continued presence of Soviet troops and «[...] pay tributes of anguish and affection to their dead.»³⁷² Notably on the same page is displayed an article titled *The UDI for Peace*:

The Executive Committee of the Unione Donne Italiane (UDI), meeting on December 5 and 6, 1956, approved the position taken by the Secretariat with the appeal of November 6 on the grave international events. After recalling that the

³⁷⁰ Original text: «中国人民为了支援埃及反抗侵略的斗争，已耀成立了“中国人民支援埃及反抗侵略委员会”。中国的广大妇女参加了各种集会、游行，抗议英、法、以色列的侵略行动。妇女们纷纷提出，如果需要，我们随时可以拿出一切来帮助埃及的姊妹们。中国红十字会会长李德全说：如果派她到埃及去，她一定立即带着一个医务大队到埃及去。中华全国民主妇女联合会书记处书记曹孟君也说，中国妇女决不能容忍埃及妇女和儿童被遭受苦难，我们一定要用实际行动来支援埃及。她表示，为了支援埃及，需要她干什么就干什么。」“Zhiyuan aiji, pumie qinlue zhanhuo” 支援埃及、扑灭侵略战火 (*Support Egypt and End the War of Aggression*). ZGFN 12(December 1, 1956), 18-9.

³⁷¹ Issue of *ND* 50 (December 16, 1956), 18.

³⁷² «[...] recare tributi di angoscia e di affetto ai loro morti» “Manifestazioni a Budapest.” (Demonstrations in Budapest). *ND* 50 (December 16), 18.

Association proudly boasts a long tradition of fighting for peace, the Executive Committee once again felt the need to interpret the anguish of Italian women, who see the will for détente and understanding expressed by all peoples being compromised by the policy of opposing blocs; a policy of blocs that, with no pause for human coexistence, continues today to bear its disastrous fruits. The Executive Committee noted that the common will of Italian women is expressed in the passionate demand: that the leaders of the great powers meet to create a peaceful solution to the problems, which are dangerously bringing back the climate of the Cold War and threatening world peace; and that negotiations be conducted as soon as possible to overcome the blocs, making possible the reduction of armaments and the withdrawal of foreign troops from every country; to create the conditions necessary to finally achieve that general disarmament which is the aspiration of all peoples; that the Italian Government work at the UN and in all international forums to support any initiative aimed at overcoming the policy of blocs and promoting a return to the spirit of Geneva. The Executive Committee, noting that the consequences of the aggravated international situation are already weighing on our country due to the worsening economic situation, with the attempt to create a climate of division and a practice of discrimination among citizens, demands: that the Government intervene by all means to ensure price stability and necessary supplies and to curb speculative maneuvers; that the Government strive to restore and maintain internal harmony, respecting the equality and freedom of citizens, by implementing the principles of the Republican Constitution. The Executive Committee of the UDI invites all women to unite for the defense of peace, for national harmony, and to prevent the worsening of already heavy conditions of misery and deprivation; to demonstrate everywhere and on every occasion their will to oppose the threats of war, aware of being a great force that, even in the past, succeeded in pointing the way and

opening the path to détente. The Executive Committee urges the Provincial Organizations of the UDI to ensure that the new peace campaign begins as soon as possible. The Executive Committee has decided to convene a study conference in January on distribution costs and the repercussions of the current international situation on the Italian market.³⁷³

This statement by the Executive Committee of the Unione Donne Italiane (UDI), issued in December 1956, is a powerful testament to the organization's multifaceted strategy in the service of peace and social justice. The document demonstrates the UDI's ability to intervene on multiple levels: at the national governmental level, by invoking constitutional principles and urging concrete economic and political action; and at the grassroots level, by mobilizing its provincial branches and broader base of women across the country. It is particularly noteworthy how the UDI aligns its appeal with the broader goals of the international socialist front, emphasizing the urgency of

³⁷³ Original text: «Il Comitato Direttivo dell'Unione Donne Italiane, riunitosi il 5 e 6 dicembre 1956, ha approvato la posizione presa dalla Segreteria con l'appello del 6 novembre u.s. sui gravi avvenimenti internazionali. Dopo aver ricordato che l'Associazione vanta con orgoglio una lunga tradizione di lotta per la pace, il Comitato Direttivo, ha sentito ancora una volta l'esigenza di interpretare l'angoscia delle donne italiane, che vedono compromessa dalla politica dei blocchi contrapposti la volontà espressa da tutti i popoli per la distensione e la intesa; politica dei blocchi, che, permanentemente, non sosta strumenti di convivenza umana, sta stravincendo oggi ancora i suoi frutti funesti. Il Comitato Direttivo ha rilevato che la comune volontà delle donne italiane si esprime nella appassionata richiesta: 1) che i massimi responsabili delle grandi potenze si incontrino per creare la soluzione pacifica dei problemi, che riportano pericolosamente al clima della guerra fredda e mettono in forse la pace del mondo; e che si pervenga al più presto, attraverso negoziati, al superamento dei blocchi per rendere possibile la riduzione degli armamenti, il ritiro delle truppe straniere da ogni paese; per creare le condizioni onde giungere infine a quel disarmo generale che è nelle aspirazioni di tutti i popoli; 3) che il Governo italiano si adoperi all'ONU e in tutti i consessi internazionali per appoggiare ogni iniziativa intesa a superare la politica dei blocchi e a favorire il ritorno allo spirito di Ginevra. Il Comitato Direttivo, rilevando che le conseguenze dell'aggravata situazione internazionale già pesano sul nostro paese per l'inasprimento della situazione economica, con il tentativo di suscitare un clima di frattura e una pratica di discriminazione fra i cittadini, chiede: 1) che il Governo intervenga con ogni mezzo per assicurare la stabilità dei prezzi e i necessari approvvigionamenti e per stroncare le manovre speculative; 2) che il Governo si adoperi a ristabilire e mantenere la concordia interna nel rispetto dell'eguaglianza e della libertà dei cittadini, attuando i principi della Costituzione Repubblicana. Il Comitato Direttivo dell'UDI invita tutte le donne ad unirsi per la difesa della pace, per la concordia nazionale, per scongiurare l'aggravarsi di condizioni già troppo pesanti di miseria e di privazione; a manifestare in ogni luogo, in ogni occasione la loro volontà di opporsi alle minacce di guerra, consapevoli di essere una grande forza che, già nel passato, riuscì ad indicare ed aprire la via della distensione. Il Comitato Direttivo impegna le Organizzazioni Provinciali della UDI ad adoperarsi affinché la nuova campagna di pace abbia inizio al più presto. Il Comitato Direttivo ha deciso di convocare in gennaio un Convegno di studio sui costi di distribuzione e sulle ripercussioni, nel mercato italiano, dell'attuale congiuntura internazionale.» In "L'UDI per la pace." (The UDI for Peace). *ND* 50 (December 16), 18.

overcoming bloc politics and returning to negotiation and détente. The reference to the “spirit of Geneva” explicitly evokes the 1954 Geneva Conference and its symbolic weight as a milestone in the global peace process. This invocation serves not only to position the UDI within a transnational framework of peace activism but also to connect the Italian campaign to a wider, translocal mobilization of women that had gained traction since the Korean War. The UDI’s approach exemplifies a holistic engagement in peace-building, wherein appeals to international diplomacy are interwoven with demands for internal economic stability, democratic cohesion, and civic equality. By demanding both international disarmament and domestic welfare protections, the UDI articulates a distinctly gendered vision of peace that spans the public and private, the national and international. This dual effort – working through legal-institutional avenues while simultaneously galvanizing grassroots participation – underscores the organization’s key role in the postwar landscape of global feminist pacifism.

The call for interventions and solutions for peace was repeated just a week later³⁷⁴, where a brief note titled “*Women for Peace*” is also reported. In this piece, it is stated:

On behalf of socialist women, PSI leader Hon. Anna Matera sent a letter to the Soviet Women's Committee, inviting them to join Italian women in a campaign for peace and détente. The letter also expresses the concern of Italian women regarding the grave events in Hungary and, while clarifying that socialist women do not intend to align their voices with the enemies of the USSR, asks

³⁷⁴ ND 51 (December 23, 1956), 10.

that Soviet women work towards the restoration of normalcy in Hungary as swiftly as possible.³⁷⁵

These interventions, however, are balanced by articles aimed at rehabilitating the international image of the USSR and Soviet republics. In particular, this emerged clearly from a report of an Italian women journalists' delegation invited by the CSW to visit the USSR, at the end of the year.³⁷⁶ The delegation visit resulted in a report echoing the propaganda of the "great country" of the USSR.³⁷⁷

The representation of the Hungarian events in *Women of China*, the ACWDF mouth-piece, also reflects the Soviet line on the conflict. Only two articles were dedicated to this topic, respectively, in January and in August 1957. The first is a sharp infantilization of the dissent regarding the Soviet intervention in the People's Republic of Hungary, portrayed as a necessary move to prevent Hungary from returning to a monarchical and pro-Nazi situation similar to that before the creation of the Soviet Republic.³⁷⁸ The second article,³⁷⁹ however, discusses a WIDF delegation in Hungary and the network of women's aid mobilized to support children in need, noting that

³⁷⁵ Original text: «A nome delle donne socialiste, la dirigente del PSI on. Anna Matera ha inviato una lettera al Comitato delle donne sovietiche, invitandole a unirsi alle donne italiane per una campagna in favore della pace e della distensione. La lettera esprime anche il turbamento delle donne italiane per i gravi fatti d'Ungheria e, chiarendo che le donne socialiste non intendono confondere la propria voce con quella dei nemici dell'URSS, chiede che le donne sovietiche si adoperino per un ripristino della normalità in Ungheria, il più sollecito possibile.» "Le donne per la pace." (Women for Peace). *ND* 51 (December 23, 1956), 10.

³⁷⁶ "Abbiamo conosciuto un grande Paese" (*We Have Come to Know a Great Country*). *ND* 1 (January 1, 1957), 11. The report was signed collectively by some of the participants to the delegation, respectively: Elsa Bergamaschi, Maria Aruffo, Luciana Nissim, Antonietta Drago, Flora Favilla, Adriana Seroni, Dina Forti, Egle Monti, Camilla Cederna, Silvia Magi Bonfanti.

³⁷⁷ Following a similar line, reproducing "Soviet propaganda" is the following article "L'URSS oggi." (The USSR Today). *ND* 9 (March 3), 24-25, also collects reportage of the previous Italian Women's journalist delegation.

³⁷⁸ Shu Lian 舒濂. "Gei haizimen jiang xiongyali shiqing de shihou." 給孩子們講匈牙利事情的時候 (When Talking to Children About the Hungarian Situation). *ZGFN* 1 (January 1, 1957), 21.

³⁷⁹ "Rang xiongyali de haizimen hui dao zuguo huaibao." 让匈牙利的孩子们回到祖国怀抱 (Bringing Hungary's children back to their homeland), on *ZGFN* 8 (August, 1957), 27.

the country has since returned to a calm state. The statements from the delegation reported in the article focus on hopes for peace and emphasize the positive role of the Red Army in restoring peace in Hungary. The article highlights the efforts made to protect and now repatriate Hungarian children. It concludes with the following remarks:

The Women's International Democratic Federation and other organizations were deeply concerned and quickly joined in the work of the "Children's Repatriation Committee," urging governments worldwide to pressure the authorities to return the Hungarian children to their homeland. The Austrian Democratic Women's Federation also launched efforts, striving to assist Hungarian mothers in retrieving their children from the camps under Soviet control. They then sent these children, who had been taken away from their homes, to even more distant places. Now, peace has returned to the land of Hungary. The diligent Hungarian people have stood up again on their own land and are working hard again. After this struggle against counterrevolution, they have come to cherish their motherland even more. But how can the mothers who lost their children forget their pain? They are taking this deep sorrow with them as they return to their homeland with their children!³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ Original text: «国际民主妇联和大事的关怀,向全月到了匈牙利的女团伦,参加到“儿童避返委员会”的工作当中,并召告世界她向她政府施加压力,迫使当局将匈牙利的孩子们回国。奥地利民主妇女联盟也展开了工作,努力协助匈牙利的母亲从匈牙利安全团理主义会列外出来的孩子们。她们再把这些被匈牙利内反映到处离家,买其他劲么困,把孩子送到更远地方去»(Ibid.)

现在,匈牙利的国土上已经恢复了平静。那些勤劳的匈牙利人民,又在自己的片体上重新站了起厦,努力搞作地工作了。经过了这次反乘让的接斗,他们更加会到孤国,是可爱的。但是那些失去孩子的母亲们心中,忘不了的痛苦下去呢?她们带着这种沉痛着着自己的孩子回国!» (Ibid.)

4.1.3 Post-1956 Institutional Changes within Women's Federation

The main global events were reflected in Italy in the deep changes and vicissitudes happening to the main minor actor in the history of the feminine transcultural relations, the UDI. During its 1956 Congress, an "emancipationist" line was proclaimed, championed by the new president, Marisa Rodano, as she emphasized in her memoirs (Rodano 2010). This position faced opposition both nationally and internationally. The UDI asserted its independence from the Communist parties, and the then-president Marisa Rodano regretfully pointed out:

The historiographical narrative on Italian women's associations in the second half of the twentieth century, though limited, is often dominated by simplistic and banal stereotypes, such as the notion that the UDI was the women's organization of the PCI, or that the female party members were merely troops at the disposal of the UDI. This is not true; the relationship was far more complex. In a time of stark political opposition in Italy, many UDI members and activists, even those not affiliated with the PCI, felt they belonged to the "democratic workers' movement" or the "left," thus positioning themselves in opposition. They feared isolation and being left alone and defenseless [...]. To assert, with such brutal honesty, the idea of non-affiliation with any political faction constituted a real rupture, or at least the beginning of radical self-criticism and a 180-degree turn. However, for thousands of members and grassroots leaders, such a statement was a real punch in the gut.³⁸¹

³⁸¹ Original text: «La vulgata storiografica sull'associazionismo femminile italiano della seconda metà del Novecento, peraltro scarsa, è succube in genere di stereotipi banali e semplificatori secondo i quali l'Udi era l'organizzazione femminile del Pci, oppure che le iscritte al partito fossero truppe messe a disposizione dell'Udi. Non è vero; il rapporto era assai più complesso. In tempi di frontale contrapposizione nella politica italiana, gran parte delle socie e attiviste dell'Udi, anche quelle non iscritte al Pci, sentivano di appartenere al «movimento operaio democratico», alla «sinistra» si essere perciò collocate all'opposizione, paventavano l'isolamento, temevano di restare sole e indifese [...]. Sostenere, con tanta brutale franchezza, la tesi della non appartenenza ad alcuno schieramento, costituiva una vera e propria cesura o, quantomeno, l'inizio di una radicale autocritica e di una svolta a 180 gradi; ma una simile asserzione si traduceva, per migliaia di iscritte e dirigenti di base, in un autentico pugno nello stomaco.» (Ivi, 104).

This emancipatory choice was made to promote women's unity. It occurred in the context of the split between communists and socialists that 1956 had brought about for the Italian left, making dialogue within the UDI more complex, as it included a large faction of women, not only communists but also socialists (ivi, 108)³⁸². Rodano recalls, «[...] the work of the distributors collapsed, and we would never return to the previous circulation and sales numbers. The reduction in our income was dramatic, a real financial crisis, which forced us to sell off assets, to the point that we had to sell the UDI cadre school, a beautiful villa in Genzano.» (ivi, 106)³⁸³

The claim for autonomy from the PCI, CPSU, and WIDF was not meant to result in isolationism, but rather to promote dialogue among these entities while preserving the UDI's focus on women's emancipation and its autonomy in policies concerning these issues. In this sense, emancipation was intended to be advanced as a "strategic" matter and «not a more or less sectional addition to the overall political platform.» (ivi, 106-7) The new directives of the UDI were summarized in the final document of the national Executive Committee's meeting on the agenda "Possibilities for New Orientations and New Activities of the UDI" (ivi, 103). This document, on one hand, defined the federation's concrete objectives – equal pay, pensions for housewives, a ban on dismissal due to marriage – while, on the other hand, expressing the need to strengthen theoretical work on emancipation «to provide a more solid foundation for the association's autonomy.»³⁸⁴ This attitude was not easily accepted in the world of

³⁸² The 23rd Congress of the PSI marked the end of collaboration between the PCI and the PSI, which sought partnerships with the PSDI and the DC (Nencioni 2015).

³⁸³ Original text: «[...] il lavoro delle diffonditrici crollò, e non saremmo più tornate alle tirature e alle vendite precedenti. La riduzione delle nostre entrate fu drammatica, una vera crisi finanziaria, che costrinse ad alienare il patrimonio, tanto che si dovette vendere la scuola-quadri dell'Udi, una bellissima villa di Genzano.»

³⁸⁴ Rodano (2010, 262, note 12) indicates that, as proof of this, *ND* published an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* in the form of a serialized story.

political blocs. Criticism arose within the PCI, as Rodano recalls, mentioning the meeting with the PCI's women's section in October 1957, which was also attended by Luigi Longo and Enrico Bonazzi from the party's secretariat. They emphasized that the emancipatory stance could undermine the balance within the WIDF. The UDI was advised to remain open and not seek independence in order to avoid political clashes and prevent isolation from the international movement as a whole.

The most serious obstacle women face today is the continued existence of a grave international tension and an aggressive imperialist bloc that threatens to unleash a third world conflict [...]. As these ominous prospects persist, the international women's movement is also compelled to promote and coordinate an effective struggle by various national organizations in defense of peace. It would be erroneous to schematically and abstractly prioritize the fight for peace over the fight for women's rights, or vice versa (ivi, 144).³⁸⁵

From this text, it becomes clear that the PCI valued the balance of the global women's movement and its strategic importance. At the same time, it also highlights that a break by the women could have indeed put the movement, already in crisis, in a difficult position. However, it also emerges that the party leaders were unable to fully grasp the function of the international movement in relation to the UDI's local objectives. Despite recommendations, the UDI, while trying to maintain dialogue with the

³⁸⁵ Original text: «L'ostacolo più grave che oggi le donne incontrano è il permanere di una grave tensione internazionale e l'esistenza di un blocco aggressivo imperialista che minaccia di scatenare un terzo conflitto mondiale [...]. Permanendo queste minacciose prospettive si impone anche al movimento femminile internazionale l'esigenza di promuovere e coordinare un'efficace lotta delle varie organizzazioni nazionale in difesa della pace. Erroneo sarebbe il prefissare schematicamente e in astratto la priorità della lotta per la pace o di quella per i diritti delle donne.»

WIDF, did not change its direction but instead hoped to influence the overall direction of the federation. This stance first manifested itself at the Fourth WIDF Congress, the “World Congress of Women” in Vienna, held from June 1 to 5 of 1958 (ivi, 111-119).

Opposition to the UDI continued and was fueled even in the early 1960s by figures from both the DC and the PCI (ivi, 156-157). This time, however, the argument sought to undermine the rationale for the UDI’s existence as an autonomous entity, engaged in dialogue but independent from the party. These critiques questioned the existence of a women’s issue itself, seeing it as a threat to society as a whole. Rodano recalls how members of the Communist Youth Federation questioned the very existence of the UDI, accusing it of being outdated and arguing that its struggles should be moved to a more direct political arena within the parties (ivi, 158). Rodano responded by directly referencing Engels:

[...] the women’s issue could not be reduced to or identified solely with the fundamental contradiction between capital and labor; consequently, women’s emancipation could not mechanically coincide with the emancipation of the proletariat. Female oppression (as I cited Engels) predated capitalist exploitation and was not synonymous with it, just as it had not previously been synonymous, for example, with the regime based on slavery.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ Original text: «[...] la questione femminile non era *riducibile e identificabile* con la contraddizione fondamentale tra capitale e lavoro; di conseguenza l’emancipazione femminile non poteva coincidere meccanicamente con l’emancipazione del proletariato. L’oppressione femminile (citavo Engels) preesisteva allo sfruttamento capitalistico e non si identificava con esso, come prima non si era identificata, per esempio, col regime fondato sulla schiavitù.» (Ivi, 157-8).

The general atmosphere was one of division within the party, particularly in light of international events, which led to a significant internal split within the PCI. However, the main line of the PCI, partly due to the loyalty demonstrated by its representatives within the UDI, became more vigilant and attentive.³⁸⁷ The attention given to these internal dynamics overshadowed the debate on another important issue, birth control, which was the subject of an investigation only in *Noi Donne* in November 1956, under the new leadership of Giuliana Dal Pozzo (Rodano 2010, 105-6).

The situation in China for the women liberation movement was at a turnpoint too, but for different reasons.³⁸⁸ The mid-1950s promising perspective to build a transnational agenda addressed to give visibility to the social and political role of women was gradually made more difficult following the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 and the Great Leap Forward the following year. As a result, the PRC's political outlook became more inward-looking. In 1957, during the Third National Women's Congress, the ACWF shifted in a conservative direction, moving away from its earlier approach of encouraging women's participation in production as a path to women's liberation. Instead, it embraced a new agenda known as diligently and frugally building the nation and diligently and frugally managing the household (勤俭建国, 勤俭持家, *Qinjian Jianguo, Qinjian Chijia*), often referred to as "the two diligences." This shift

³⁸⁷ This is evidenced by Nilde Iotti's speech at the PCI Central Committee regarding the organization of the 3rd National Conference of Communist Women, where she pointed out the party's lack of support for the emancipation cause (ivi. 2010, 159).

³⁸⁸ Wang, Zheng. 2006. "Dilemmas of Inside Agitators: Chinese State Feminists in 1957." *The China Quarterly* 188 (December), 913–32. This article illustrates the turning point of 1957 within the women's federation. Subsequently, in the book *Finding Women in the State* (2017), Wang Zheng dedicates an entire section to the internal shift within the ACWF, emphasizing the role of Liu Shaoqi, who highlighted the importance of the federation during a crisis when its very existence was called into question. The ACWF had to prioritize the party line over more strictly gender-related issues in order to survive (see particularly pages 65, 66, 67).

was reflected in the change of the federation's name, as Yang Yunyu, ACWDF resident secretary at the WIDF from 1953 to 1957, and then responsible for foreign affairs and the International Liaison Department at the ACWF Secretariat – explains. The name was changed during the third congress of the ACWF in 1957:

The word "democracy" of the International Democratic Women's Federation is aimed at anti-fascism and striving for democratic progress. Our National Democratic Women's Federation used the word "democracy" because the task of the democratic revolution has not yet been completed. After establishing the socialist system in 1956 [i.e. Social Organization System],³⁸⁹ the three major National Women's Organizations dropped these two words in 1957 and were renamed the All-China Women's Federation.³⁹⁰

After the 1957 Congress, Yang Yunyu recalls how the organization of the ACWF foreign affairs organized its work into three main areas to facilitate coordination: domestic affairs, managed by Li Baoguang; foreign affairs, overseen by Yang Yunyu; and publicity, handled by Wu Wei. The Party Group of the ACWF has a distinct division of labor among the Party Group Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and various departments, with each person responsible for liaising with multiple individuals and departments. Within the national Party Group, Cai Chang, the Chairman, is responsible for overall work, focusing primarily on domestic affairs, while Vice Chairman

³⁸⁹ Between 1949 and 1956, China developed a unique social organization system distinct from the "third sector" commonly found in Western countries or a mere collection of civil associations. This system comprises three broad categories: mass organizations under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), re-accredited social organizations, and non-registered resident mutual aid groups. This model represents a specific form of adaptive political power construction, shaped by the combined influence of three key forces: state-structured social organizations, the collaboration of social elites, and the participation of social members in addressing marginal issues. Among these, the influence and authority of state-structured social organizations are the most prominent and significant (Chen, Mao 2023).

³⁹⁰ Original: «国际民主妇联的“民主”二字是针对反法西斯讲的，争取民主进步。我们的全国民主妇联是因为民主革命的任务尚未完成，所以用“民主”二字。1956年社会主义制度建立后，1957年全国妇女三大去掉这两个字，改称全国妇联。」 (Geng 2023).

Deng Yingchao concentrates on foreign affairs. Due to their age and health, Cai and Deng were not working in presence at the Federation headquarters. Still, they attended essential meetings, remaining pivot figures from whom to seek instructions and report on significant matters. She noticed:

The International Liaison Department has long overseen the foreign affairs work of the All-China Women's Federation. The workload for women's foreign affairs is substantial, with heavy responsibilities for overseas visits and hosting foreign guests. The members of the Secretariat responsible for foreign affairs are always busy and never have any free time.³⁹¹

Among the Party Group and Secretariat members are Cao Guanqun 曹冠群, Guo Jian 郭建, and others. Additionally, three "democratic sisters" played crucial roles: Cao Mengjun, leader of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang) was in charge of the foreign affairs section; Hu Naiqiu 胡耐秋 was responsible for the International Propaganda Department, mainly overseeing the English version of *Women of China*; and Shen Zijiu was in charge of the propaganda section and edited the "Chinese Women" magazine. Although these three women were members of the Communist Party of China, their party membership was not publicly disclosed then, allowing them to serve as public figures outside the party and facilitate the united front work within the women's community. It was stipulated that the three "democratic sisters" could attend the ACWF party group meetings.

³⁹¹ Original: «全国妇联外事工作长期由中联部代管，妇女外事工作量很大，出国访问和接待外宾的任务很重，负责外事的书记处几位书记都不得闲。」 (Geng 2023).

4.1.4 Changes in womanhood models

In this context of internal revision, the conception of women and women's work also changed. This shift becomes evident in the articles published in the Chinese periodical *Women of China*. In particular, in the speech by ACWF vice-President Li Dequan published at the Third National Congress of Literary and Art Workers in July 1960.³⁹² Li's intervention calls for promoting images of model women according to the ideals of frugality and diligence. In this context, the literary tool is also emphasized as instrumental in propagating party policies:³⁹³

Chairman Mao has taught us that literature and art should serve as an integral part of the revolutionary machine, acting as a powerful weapon to unite and educate the people, strike at the enemy, and help eliminate them. Our literary and art workers have followed this teaching, correctly wielding the socialist literary and artistic weapon.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Li Dequan 李德全. "Suzao dongren de yingxiong funü de xingxiang." 塑造动人的英雄妇女的形象 (*Shaping Inspiring Images of Heroic Women*). *ZGFN* 14/15 (August 1, 1960), 5.

³⁹³ The use of literary, musical, poetic, and cinematic media for propaganda purposes becomes evident as early as the 1950s, but never has its utilization intensified as it does during this period, particularly in the women's magazine *ZGFN*. This significance is further illustrated by the increase in articles featuring, for example, party songs and films. In issue no 5, dated March 1, 1960, "Sweet Song of the March 8th Festival" by Yin Guanglan and "Opening the Floodgates of Energy, Introducing the Films for the 'March 8th' Film Week" by Xie Fengsong are published. Similarly, in issue no 18, dated September 16, 1960, "Zhengyi zhanzheng de ge" 正义战争的歌 (Song of a Just War) by Li Zhen 李贞 appears, subtitled "Dianying *Yangmen nüjiang* guan hou" 电影《楊門女將》观后感 (Reflections After Watching the Film 'The Women Generals of the Yang Family'). This piece emphasizes the equal capabilities of men and women, even in military contexts, through the narrative presented in the film *Yangmen nüjiang* 楊門女將 (The Women Generals of the Yang Family) by Cui Wei 崔嵬 and Cheng Huaikai 陈怀恺.

³⁹⁴ Original text: «毛主席教导我們要使文艺很好地成为整个革命机器的一个粗成部分, 作为团结人民、教育人民、打击敌人、消灭敌人的有力武器, 帮助人民同心同德地和敌人作斗争。我国的文艺工作者正是遵循着这个教导, 正确地发挥了社会主义文艺武器的作用.» (Ibid.).



Figure 4.2. Zhang Daxin 张大昕. Mama kaizhe tuolaji laile 妈妈开着拖拉机来了 (Mama Comes on a Tractor), 1960 (Chineseposters 1960).

The words of Li Dequan and this image of women must be understood in light of the ideas of the leader Cai Chang.

In Cai Chang's view, women's participation in labor in New China not only reflects the progress of social development but also makes more people realize that household labor is part of social labor. This transforms traditional family concepts, protects women's practical interests, and improves women's status. This is a process of positive interaction between production and women's status, and the effects are significant. According to statistics, “in 1957, 70% of rural women participated in agricultural production; urban female workers reached 3.286 million, an increase of 4.5 times compared to 1949. This completely changed the situation in old China where women were excluded from social production labor, giving women an independent economic source.” (Ji, Luo 2020, 50)

According to Wang (2017, 54-77), Cai Chang collaborated with Deng Yingchao and Deng Xiaoping to preserve the organizational structure of the Women's Federation by emphasizing the "double diligences." However, in Manning (2023, 182) opinion Cai Chang's focus on promoting the double diligences was not merely a defensive strategy but was already central to her vision of the ACWF's growing role in the state economy, with the socialist household as a key element. Rooted in the Yan'an experience, the double diligences represented a proactive component of economic policy, rather than a response to it, aligned with a "Total War" approach to rapid progress. The political and economic events unfolding in China at the end of 1958 had a significant impact on the life of the ACWF, and for many women, the Great Leap Forward in 1958 marked a turning point in Chinese women's liberation (Wang 2010, 843; Manning 2006) Building on pre-1949 efforts, the PRC of the Great Leap Forward began to promote contraception and relaxed limits on sterilization and abortion (Manning 2023, 132-3), a process headed by the Ministry of Health Li Dequan (Ivi, 205-36).

This new definition on the role of women evolved in a context that slowly prepared for this change. During the Cold War era, few global leaders had recognized menstruation as an issue of national significance, let alone addressed it publicly. In December 1958, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, emphasized the importance of menstrual health in the new commune regulations. He emphasized the need to protect women both before and after childbirth by ensuring they get sufficient rest, and highlighted that menstruating women should also avoid strenuous tasks, cold water, and night shifts (ivi, 240). Mao's attention to reproductive health followed strong advocacy by Cai Chang in the fall of 1958. Throughout the winter and spring of 1959, Cai

continued to stress the need to protect women's health in her major writings, highlighting that some leaders' views on this issue were "conflicted," a problem that needed urgent resolution (ibid). Likewise, Li Dequan, Vice Chair of the ACWF and Minister of Health, took action by urging medical authorities to avoid exaggerated claims and maintain a scientific approach (Ibid). In a 1959 *Women of China* essay on women's health, Li Dequan discussed women's unique vulnerabilities, arguing that their physical capabilities differed from men's and required special protection.³⁹⁵ However, as the CCP moved into the new year, it became clear that women's health and related organizations were not consistently protected. This concern was reflected in two *Women of China* articles: *Why Postpartum Rest is Necessary*,³⁹⁶ which recommended simple postpartum care, and Li Dequan's follow-up article, *Why It Is Necessary to Emphasize Prenatal Rest*.³⁹⁷

The early break from maternalism at a grassroots level began under Li Dequan's health-care reform movement, which laid the groundwork for distributing birth control and legalizing abortions. These efforts were built on pre-1949 campaigns to "fight starvation with contraception" (Manning 2023, 132). The maternalist social policy, though complex and sometimes contradictory, aligns with the concept of biopower as understood through a Foucauldian lens and reflects what Goldstein (1998) identified as the rise of a new ideological and political structure characterized by state regulation and occasional repressive measures. Campaigns aimed at reforming birth, marriage, and household practices operated through a eugenic framework of social

³⁹⁵ Li Dequan 李德全. "Guanxin funü jiankang baochi wangsheng ganjing." 关心妇女健康保持旺盛干劲 (Caring for Women's Health to Maintain Vigorous Energy). *ZGFN* 3 (March 1, 1959), 1.

³⁹⁶ Li Huiqin 李惠琴. "Chanhou weisheme yao xiuxi." 产后为什么要休息 (Why Postpartum Rest is Necessary). *ZGFN* 1 (January 1, 1961), 29.

³⁹⁷ Li Dequan 李德全. "Weisheme bixu zhongshi chan qian xiuxi." 为什么必须重视产前休息 (Why It Is Necessary to Emphasize Prenatal Rest). *ZGFN* 2 (February 1, 1961), 31.

reform. Eugenics (优生学, *Youshengxue*), literally translated as the study of optimal birth (Barnes 2018, 187), had been criticized by the CCP before its founding but still influenced efforts to regulate women's bodies and the households they managed. This movement in China was observed with great interest by Italian women, who were fighting to realize the women's rights enshrined in the Italian constitution but lacked formal legal implementation – a struggle Molly Tambor (2014, 169) termed “Constitutional Rights Feminism.”

4.2 Decolonization and New Global Strategies

4.2.1 Growing divisions within the Transnational women's movement

The effects of the Sino-Soviet Split contributed to freezing the personal contacts between the UDI and the PRC Women's Federation.³⁹⁸ This involution is significantly proven by the disappearance of documents attesting to any direct correspondence with the PRC in the UDI central archive after 1957. At the same time, there was a bifurcation in the conception of human rights that had previously united women transnationally: “If the allies in the Second World War had chosen to describe their opponents as systematic violators of human rights, the antagonisms between the Communist bloc and the Western democracies quickly embraced similar rhetoric.” (Foot, 2010). In the global context of peaceful coexistence, the communist movement's ideological front split into two distinct approaches: one that advocated coexistence – understood as mutual respect despite differing political systems and orientations – and another that rejected coexistence, aligning with anti-imperialism, as

³⁹⁸ Renamed in 1957, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo funü lianhehui* 中华人民共和国妇女联合会. For an extended version of the Federation's 1957 Constitution see ACWF (2000b).

many nations were still under the threat of colonialism or foreign invasions. This division also led to a bifurcation in how women and their roles were understood.

In the WWII context both the Chinese and the Italian cases, women were willing to give continuity to the intersectional mobilization experienced during the war that had led to a “partial disruption of the gender order”.³⁹⁹ But now the circumstances had widely changed. Italy experienced significant progress in women’s rights with the promulgation of new laws in the 1950s – a law on the physical and economic protection of working mothers (*Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri*, Law No. 860) in 1950, on equal remuneration in 1956, and another one on the protection of homework in 1958 (Gabrielli, 2020).

In post-war Italy, the figure of the woman soldier – almost a genderless prototype, strong and brave like men but still female – was overshadowed, due to her incompatibility with the traditional Catholic view of women. Less controversy surrounded the figure of the “staffetta,” or messenger, thanks to the more ephemeral nature of this role, which had a lesser visual impact. While the role of the “staffetta” was more readily accepted, its crucial importance was unfortunately not fully recognized. Beyond the partisan parades of the immediate post-war period, this marginalization is also reflected in contemporary data on the awarding of military valor medals: despite the fact that there were 35,000 women who took part into the partisan resistance fight, only 19 were awarded gold medals for military valor (ANPI, n.d.)

Although women's active participation in the War of Liberation had proven to be a crucial – albeit often unspoken – factor in granting them the "reward" of suffrage, there was now a reinforced interpretation of the Resistance as an exclusively male

³⁹⁹ Bonfiglioli (2013, 59); see also the groundbreaking work of Elshtain (1987, 163-193). For a recent work stressing the Chinese Communist Women network beyond the Soviet Union see Calver (2023).

experience of redemption. Furthermore, the "otherness" of women increasingly became associated with an image opposed to war itself (Casalini 2005, 236), framing women pacifist and peaceful role (Di Cori 1994). The creation of the UDI itself originates from the Women's Defense Groups formed during the war, and thus has its roots in the violent and armed association. However, once the war ended, this military connotation faded. As Alessandrini noted as early as 1951,⁴⁰⁰ taking up arms was a necessity, but the struggle continues without them, for peace and life. Woman is not a bearer of death, but of life, as a mother. This is also why the lesser recognition of women's role in the war is more readily accepted. The narrative shifts from that of a warrior to one of a nurturer, reinforcing traditional gender roles and diminishing the acknowledgment of women's active participation in combat.

In parallel and in contrast, within the Chinese context, there is a continuity in the role of women during and after the war. Although militarized women iconography became less visible in the context of socialist reconstruction, with more emphasis on promoting China as a homeland of peace and tranquility after liberation, their military element was far from being denied. On the contrary, it was reaffirmed during the Korean War, where the participation of women in military efforts is attested (Liu 2023). Women militia iconography will have come back to be displayed in women's press from 1958 onward, will feature articles on figures of martyrs from the Liberation War and on contemporary model military women. In October 1958, the article *Women Militia Training* was published on *Women of China*.⁴⁰¹ The article openly employs military language and emphasizes the equal military capabilities of men and

⁴⁰⁰ Alessandrini, Ada. "Partigiane ieri e oggi" (Partisans yesterday and today). *ND* 17 (April 29, 1951), 3.

⁴⁰¹ Hejian County Women's Federation 河間县妇联. "Nü minbing lianwu." 女民兵練武 (Women Militia Training). *ZGFN* 13 (October 1, 1958), 7.

women. Again, two months later, the same periodical featured Li Dequan's speech titled opening speech at the National Conference of Women Socialism Builders [全国妇女建设社会主义积极分子代表会议] held in early December 1958.⁴⁰² In the speech, Li highlighted the presence of Peng Dehuai, Minister of Defense, and the conference and stated, «Today's conference is honored to have comrade Peng Dehuai from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China present, providing us with guidance. This demonstrates the Party's deep concern and encouragement for us women.» This acknowledgment suggests the CCP recognition of women's contributions to socialist construction and their ongoing involvement in national defense efforts.⁴⁰³

The events of the Vienna Congress in 1958 were pivotal in highlighting a key moment in the growing dissension, particularly in how the Chinese side increasingly adopted "isolationist" or "independentist" positions with a Third World perspective. This shift reflected a diminishing engagement with the concerns of other countries, as China positioned itself as a leader of advanced progress, portraying it as a model of socialist construction. This dynamic became especially evident in the decision to change the name of the Chinese federation, symbolizing its distinct stance and growing autonomy within the global movement.

The fourth WIDF Congress, also named "World Congress of Women", as the 1953 one, gathered representatives of 76 countries in Vienna from June 1 to 5, 1958. At the end of the Congress, the assembly approved three resolutions focused on children's rights, women's right to emancipation, and humankind right to life. The first

⁴⁰² Li Dequan 李德全. "Kaimu ci." 开幕词 (Opening Remarks). *ZGFN* 18 (December 22, 1958), 3.

⁴⁰³Original text: «在今天的大会上, 有中共中央的代表彭德怀同志亲临指导, 这是党对我们妇女亲切的关怀和鼓舞。同志们, 让我们向党中央和毛主席表示我们最崇高的敬意.» (Ibid.).

resolution, on children's rights, called for strengthening relationships between global women's organizations and urged the UN to draft a Charter of Fundamental Rights covering labor, welfare, and education protections. Regarding women's emancipation, the Congress reaffirmed the 1953 Declaration of Women's Rights, specifically emphasizing the principle of "equal pay for equal work." The third issue, the right to life, received significant attention during discussions. In the final report, an appeal was made for an end to the war in Algeria and for the establishment of fair conditions to achieve the reunification of Germany, Korea, and Vietnam. Additionally, the Congress expressed solidarity with all women fighting for their people's independence. In a letter to the UN Human Rights Commission and the UN ECOSOC, the Congress strongly demanded an immediate end to torture and the enforcement of the Nuremberg principles for punishing torturers. Another issue addressed was the admission of the WIDF into the UN's advisory body on women's issues. Thanks to the initiative of the Italian delegation, a resolution was also passed focusing on children's rights, as well as the monitoring and fight against the resurgence of fascism. This highlights the WIDF's persistent effort to reconnect with the UN, an endeavor that was never abandoned following the federation's expulsion from ECOSOC in 1954. This is exemplified by events such as the *Seminar on Equal Rights for Soviet Women*, held in Moscow in September 1956, which was attended by representatives of member states as well as non-governmental representatives from the UN ECOSOC.⁴⁰⁴ Although the official results of the congress suggested continuity and strength within the movement, a closer analysis of the documents from the affiliated federations reveals un-

⁴⁰⁴ Wang Xinnan 王辛南. "Mosike de sulian funü quanli pingdeng jiangxi hui." 莫斯科的苏联妇女权利平等講習会 (Seminar on equal rights for Soviet women in Moscow). *ZGFN* 11 (November 1, 1956), 16.

derlying fractures. These internal divisions were, in fact, becoming increasingly evident. It has not been possible to precisely reconstruct the internal discussions within the ACWDF during this period; however, the aforementioned decrease in articles dedicated to the WIDF in its official mouthpiece suggests a distancing, with a shift in focus towards internal issues. The reasons for the dissent from national federations regarding the instrumentalization of the WIDF by its Soviet component are clearly reflected in the UDI's positions. The Italian federation explicitly lamented the predominant and instrumental focus placed on the themes of peace and disarmament.

4.2.2 New trajectories in the Italian women's movements

The urgency to address the deficiencies and rigidities within the Federation and initiate a critical reassessment of its identity was first raised by the UDI in 1957 during the WIDF Council meeting in Helsinki. These calls for reform were reiterated, more structured, at the World Congress in Vienna in 1958, while the subsequent meetings of the Council in Warsaw in 1960 and Budapest in 1961 solidified the emerging fracture (Cioci 2020, 171). Rodano (2010, 111-9) recounts a meeting held on July 7, 1957, following the WIDF Council in Helsinki, during which the upcoming Congress in Vienna was scheduled. Present were the two Italians in the WIDF Secretariat, Carmen Zanti, who had been elected Secretary General that year – and Angiola Minella. Zanti offered a particularly critical evaluation of the Helsinki Council. According to her, it was decided that the Vienna Congress would focus on three themes: defense of peace, securing women's rights, and protection of children. However, the UDI was not in favor, as this approach avoided addressing the core issue of the Federation's identity. Zanti remarked that the Italian position was not understood, and at Helsinki, the UDI seemed very isolated. From Zanti's perspective, the decision to organize the

Congress around these three themes was driven by the desire to broaden the consensus and accommodate different priorities. This strategy was primarily promoted by Soviet women, who «viewed the WIDF as a tool of their country's foreign policy,»⁴⁰⁵ and by the UFF for different, unspecified reasons. The reference here likely points to the strategy of peaceful coexistence, which is a delicate phase for the international communist movement.⁴⁰⁶

Minella was even more direct than Zanti. In her view, the situation within the WIDF had deteriorated after the Soviet invasion of Hungary: «These are not old encrustations; a purposeful struggle has been waged, and the *raison d'être* of the WIDF is lost... We must address the core issue: the purpose and meaning of the WIDF.»⁴⁰⁷ She emphasized the need to push for the WIDF's re-entry into the UN and its commitment to supporting international conventions on women's labor. Additionally, Minella strongly advocated for a change in the WIDF Secretariat, highlighting the lack of representation from countries that played a central role in the renewed global leftist movement. In contrast, some countries, while geopolitically important, offered limited maneuverability for women. Thus, she proposed: «out with Spain and the USA, in with Argentina and Indonesia.» (ivi, 116).⁴⁰⁸ The gap in independence from the Women's Federation, particularly among women from decolonizing countries, became evident during the same period at the Asian-African Conference of Women, held in Ceylon from February 15 to 24, 1958. The conference was organized by five Asian women's organizations dedicated to social reform co-sponsored the conference,

⁴⁰⁵ Original: «vedevano la WIDF come uno strumento della politica estera del loro paese» (ivi, 116)

⁴⁰⁶ Rodano notes that this approach received support from the Indian delegation. (ibid.)

⁴⁰⁷ Original: «Non sono vecchie incrostazioni; si è condotta una lotta di scopo e la ragion d'essere della WIDF è perduta... Bisogna affrontare il nodo di fondo: scopo e ragion d'essere della WIDF.» (ibid.)

⁴⁰⁸ The issue of the formal yet effectively non-existent representation of women from the so-called 'Third World' in the WIDF has been recently addressed by Gradska, Yulia (2020).

including the All-Ceylon Women's Conference, the Women's Welfare League from Burma, the Indonesian Women's Congress, the All-Pakistan Women's Association, and the All-India Women's Conference. The conference explicitly invoked the spirit of Bandung and was jointly funded by these five national women's organizations from South and Southeast Asia. Each of the national groups on the 1958 organizing committee had a long-standing tradition of social reform feminism, committed to improving women's education and increasing their access to healthcare infrastructure and social development. Moreover, these organizations represented nationalist and state feminist perspectives, striving to connect women's needs and activism to the governance of independent nations. The 1958 conference in Colombo centered its primary concerns around women's welfare and reiterated its decision to refrain from actively engaging in political movements for independence. These two aspects positioned the event within the social reformist spectrum of the international pan-Asian and African women's movement. The Afro-Asian Women's Conference followed it was held in Cairo in 1961 as a state-feminist conference that included leftist feminists linked to the Non-Aligned Movement and organized by the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO). This second conference was more focused on women workers, with a large contingent from state socialist countries (Armstrong 2016, 316-7).

The platform of this conference was primarily focused on issues of women's emancipation, Rodano notes, adding that the WIDF had requested to participate but was denied (*ibid*). According to the former UDI President, this decision was likely influenced by the dissent expressed by women from the Third World, who criticized the WIDF for failing to support the independence struggle of Cameroonian women and

for maintaining an ambiguous position on the Algerian issue, in an effort not to offend the French organization's sensibilities (ibid).

In order to advance the UDI position within the WIDF, Rodano recounts that the Italian federation attempted to build alliances and communicate its perspective before the Congress by conducting a strategy focused on bilateral dialogue. The UDI sought contact with Yugoslav women (September 13-15, 1957), French women (November 1957), Polish women (November 1958), and even the Soviet.⁴⁰⁹

On October 13, 1957, Carmen Zanti wrote from Berlin to Nella Marcellino, head of the PCI's women's section, emphasizing that after discussions with the French and Soviet counterparts, including a conversation with Zoia Ivanova, the Soviet representative at the Secretariat in Berlin, it was a common view within the WIDF that «the federation could not fail to adhere to its three main pillars (peace, women's rights, and children's rights).»⁴¹⁰ Zanti proposed drafting a document or "theses" to prepare for the congress, focusing on the recognition of women's position in modern society, and only then addressing the three key points (ivi, 113). The support Zanti received from the Soviet members of the WIDF Secretariat seemed to be a strategy to temper her expectations, which were considered too "independent," as revealed in a document assessing the WIDF Secretariat members, by the CSW (Gradsкова 2021b, 51-2). Rodano (2010, 117) noted that, in this context, the terms "emancipation" and "rights" were in opposition. The WIDF's understanding of "rights" merely extended the civil and political rights of male citizens to women, whereas the UDI's focus on

⁴⁰⁹The meeting with the CSW delegation was postponed many times and eventually canceled (ibid.)

⁴¹⁰ «che la federazione non potesse non tener fede ai tre filoni (pace, diritti della donna, infanzia).» (ivi, 113).

emancipation was considered both “opportunistic” and “too advanced” for the international women's movement at that time. Zanti's hopes were soon dashed during a subsequent WIDF Secretariat meeting, where it was made clear that a programmatic text on the federation's objectives was unnecessary; instead, a list of issues related to the previously established three points was deemed sufficient (ivi, 114). As a result, the 1958 Vienna Congress was structured around these three points, with introductory presentations given by representatives from the United Kingdom on peace, Argentina on children, and India on women's rights. Like other delegations, the Italian federation was given 20 minutes to speak during the plenary session in addition to its contributions in the committees (ivi, 116-7).

The relationship between the UDI and WIDF became a matter of internal politics within the UDI. Staying in the international federation fueled divisions already seen in national alliances between parties and women from the socialist sphere (ivi, 161). Rodano noted that, on the eve of the UDI's VI National Congress, in May 1959, discussions were already underway about whether to remain in the WIDF. This was related also to the UDI internal frictions with the socialist women within the federation – who were in open conflict with the WIDF following the Hungarian uprising (ibid.) In the following years, the UDI remained committed to its new path of autonomy and emancipation, including on the international stage. This is evident from the messages of Marisa Passigli, a member of the UDI presidency, dated October 21, 1960, and from Nilde Iotti, head of the PCI women's commission, on October 28. These messages were sent after a meeting in Italy to discuss the preparatory documents for the upcoming WIDF Council in Warsaw. Their content reflects an effort to avoid separatism, promoting a reconciliatory approach with the WIDF. It was suggested that Italy's approach to emancipation could serve as a model for the WIDF's

activities, helping to expand the international federation's representation and thus strengthen it. As Passigli stated:

We must point out that by identifying universally valid reasons, we can create the possibility of agreement among all women and increase the Federation's influence in regions and countries where it is currently minimal. I believe, therefore, that the best critique can arise from demonstrating how our national association has managed to free itself from any instrumentalism and has built a platform that has now achieved clear unity. From this, we can evaluate the role of the WIDF in defending women's rights and the fundamental principles of co-existence, thus providing the perspective for an essential expansion to include more national representations within the WIDF.⁴¹¹

This position was explicitly reiterated during the Warsaw Council (November 29 - December 4, 1960) in Giglia Tedesco's speech (ibid):

We believe in this regard that the Federation can and must do more to implement, through concrete actions, the decisions on women's issues taken at the 1953 and 1958 Congresses. It is important to clarify that talking about emancipation is not just about equality of rights. Certainly, legal equality is an important part of the emancipation process. However, full emancipation means not only having the same rights as men but, above all, real opportunities for work and education,

⁴¹¹ Original text: «[...] dobbiamo indicare nella ricerca di motivi validi universalmente la possibilità di accordo tra tutte le donne e una possibilità di maggiore influenza della Federazione in zone e Paesi dove questa influenza è minima. Credo, quindi, che la miglior critica possa nascere dalla dimostrazione di come la nostra Associazione nazionale sia riuscita a svincolarsi da ogni strumentalismo e a costruire una piattaforma che ha oggi dato evidenti risultati unitari. Di qui l'esame della funzione della WIDF per la difesa dei diritti femminili e per la difesa dei principi fondamentali di una convivenza: dando così la prospettiva di un indispensabile allargamento ad altre rappresentanze nazionali in seno alla WIDF.» Marisa Passigli message to UDI secretary after the UDI preparatory meeting for the WIDF Council in Warsaw, on October 21, 1960 (ACUDI 26, 135-1).

full recognition of women's labor, and equality at all professional, social, and political levels. If we want full female emancipation, this requires a profound transformation of society so that it can provide women with real equality in the fields of work and education – essential conditions for their liberation. We are not just asking that women enjoy the same opportunities as men, but that society guarantees them the conditions to fully assert their individuality. M. Cotton spoke passionately about this; it is necessary for society and family life to change in ways that harmonize with women's roles in both the family and productive and social life. This means concretely fighting backwardness and poverty and transforming technical progress into social progress. A women's organization must have its own stance on essential issues such as peace, repression, and anti-fascism, as these directly affect the lives and futures of women. But we must distinguish in this regard: it is natural for each national organization to take positions that reflect its own national situation and policies. However, the Federation, as an entity that brings together different forces and aims to gather an ever-increasing number of national organizations, must adopt positions that do not reflect unilateral judgments, but rather the shared sentiments of women. For example, in the current situation, there may be differing opinions among women on the causes of international difficulties. But all women can understand that a war with such terrible weapons of destruction would mean the end of civilization and life for most of the world. That is why we must always make the necessary efforts to develop a position on peace and disarmament that can

be supported by all women, regardless of their different views on the causes of international tension.⁴¹²

The role of women as ambassadors of peace was reflected during this period through active anti-nuclear propaganda, which, as seen in the previous chapter, had always been a key issue for women and transnational women's organizations. In Italy, however, the UDI faced a contradiction in this regard, due to the strong influence of the USSR, which was simultaneously pursuing nuclear research to develop an atomic bomb. Italian women took concrete steps toward disarmament and opposition to the Soviet Union only after the process of emancipation discussed in the previous paragraph.⁴¹³ This culminated in 1961, when the Italian delegation abstained from voting on a peace resolution during the WIDF Council plenary session held in Budapest on October 7-8. The UDI women rejected any responsibility for the failure to halt nuclear tests by all nuclear powers, including the USSR (Cioci, 2020, 174).

⁴¹² Original text: «[...] Pensiamo a questo riguardo che la Federazione può e deve fare di più per mettere in pratica attraverso azioni concrete le decisioni sui problemi femminili prese nei Congressi del 1953 e del 1958. È opportuno precisare che parlare di emancipazione non è solo parlare di parità di diritti. Certamente, la parità di diritti nella legge è un momento importante dell'azione di emancipazione. Ma una piena emancipazione presuppone non solamente gli stessi diritti degli uomini, ma prima di tutto reali possibilità di lavoro ed istruzione, pieno riconoscimento del lavoro della donna e parità a tutti i livelli professionali, sociali e politici. Ora, se vogliamo la piena emancipazione femminile, ciò presuppone una profonda trasformazione della società così che la società stessa possa dare alla donna piena eguaglianza di diritti nel campo del lavoro e dell'istruzione, condizioni essenziali per la sua liberazione; non chiediamo solo che la donna fruisca delle stesse possibilità dell'uomo, ma anche che la società le garantisca condizioni tali da darle la possibilità concreta di affermare la sua personalità. M. Cotton ha parlato con tanto calore di ciò; è necessario che la società e la vita familiare si modifichino in modo da armonizzarsi con i compiti della donna nella famiglia e nella vita produttiva e sociale. Ciò significa combattere concretamente l'arretratezza e il bisogno, e trasformare il progresso tecnico in progresso sociale [...]. Una organizzazione femminile come tale non può non avere una sua propria posizione sulle questioni essenziali della pace, delle repressioni e dell'antifascismo che investono direttamente la vita e l'avvenire delle donne. Ma dobbiamo fare una distinzione a questo riguardo: è naturale che ogni organizzazione nazionale prenda le posizioni che ritiene corrispondenti alla propria situazione nazionale e alla politica della organizzazione stessa. Ma la Federazione, quale organismo che raggruppa forze differenti e sempre più mira a raggruppare un numero sempre più grande di organizzazioni nazionali, è chiamata a prendere posizioni non basate su giudizi unilaterali delle situazioni, ma riflettenti i comuni sentimenti delle donne. Per esempio, in una situazione come la presente, differenti opinioni possono esservi tra le donne sulle cause della difficoltà internazionali. Ma tutte le donne possono rendersi conto che una guerra con le terribili armi di distruzione sarebbe la fine della civiltà e della vita per la più gran parte del mondo. Ecco perché dobbiamo sempre fare i necessari sforzi per elaborare una posizione sui problemi della pace e del disarmo tale da essere sostenuta da tutte le donne, indipendentemente dalle loro differenti idee sulle cause della tensione internazionale.» UDI delegate Giglia Tedesco Intervention at the WIDF Council in Warsaw (ACUDI, 26, 135-2).

⁴¹³ See also Betti (2020a) for a detailed analysis of the Bolognese case.

The ambiguous stance on the nuclear issue is evident in the series of articles published in the women's magazine *Noi Donne*, especially in 1957, a year introduced with a general atmosphere of hope – hope for progress and hope for peace. This sentiment was evident from the beginning of 1957, as seen in the January issue of *Noi Donne*, which published an article titled *The Wonderful World of Peace*.⁴¹⁴ The article opens with three exchanges of correspondence between the UDI and three global leaders: Soviet Premier Nikolaj Bulganin, Queen Elizabeth of England, and Indian Prime Minister Nehru. The dossier includes hopeful images for the future, strongly evoking motherhood, with two contrasting photos – one of a mother mourning her daughter and another of a mother smiling happily at a newborn. The following pages of the piece feature captions that envision a future filled with hope, focused on scientific progress and personal as well as social freedoms, accompanied by optimistic titles: *Love lives above the earth; The friendly atom; Science against evil; Life given without pain; We will create new planets; Transforming nature; Safe and fast paths of the sky; Machines liberate man; The awakening of two continents; Civilization in the countryside; Roads without borders; More numerous antennas; A house like in a dream; Beauty is also serenity; In peace, culture flourishes, and Fraternally competing*.⁴¹⁵

Opposition to nuclear weapons was discussed in April 1957, when Enzo Rava, notably a male PCI member, wrote the article *Destroy Them Before They Destroy Us*,⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ “Il meraviglioso mondo della pace.” (The Wonderful World of Peace). *ND* 3 (January 20, 1957), 6-7.

⁴¹⁵ Respectively: “L’amore viva sopra la terra”; “L’atomo amico”; “La scienza contro il male”; “Si dà la vita senza dolore”; “Creeremo nuovi pianeti”; “Si trasforma la natura”; “Sicure e veloci le vie del cielo”; “Le macchine liberano l’uomo”; “Il risveglio di due continenti”; “La civiltà nelle campagne”; “Strade senza confini”; “Più numerose le antenne”; “Una casa come in sogno”; “Bellezza è anche serenità”; “Nella pace fiorisce la cultura”; “Cimentarsi fraternamente” (ibid).

⁴¹⁶ “Distruggiamole prima che ci distruggano.” (Destroy Them Before They Destroy Us). *ND* 17 (April 28, 1957), 24-5. At p. 5 of the same number of the same issue is included the article “La F.D.I.F. per la pace.” (The WIDF for peace).

subtitled *Our protest against the horrific world of thermonuclear weapons* [La nostra protesta contro l'orrido mondo delle armi termonucleari]. The article recounts how the WIDF had, in those days, launched an appeal to women of all nations for disarmament and the prohibition of atomic and thermonuclear weapons. The appeal states:

The women of the world must demand the immediate cessation of atomic and thermonuclear experiments. We are certain that an agreement on this issue is both urgent and possible. Everywhere, women should take the lead in promoting a broad movement for disarmament, joining forces and multiplying their efforts to achieve these goals.⁴¹⁷

The call to “Atomic Alert” resurfaced as early as the following May.⁴¹⁸ The article critiques the U.S. Army's claim that the atomic weapons stationed at its Italian bases between Vicenza and Verona are of a “purely tactical” nature, intended solely for combat between armies.⁴¹⁹ In response to this operation, the UDI called for a protest on May 8, a day traditionally dedicated to peace:⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ Original text: «Le donne di tutto il mondo, dice l'appello, devono richiedere la cessazione immediata degli esperimenti atomici e termonucleari. Noi siamo certe che su questo problema un accordo è urgente e possibile. Ovunque le donne si facciano promotrici di un largo movimento per il disarmo, unendosi e moltiplicando i loro sforzi per raggiungere tali scopi.» (Ibid).

⁴¹⁸ Notably the discussion on the topic at meeting of the Permanent International Committee of Mothers for the Defense of Children, held from April 27 to 29 in Lausanne, passed in complete silence.

⁴¹⁹ “Le atomiche in Italia.” (Atomics in Italy). *ND* 19 (May 12, 1957), 3.

⁴²⁰ It is interesting to note the overlap of this celebration today with Mother's Day, which originally began in the USA and later spread to Italy, starting from a local initiative and then a religious one, specifically between 1956 and 1957.

And meanwhile, the nuclear arms race continues around the world, with ongoing experiments: the next one, the British H-bomb test, will cost humanity – according to American Nobel laureate Pauling – “a thousand lives and cause leukemia and bone cancer in another twenty thousand. This rearmament, these experiments,” the UDI's appeal highlights, “not only pose an increasingly serious risk of war but already endanger the lives and health of entire generations.” The UDI has thus called on “all its provincial organizations and circles to ensure that during the celebrations of May 8th, traditionally dedicated to peace, the strong voice of Italian women rises up, urging the UN to urgently take appropriate measures to immediately halt nuclear testing, as the first step toward banning the manufacture and use of atomic weapons.”⁴²¹

In 1957, the fight for general nuclear disarmament, as claimed by the WIDF and UDI, was in clear contradiction with the USSR's policy of developing its own nuclear weapons, a stance supported by the Communist Party and fully endorsed by the women's magazine. While *Noi Donne*, as mentioned, provided coverage for protests against US nuclear bombs, it also supported the USSR's development of its own nuclear arsenal, reflecting the contradictory stance of the publication. On September 8, in the column “Personality of the Week”, features an article titled *The Soviet Missile*,⁴²² in which the USSR is praised for having created the «super weapon,» described in great detail. It even goes as far as to say:

⁴²¹ Original text: «E continua intanto, nel mondo, la corsa al riarmo atomico, continuano gli esperimenti: il prossimo, quello della H inglese, costerà all'umanità, come ha ammonito il Premio Nobel americano Pauling, la morte di un migliaio di persone e leucemie e cancro ossei ad altre ventimila. Questo riarmo, questi esperimenti, rileva un appello dell'UDI, "non solo comportano un sempre più grave pericolo di guerra ma mettono già a repentaglio la vita e la salute di intere generazioni". E l'UDI ha così invitato "tutte le sue organizzazioni provinciali e i suoi circoli a far sì che nelle celebrazioni della giornata dell'8 maggio, tradizionalmente dedicata alla pace, alta si levi la richiesta delle donne italiane affinché l'ONU sappia con urgenza prendere le opportune misure perché cessino immediatamente gli esperimenti nucleari, primo passo per giungere all'interdizione della fabbricazione e dell'impiego delle armi atomiche."» (Ibid.).

⁴²² “Il missile sovietico.” (*The Soviet Missile*). ND 35 (September 8, 1957), 5.

The fact that the USSR was the first great power to develop the intercontinental missile demonstrates the high level of scientific and industrial achievement reached by that nation. The announcement of the experiment was accompanied by the Soviet government's well-known proposals for controlled general disarmament and the prohibition of all atomic experiments and the production of atomic weapons. In the face of great advances in military technology, the public anxiously awaits an agreement between the great powers on disarmament to be reached as soon as possible.⁴²³

This contradiction, along with the celebration of Soviet military progress, accompanied the technological race and the "space race," which were widely discussed in articles throughout 1957. The year ended with the launch of Sputnik, and in the final issue, it was declared that 1958 would be «the year of the sky.»⁴²⁴ Starting with the external and internal political tensions following the Soviet military intervention in Hungary, which had exacerbated global dynamics and caused internal divisions within the UDI, it became increasingly clear between 1957 and 1961 that the Italian feminist union needed to resolve this ambiguity. This tension inevitably led to rifts, especially as the UDI's actions and direction were in stark contrast to those of the WIDF. As mentioned earlier, a significant break occurred during the WIDF Council meeting held in Budapest from October 4 to 6, 1961. The meeting took place against the backdrop of a worrying international context: on August 31, the Soviet Union had

⁴²³ Original text: «Il fatto che sia stata la URSS la prima grande potenza a realizzare il missile intercontinentale sta a dimostrazione dell'altissimo livello scientifico e industriale raggiunto da quella nazione. L'annuncio dell'esperimento è stato accompagnato dalle note proposte del governo sovietico per un disarmo generale controllato e per la proibizione di ogni esperimento atomico e della produzione di armi atomiche. Di fronte ai grandi progressi della tecnica militare, l'opinione pubblica attende con preoccupazione che l'accordo fra le grandi potenze sul disarmo si realizzi al più presto.» (Ibid.).

⁴²⁴ *ND* 51 (December 29, 1957), cover page.

resumed nuclear testing, and that same month, construction of the Berlin Wall had begun. Despite the growing climate of hostility, the final appeal of the council did not include a call for a moratorium on nuclear testing. The UDI had been campaigning for months for the cessation of nuclear testing, putting it in clear opposition to the council's appeal. The Italian delegation, composed of Marisa Rodano, Serena Madonna, Maria Maddalena Rossi, and Gisella Floreanini, after unsuccessfully attempting to propose changes to the document, decided to abstain from the vote (Rodano 2010, 163).

We therefore asked that the Federation focus, on all international issues, on indicating the broad, general objectives [...] without delving into the specifics of diplomatic and political solutions. Additionally, we believed that the detailed attribution of causes and responsibilities was more appropriate for meetings of government or party representatives, rather than for an assembly of women's associations.⁴²⁵

The UDI's stance was by then well-received in Italy, garnering the support of the PCI. Giancarlo Pajetta, during the Central Committee meeting in November, hailed it as a «concrete success of the line of “autonomy and unity in diversity within the international workers' movement”». ⁴²⁶ The position also found support from the other sig-

⁴²⁵ Original text: «Chiedevamo, dunque, che la Federazione, si attenesse, su tutte le questioni internazionali, a indicare i grandi obiettivi generali [...] senza entrare nel merito delle specifiche soluzioni diplomatiche e politiche. E senza l'indicazione dettagliata di cause e responsabilità, più consone, a nostro avviso, a una riunione di rappresentanti di governi o di partiti che non a un'assemblea di associazioni femminili.» (Ibid.).

⁴²⁶ «successo concreto della linea “di autonomia e di unità nella diversità nel movimento operaio internazionale”» (ivi, 164).

nificant Italian women's organization, the Catholic CIF. The UDI's policy of condemning nuclear weapons, regardless of their origin, was further solidified at the World Assembly of Women for Disarmament, held in Vienna from March 23 to 25, 1962. In this context, the UDI, along with other women's associations it had reached out to, sent a message to the members of the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, calling for the cessation of nuclear testing (*ibid.*)

4.2.3 The role of the ACWF on the re-emergence of anti-imperialism within the WIDF

In the Chinese context, the breakdown of transnational ties between women occurred for different reasons. In the late 1950s, China was still seeking a partial dialogue and aiming to spread its message among women in Western countries,⁴²⁷ even though China's foreign policy had become more rigid and exclusive, especially concerning the Taiwan issue, it still sought to engage in dialogue and spread its message among women in Western countries.⁴²⁸ This situation led to episodes of diplomatic tension between the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC), even in the cultural sphere, where the first significant steps had been taken only a few years earlier. This emerges, for example, in the context of the World Children's Festival held in Palermo from June 9 to June 23, 1957, to which China refused to participate after learning of the presence of the ROC (Taiwan). They declared: 'We consider it very unfriendly towards us, the Chinese people, to have invited the People's Republic of China to your

⁴²⁷ As evidence of this, the letter from Zhang Yun to the UDI secretariat dated February 28, 1958, includes a copy of the foreign edition of the periodical *ZGFN* in English (ACUDI 21, 99-1). However, the tone of this letter, compared to those from previous years, is markedly colder and more formal; instead of referring to each other as friends or sisters, the Italian women are addressed as "Madames".

⁴²⁸ From the end of August 1958, the second Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred, which had a significant impact on Chinese and global politics, as well as on the women's movement, where ACWF representatives, just a few years prior, stated that the Taiwanese issue should be resolved through diplomatic means (Gurtov 1976).

festival and yet permit Taiwan's participation not as part of China, but individually. We strongly oppose and protest against any attempt to create the impression of two Chinas, since Taiwan is merely an inseparable part of China's territory. We hereby formally inform you of our decision to withdraw immediately from your exhibition and request that all our exhibits be returned to us, in care of our embassy in Switzerland, with full responsibility for the expenses. Please render all possible assistance.' This correspondence is found in the Telegram from the Chinese People's National Committee for the Defence of Children to Maria Maddalena Rossi, June 15, 1957 (ACUDI 22, 109-1).

If at the beginning of 1957, *Noi Donne* portrayed Premier Zhou Enlai alongside Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as an ambassador of peace, the situation soon changed.⁴²⁹ Even in 1960, when China faced harsh criticism due to reports on the consequences of the Great Leap Forward, there were still expressions of solidarity within the women's movement.⁴³⁰ However, direct dialogue gradually diminished during this period, with the last bilateral communications between the UDI and the ACWF taking place on the occasion of IWD on March 8, 1962.⁴³¹ From then on, the UDI received informational pamphlets and the *Bulletin d'information de l'Ambassade de la République*

⁴²⁹ The meeting between the two leaders is the subject of an article in *ND* 49 (December 8, 1956), 3; additionally, Zhou Enlai is positively portrayed as 'Personality of the Week' in issue no 2 of January 13, 1957, where his diplomatic trip, which continued in Southeast Asia after India, is described in detail. His role as a spokesperson for China as a peace power is also described, stating that he was willing to mediate the Taiwanese issue in a peaceful manner.

⁴³⁰ Letter from Pia Ferrante, from Berlin, to UDI, dated July 30, 1960 (ACUDI 27, 141-2). In the message, she attaches her previous letter of protest to the editorial staff of *Avanti!*, in response to an article about China published on *Avanti!* on July 23, 1960, 3, titled "Mao's Fable about the Farmer Who Wanted to Dismantle the Mountains", which critiques the results of the Great Leap Forward.

⁴³¹ Included are greeting cards for IWD, referred to as the "Workers' Women's Day," in both English and Chinese, along with a typed message signed by the "National Women's Federation of the People's Republic of China." This represents the last message received directly from the Fulian. It is a standardized message sent similarly to women's associations in all friendly countries, as indicated by the text (notably lacking the word "Italy," and consequently resulting in a clear omission). The content of the message indicates that it was accompanied by a series of photographs "of Chinese women's activities in building socialism in their country," with a request for publication in local media (ACUDI 31, 165).

populaire de Chine à Berne, which served as the center of Chinese relations with Europe (Knüsel 2022). Relations with the USSR, as previously mentioned, grew increasingly cold, despite continued emphasis on a Sino-Soviet alliance in contrast to the alliance between the UK and the US.⁴³²

⁴³² ND 10 (August 16, 1957).



Figures 4.3; 4.4; 4.5. The erosion of alliaces: (above) Yu Huali 于化鲤. 'You peng zi yuanfang lai.' 有朋自远方来 (Friends from Afar are Coming to Visit), 1961; (below, left) Shen Jialin 沈家琳. 'Gemingde youyi (Yazhou, Feizhou, Lading Meizhou pengyoumen canguan Zhongguo renmin geming junshi bowuguan)' 革命的友谊 (亚洲, 非洲, 拉丁美洲朋友们参观中国人民革命军事博物馆) (Revolutionary friendship. Friends from Asia, Africa and Latin America visit the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution), 1963; (below, right) Ding Hao 丁浩. 'Women de pengyou bian tianxia.' 我们的朋友遍天下 (Our friends from all over the world), 1964 (Chineseposters 1961, 1963, 1964).

At this time, the focus of Chinese women, along with women from other countries in the Global South, was on the decolonization process. While China had previously positioned itself as a model for revolutionary struggles worldwide, it now aligned primarily with the struggles of smaller actors. The ties with the WIDF remained, particularly concerning decolonial issues. In 1958, *Women of China* published a WIDF communiqué on July 19, 1958, condemning US intervention in Lebanon and British intervention in Jordan in the Middle East.⁴³³

In the article *Women Worldwide Support the Struggle of the Arab People*⁴³⁴ women from Western countries, including Italy, are mentioned for their involvement in organizing anti-war demonstrations. Notably, the following appeal for global women's mobilization originates from the Soviet Women's Federation, rather than the WIDF. This appeal prominently uses maternal language, beginning with «Women, mothers, sisters, and friends of the world!» – demonstrating how the universalism of women's movements was still closely tied to the concept of motherhood. China's strong political interest in anti-colonial struggles stemmed from its aim to create a sense of parallelism between its own situation during the civil war and that of Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, with the hope that these movements would evolve in a revolutionary, communist direction. This emerges clearly in the June 1958's article *The Struggles of Women in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan*, focusing on the local women's movements in these regions:⁴³⁵

⁴³³ “Guoji minzhu fulian shuji chu zhi geguo huiyuan tuanti ji quan shijiu funü de gongkaixin.” 国际民主妇联書記处致各国会员团体及全世界妇女的公开信 (Women's International Democratic Federation Secretariat's Open Letter to Member Organizations and Women Worldwide). *ZGFN* 3 (May 1, 1958), 2.

⁴³⁴ “Quan shijie funü zhichi alabo renmin de douzheng.” 全世界妇女支持阿拉伯人民的斗争 (Women Worldwide Support the Struggle of the Arab People). *ZGFN* 10 (August 16, 1958), 3.

⁴³⁵ Dai Fang 戴方. “Yilake, libanen, yuedan funü de douzheng.” 伊拉克、黎巴嫩、约旦妇女的斗争 (The Struggles of Women in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan). *ZGFN* 10 (June 16, 1958), 2.

Women in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, much like women in pre-liberation China, have long suffered from the dual oppression of imperialism and feudalism. They understand that the struggle for women's liberation is inseparable from the struggle for national independence, and they have bravely participated in the fight for freedom.⁴³⁶

The connection with Middle Eastern countries continued in the following years, as evidenced by the article supporting Turkish people's the protests erupted on April 28, 1960, against the pro-UK puppet government.⁴³⁷

In the 1960s, China increasingly focused on anti-imperialist propaganda, initially publishing articles supporting the Soviet Union, itself portraying as the defender of nations against U.S. aggression. An example of this is the article *Resolutely Support the Soviet Union's Just Struggle Against American Aggression and Provocation*.⁴³⁸ Frazier (2014, 6) emphasized that China's role as an anti-imperialist stronghold during the Cold War was vital, particularly due to the CCP's prominent position in ending foreign occupation and exploitation, as well as its commitment to peasant radicalism and social progress. This made China one of several global Cold War alternatives to a world dominated by capitalism and military expansion. Moreover, radicals recognized that the spread of communism in China and other parts of Asia threatened America's access to new markets, cheap resources, foreign labor, and overseas indus-

⁴³⁶ Original text: «伊拉克、黎巴嫩、約旦的婦女們和解放前的中國婦女一樣，飽受帝國主義和封建勢力的雙重壓迫，她們知道要爭取婦女本身的解放是與爭取民族獨立的解放鬥爭分不開的，她們勇敢地參加了解放鬥。」(Ibid.).

⁴³⁷ Ziban 子般. "Tu'erqi renmin de nuhuo." 土耳其人民的怒火 (The Wrath of the Turkish People). *ZGFN* 11 (June 1, 1960), 6.

⁴³⁸ "Jianjue zhichi sulian fandui meiguo qin ke he tiaoxin de zhengyi douzheng." 堅決支持蘇聯反對美國侵略和挑釁的正義鬥爭(Resolutely Support the Soviet Union's Just Struggle Against American Aggression and Provocation). *ZGFN* 11 (June 1, 1960), 4.

tries. China's socialist model, with its version of Third World Marxism, thus provided a vision of economic democracy, widespread political participation, and an antiracist form of global modernity – though it was not the only such vision.

China thus positioned itself in opposition to U.S. interference in Asia and alongside various anti-imperialist struggles in different Asian nations.⁴³⁹ In the article *Unite the People of the World to Overthrow U.S. Imperialism*,⁴⁴⁰ China expresses support for the Japanese population in their opposition to U.S. military occupation. Similarly, in *The Patriotic and Just Struggle of the People of South Korea* it backs the resistance efforts in South Korea Chinese women recount and stand in solidarity with the protests against the South Korean puppet government, which emerged during the parliamentary elections.⁴⁴¹ Again, on September 1, 1960, *Women of China* highlighted the efforts of Vietnamese women,⁴⁴² a theme resurfaced the following year, in May, with the article *In the Busy Days with Vietnamese Sisters*⁴⁴³, and again in August, when the figure of Nguyen Thi Ten, Chairperson of the Vietnam Women's Union, is introduced.⁴⁴⁴ In this issue, the theme of childhood reemerges with the article *Children of*

⁴³⁹ The Editor. "Mei diguo zhuyi cong yazhou gun chuqu!" 美帝国主义从亚洲滚出去! (American Imperialism get out of Asia!). *ZGFN* 13 (July 1, 1960), 2.

⁴⁴⁰ The Editor. "Quan shijie renmin tuan jie qilai, dadao mei diguo zhuyi!" 全世界人民团结起来，打倒美帝国主义! (Unite the People of the World to Overthrow U.S. Imperialism!). *ZGFN* 10 (May 16, 1960), 4.

⁴⁴¹ Hai Yun 海云. "Nuhuo liao yuan de nan chaoxian renmin de aiguo zhengyi douzheng." 怒火燎原的南朝鲜人民的爱国正义斗争 (The Patriotic and Just Struggle of the People of South Korea). *ZGFN* 10 (May 16, 1960), 6.

⁴⁴² "Yue nan tong xun she." 越南通讯社 (Vietnamise New Agency). "Zai jiefang he fan she zuguo daolu shang de yuenan funü." 在解放和范設祖国道路上的越南妇女 (Vietnamese Women on the Path to National Liberation and Reunification). *ZGFN* 17 (September 1, 1960), 22.

⁴⁴³ Qi Yun 戚云. "Zai he yue gao zimeimen re fan de rizi li." 在和越高姊妹们热繁的日子里 (In the Busy Days with Vietnamese Sisters). *ZGFN* 5 (May 1, 1961), 12.

⁴⁴⁴ Wu Yuyi 武玉宜. "Ji yuenan funü lianhe hui zhuxi ruan shi shi." 記越南妇女联合会主席阮氏十 (Profile of Nguyen Thi Thu, President of the Vietnam Women's Union). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1, 1961), 18.

South Vietnam in Suffering the focus is on how the war, waged by the USA, deeply harms the most innocent – children.⁴⁴⁵

In line with its anti-imperialist goals, China strengthened its relations with Latin American countries, inviting prominent figures and delegations. Cuban women visited China between the end of April and the beginning of May 1960,⁴⁴⁶ while in June 1960, an interview with the revolutionary poet Carmen Soler was published.⁴⁴⁷ China's support for the Cuban cause continued the following year, with congratulations for their victory in the revolutionary struggle, as expressed in the article *Cheers for the Victory of the Heroic Cuban People*.⁴⁴⁸ The article summarizes the events leading to the founding of the first Socialist Republic in the Americas, while in *Cuban Heroine Among Us* recounts the visit of a Cuban delegation to China, including the Cuban revolutionary heroine Haydée Santamaría.⁴⁴⁹ During the visit, Santamaría presented a commemorative medal as a gift to Li Dequan, the vice-president of the ACWF. In recounting the Cuban revolution, the military role of women is notably emphasized, highlighting that they took up arms just as men did. This is reflected in the article *The Women's Militia Camp in Havana*.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁵ “Kunan zhong de nanyue ertong.” 苦难中的南越儿童 (Children of South Vietnam in Suffering). *ZGFN* 8 (August 1, 1961), 18.

⁴⁴⁶ Yang Yun 楊蘊. “Guba de funü he ertong zai zhandou zhong.” 古巴的妇女和儿童在战斗中 (Cuban Women and Children in the Struggle). *ZGFN* 11 (June 1, 1960), 9.

⁴⁴⁷ Nain 乃茵. “Fangwen belagui geming nü shiren Kamen·Suo lei er.” 访问巴拉圭革命女诗人卡门·索勒尔 (Interview with Carmen Soler, the Revolutionary Poet from Paraguay). *ZGFN* 11 (June 1, 1960), 8.

⁴⁴⁸ “Wei yingxiong de guba renmin de shengli er huanhu.” 为英雄的古巴人民的胜利而欢呼 (Cheers for the Victory of the Heroic Cuban People). *ZGFN* 5 (May 1, 1961), 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Wang Boqing 汪波清. “Guba nü yingxiong zai women zhongjian.” 古巴女英雄在我们中间 (Cuban Heroine Among Us). *ZGFN* 5 (May 1, 1961), 15.

⁴⁵⁰ “Hawana de nü minbing ying.” 哈瓦那的女民兵营 (The Women's Militia Camp in Havana). *ZGFN* 10 (October 1, 1961), 17.

China's anti-imperialist influence also extended to Africa, as evidenced by numerous articles focusing on the continent.⁴⁵¹ Topics included the Congolese situation,⁴⁵² as well as Ghana and Guinea.⁴⁵³ The African issue ties into the rhetoric that connects the decolonial struggle with the fight against racism. As Frazier (2014) highlights:

[...] the Chinese government worked to explicitly align itself and its anti-Western rhetoric with that of other exploited non white populations. They centered China as the leader of an anti-imperialist world struggle against capitalism, U.S. empire, and white supremacy. And in this narrative, representations of black struggle, particularly that being waged by African Americans, were of serious importance. The Chinese government produced propaganda that unambiguously denounced U.S. racism and militarism and articulated China's support for black social movements. Moreover, in these portrayals, African American anti-racist struggle was identified in anticolonial Marxist terms. It was depicted as an example of a larger decolonial wave that was subverting Euro-American

⁴⁵¹ Yafei 雅菲. "Feizhou de minzu duli yundong." 非洲的民族独立运动 (The African National Independence Movement). *ZGFN* 18 (September 16, 1960), 18.

⁴⁵² Zhong Lin 钟林. "Zuihou shengli yiding juyu gangguo renmin." 最后胜利一定居于刚果人民 (The Ultimate Victory Belongs to the Congolese People). *ZGFN* 19 (October 1, 1960), 24; "Daili ren shahai gangguo zongli lu meng ba!" 代理人杀害刚果总理卢蒙巴! (The Agents Who Murdered Prime Minister Lumumba of the Congo). *ZGFN* 3 (March 1, 1961), 15; and Wang Shu 王殊. "Gangguo minzu yingxiong lu meng ba." 刚果民族英雄卢蒙巴 (Congolese National Hero Lumumba). *ZGFN* 4 (April 1, 1961), 18.

⁴⁵³ The Editors. "Jiana de guoqu he jintian." 加纳的过去和今天 (Ghana: Yesterday and Today). *ZGFN* 9 (September 1, 1961), 14.; Qu Wu 屈武. "Bi feizhou de taiyang hai yao chire de youyi – ji nei ya jianwen za ji." 比非洲的太阳还要炽热的友谊 – 几内亚见闻杂记 (Friendship Hotter than the Sun of Africa, Notes on Guinea). *ZGFN* 19 (October 1, 1960), 26. «President Sékou Touré of Guinea, the esteemed leader of the courageous Guinean people, recently visited China, responding to an invitation from President Liu Shaoqi. Leading a government delegation from Guinea, President Touré and his team brought with them the deep friendship of the Guinean and broader African peoples. They were warmly received by both the Chinese government and its people. During the visit, President Touré had a meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong and held friendly discussions with Chinese government leaders. The two nations issued a joint communiqué and signed significant agreements, including the Sino-Guinean Friendship Treaty, along with agreements on economic and technical cooperation, and trade and payment. This visit marked a new chapter in the cooperation between China and Guinea, representing a milestone not only in their bilateral relations but also in China's broader relations with Africa. Recalling this remarkable visit fills me with joy and enthusiasm. In early April this year, the Chinese Acrobatic Troupe was invited by the Guinean government to perform a series of shows in Guinea.»

dominance and instituting a new world order (see figure 1.1). What's more, China's leaders recognized several Civil Rights and Black Power Movement activists and critics of U.S. foreign policy as *waiguo pengyou* (friends of China). Through political outreach and hosted stays in China, the Chinese leaders worked to proselytize and inculcate these select visitors with China's road to socialism and global revolution.

4.3 Bending but Not Breaking: Drama and Re-signification of Women's Struggle

4.3.1 The parallel roads to Moscow

The relations between Italian and Chinese women, as well as their ties with the WIDF, which had already been strained between 1956 and 1960, reached a complete breakdown in the early 1960s. This rupture must be understood in the context of global events of that era, as well as the more localized developments in Italy and China. From a global perspective, in the early 1960s, several key events occurred within the larger framework of Cold War competition. In 1959, Pope John XXIII initiated the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which aimed to reform the Catholic Church's role in the world. While primarily a religious event, Vatican II indirectly reflected Cold War tensions, particularly in its emphasis on peace and dialogue at a time when the world was divided by capitalist and communist ideologies. The Church, though officially neutral, leaned toward positions that challenged both the materialism of Soviet-style communism and the excesses of capitalist societies. In 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected president of the United States, bringing a fresh approach to

Cold War policy. Kennedy's presidency was marked by a balance between aggressive containment of communism and diplomatic engagement. His administration's role became pivotal during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, a confrontation sparked when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba to defend Fidel Castro's communist regime and counterbalance U.S. missile placements in Turkey. The crisis nearly escalated into nuclear war but was ultimately resolved through negotiations. The Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the missiles in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba and the secret removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. This resolution underscored the strategic interests of both superpowers: the U.S. sought to maintain its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere, while the Soviet Union aimed to support its allies and check U.S. military power. Concurrently, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) was ending. This conflict, fought between the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and France, was emblematic of the broader decolonization movement that swept through Africa and Asia during the Cold War. France, as a key member of the Western bloc, struggled to retain control over Algeria, while the FLN, receiving sympathy and some support from socialist and communist-aligned nations, pushed for independence. The end of the war in 1962, with Algeria gaining independence, marked a significant victory for anti-colonial forces. While the war was primarily a colonial conflict, the newly independent nation became the arena of influences struggle between the United States and Soviet Union, both of whom sought to align these states with their respective ideological camps.⁴⁵⁴

In Italy the economic miracle not only fueled internal migration, as millions of people moved from the rural South to the industrial North, but also created new job opportunities, particularly for women, reshaping traditional gender roles in Italian society

⁴⁵⁴ For an overview on this period see Leffler and Westad (2010) and Westad (2017).

(Betti 2010). This massive migration and industrialization intersected with Palmiro Togliatti's leadership of the PCI, where his moderate approach sought to engage with these social transformations while maintaining ideological loyalty to the Soviet Union (Crainz 2005, 40-43). Meanwhile, the formation of Aldo Moro's center-left government in 1963 reflected a political response to these evolving dynamics, as progressive reforms aimed to address the challenges brought by both internal migration and economic shifts.

In the same period, between 1958 and 1960, China launched the Great Leap Forward, a campaign aimed at transforming its agrarian economy into an industrial one through collectivization and mass mobilization. However, these policies led to major challenges, including the Great Famine from 1959 to 1961, which caused widespread hardship and significant loss of life. During the same period, relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated. In 1960, the USSR withdrew its technical assistance, including support for China's nuclear program, which China viewed as an attempt to curb its technological and military advancements. This tension escalated when the U.S., UK, and USSR signed a nuclear test ban treaty in 1963, which China interpreted as a further impediment to its nuclear ambitions, prompting China to continue its research, culminating in its first nuclear test in 1964.

The ideological rift between China and the USSR deepened with the Socialist Education Movement, launched in 1962. This movement aimed to reinforce socialist principles and combat corruption within the Communist Party. It marked a return to stricter ideological control, emphasizing class struggle and Maoist thought, which contributed to the growing divide with the Soviet Union, whose leaders were promoting a more moderate approach. By mid-1963, these ideological differences, along

with China's desire for greater independence in its foreign and nuclear policies, led to the official breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations.

In this general environment, the WIDF proposed the World Congress of Women as a crucial platform for bringing together women from all walks of life – across race, profession, belief, and opinion – to exchange ideas, share experiences, and address issues of shared importance. A central aspect of the Congress's message was again the rhetoric of motherhood, highlighting the role of mothers as defenders of their children's lives and emphasizing their responsibility in advocating for peace and human dignity. The Congress called for the participation of women worldwide, whether affiliated with the WIDF or other women's organizations and movements. It presented itself as a collective effort aimed at addressing global challenges and advancing women's contributions to peace, independence, and the rights of women and children.

The Congress agenda was organized around three key issues: The general and total disarmament, peace, national sovereignty, and democratic freedoms to safeguard human dignity; the promotion and defense of women's rights as mothers, workers, and citizens; the protection of children's rights to life, health, and education. By encouraging mutual respect and open dialogue among women from different nations, the WIDF still positioned the Congress as a significant event in the ongoing struggle for

peace, the rights of women, and the well-being of children globally.⁴⁵⁵ The congress marked the crucial moment of the breakdown in transnational collaborations between women's organizations, particularly between Italian and Chinese women, as well as between them and the WIDF.

4.3.2 The 1963 third “World Congress of Women”

The World Congress of Women took place in Moscow from June 24 to 29, 1963.⁴⁵⁶ The attendees included representatives from across Europe, including Greece and Spain (which were still under fascist regimes), along with delegates from the Swedish section of the International League for Peace and Freedom. *Noi Donne* reported that the Congress was expected to include 40 delegates from the UK, 50 from China, 50 from Japan, and 50 from the United States, representing all states in the Union, alongside a large Canadian delegation.⁴⁵⁷ Prominent figures, such as Prime Minister Bandaranaike, Head of the Cabinet of Ceylon, and Queen Mother Elisabeth of Belgium, also expressed their support. African nations were represented by delegations from smaller states like Aden, the Comoros Islands, and Mozambique, as well as newly

⁴⁵⁵ Original text: «Questo Congresso darà alle donne di ogni razza, professione, credo ed opinione, la possibilità di scambiare idee, di confrontare esperienze e assicurare il successo delle questioni vitali che le interessano tutte. Si indirizza a tutte le donne desiderose di pace: lavoratrici, contadine, intellettuali, madri che difendono la vita dei loro bambini. Spera nell'appoggio delle donne di tutti i Paesi, di tutti i continenti, nell'appoggio delle donne che appartengono a organizzazioni affiliate alla WIDF., di quelle che appartengono ad altre organizzazioni e movimenti femminili, delle personalità più diverse. La WIDF. vi invita a dare il vostro appoggio e a partecipare al Congresso Mondiale delle Donne. L'ordine del giorno riguarda: il disarmo generale e totale, la pace, la sovranità, l'indipendenza nazionale e le libertà democratiche per la dignità umana; la conquista, la garanzia e la difesa dei diritti della donna come madre, lavoratrice e cittadina; la difesa dei diritti dell'infanzia alla vita, alla sanità e all'istruzione. L'atmosfera di rispetto reciproco, di fiducia, di comprensione, di amicizia tra le donne di tutti i Paesi permetterà una larga e libera discussione e preparerà il successo dei lavori del Congresso. Madri, lavoratrici, cittadine, questo è il vostro Congresso; la vostra partecipazione, la partecipazione delle vostre organizzazioni contribuirà allo sforzo comune delle donne nel loro impegno dentro nella lotta per la pace, per l'indipendenza nazionale, per i diritti delle donne e il benessere dell'infanzia.»

⁴⁵⁶ For an analysis of the Russian perspective on the World Congress of Women of 1963 see Kadnikova (2011).

⁴⁵⁷ “Il Congresso mondiale delle donne.” (The World Congress of Women). *ND* 25 (22 June, 1963), 36.

independent countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. Angola, still under colonial rule, sent delegates, as did Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Cuba, and Argentina, the latter of which was preparing a significant delegation despite facing government persecution and the arrest of Mrs. De Ponce, Secretary General of the Women's Emancipation Movement. Colombia and Mexico were also represented.

Despite the seemingly broad representation, the diverse positions presented by these women's delegations did not result in a genuinely balanced discussion at the WIDF. The subsequent paragraphs will clearly illustrate this through an analysis of the two, often opposing, perspectives of the Italian and Chinese delegations at the congress.

An assembly of great interest, with topics of great importance: among the women of the world, discussions will unfold, enriching a shared heritage with the new experiences that have emerged in recent years across various countries and different situations. The great anticipation for the Moscow Congress is also due to the exchange of ideas that will take place among all the delegates. This will not only foster knowledge and friendship between women from diverse nations but also allow for the development and deepening of fundamental issues for the women of our time.⁴⁵⁸

Despite the ongoing conflict with the WIDF, the UDI greeted the 1963 Congress with great hope. The delegation departing from Italy was the largest since 1945. Among the prominent Italian attendees were UDI national representatives, including Prof.

⁴⁵⁸ Original text: «Un'assemblea di grande interesse, argomenti di grande interesse: tra le donne di tutto il mondo potrà svilupparsi la discussione, alimentandosi un patrimonio in comune con le esperienze nuove, che si sono verificate in questi anni nei vari Paesi, in situazioni diverse. La grande attesa per il Congresso di Mosca è anche per questo confronto delle idee che dovrà avvenire tra tutte le delegate e che significa non soltanto conoscenza e amicizia tra cittadine delle più varie nazioni, ma anche elaborazione e approfondimento dei temi fondamentali per le donne del nostro tempo.» (Ibid.).

Serena Madonna, Prof. Maria Piccone, and Hon. Baldina Di Vittorio Berti.⁴⁵⁹ The UDI will take an active role in the Congress, with Hon. Anna Matera delivering a presentation on the struggle for women's rights in society and the family. Additionally, the UDI submitted a written communication prepared by Prof. Ada Alessandrini, addressing Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. This congress showcased a significant global effort to unite women in their fight for peace, equality, and human rights.

The UDI's position at the Congress must be understood because, during the Bureau meeting in Berlin in March 1963, just a few months before the Congress, the UDI requested that an item be added to the agenda for a review of the Federation's nature, international orientation, and tasks.⁴⁶⁰ As in the late 1950s, the Italian section viewed the WIDF as a platform for party-based organizations and, as such, accused it of unilaterally reflecting the dictates of a single ideological bloc.⁴⁶¹ In contrast, the UDI proposed re-establishing a collaboration that would effectively unite women's associations of different orientations. As will be explored later, the Italian requests were ultimately ignored (Cioci 2020, 174-5).

This tension continued at the Moscow Bureau, on the eve of the Congress, on June 18. The meeting undermined any potential for agreement between the parties, escalating tensions and ultimately leading to an inevitable split. The immediate issue that

⁴⁵⁹ Other notable participants included Marisa Passigli, Hon. Luciana Viviani, Giglia Tedesco, and the director of *ND*, Benedetta Galassi Beria. Many women active in political and feminist movements were present, such as Prof. Rosetta Longo, Maria Morante from the UDI National Committee, and Bianca Riccio and Licia Perelli from the UDI National Youth Commission. Other influential women like lawyer Bianca Guidetti Serra from Turin, Mrs. Chanoux Perruchon from the Aosta Valley regional council, and several other lawyers and activists from Bologna, Milan, Parma, and Mantua were also in attendance. Among the cultural and academic participants were writer Paola Masino and professors Carla Guglielmi Fanti and Olga Prati.

⁴⁶⁰ "Riunione del Consiglio Nazionale dell'Unione Donne Italiane" (Meeting of the National Council of the Italian Women's Union, Rome, May 14-15, 1963). Roma, (May 14-15, 1963) - Motion presented to be included in the agenda of the Congress (ACUDI 33, 170-4).

⁴⁶¹ The position of the UDI, also expressed in an interview on the issue with Anna Matera, was defended by the Italian delegation in Moscow. In "Le armi dell'emancipazione" (The Weapons of Emancipation). *ND* 26 (June 29, 1963), 22.

highlighted these problems was related to the four reports on the agenda, whose texts were meant to guide the plenary sessions. Among them were "The Women's Struggle for National Independence," presented by the Malian representative Aona Keita, which was unanimously adopted, and "The Struggle for Women's Rights in Society and the Family," entrusted to the socialist Anna Matera, which was heavily amended but approved by a large majority. However, the reports by Japanese representative Fuki Kushida on "The Women's Struggle for Peace, Disarmament, and Friendship Among Peoples" and Cuban representative Vilma Espin de Castro on "Health, Education, and Youth Training" were rejected for not aligning with the political nature of the WIDF, as they featured direct attack to the U.S. imperialism, contradicting with the international federation agenda of political coexistence.⁴⁶²

In response to the rejection of these reports, and following the WIDF statute, representatives from Italy, Chile, and France put forward conciliatory amended versions of each report. When the amended report came to be discussed, nonetheless, an anti-democratic procedure occurred. At the suggestion of Nina Popova, the amended versions were discarded, and the original ones were reinstated to be voted on, not as expressions of the WIDF, but as the personal positions of the respective delegations, namely the Japanese and Cuban. Although this decision by the Bureau was hotly debated and voted on, it was soon annulled by a second, anti-democratic action. The Japanese and Cuban spokeswomen, refusing any amendments to their reports, demanded their reinstatement, and the Bureau, after reconvening, reversed its earlier

⁴⁶² Meeting of the National Council of the Union of Italian Women, Rome, May 14-15, 1963 - Motion presented to be included in the agenda of the Congress, in ACUDI 33, 170-4. For a detailed account on these contrasts see also Cioci (2020, 175-6).

decision, approving the reports as discretionary but in line with the political expression of the WIDF.

The UDI proposed postponing the Congress due to the political deadlock caused by the rigid anti-imperialist stance taken by the Chinese delegation from the preparatory stages onward. During the Commission on Women's Rights, for instance, a fierce confrontation erupted between Italy and China. While Italy emphasized the importance of extending rights, reforming social services, and promoting emancipation, the Chinese delegation launched a strong attack, accusing Anna Matera's report of containing pro-imperialist political elements.⁴⁶³ By presenting the reports as majority interventions – despite clearly representing a minority – the UDI identified serious irregularities and felt compelled to oppose them with a strong protest. Consequently, during the reading of the two contested reports at the Congress, the Italian representatives unanimously decided to leave the hall.⁴⁶⁴

Based on the events at the Bureau and the Congress, and in line with UDI's emancipatory policy, which aimed to distance itself from its affiliation with the Soviet Union and anti-imperialist positions that favored military intervention, the UDI found itself moving away from the WIDF. The solution came from the WIDF statute, which allowed a shift from full membership to associate membership (Cioci, 2020, 179). The approval of the amendment to Article 5 of the UDI statute led to the withdrawal of its representatives from the Federation's leadership bodies. This decision was communicated to the WIDF delegation during UDI's 7th Congress, held in Rome from

⁴⁶³ “Posizione della l'Unione Donne Italiane al Congresso Mondiale delle Donne (Mosca, 24-29 giugno 1963)” (Position of the Italian Women's Union at the World Congress of Women: Moscow, June 24-29, 1963). (ACUDI 33, 170-4) and “Rapporti fra l'UDI e la FDIF” (Relations between the UDI and the FDIF) (ACUDI 33, 176).

⁴⁶⁴ A reconstruction of the decisions made in Moscow during the *Conferenza stampa della delegazione italiana al Congresso Mondiale delle donne* (Press Conference of the Italian delegation at the World Congress of Women) – Introduction by Prof. Serena Madonna, Rome, July 11, 1963. (ACUDI 33:170-4).

June 4 to 7, 1964. However, this did not signify a complete break in relations nor a departure from the Bureau and the Council (ibid.)

The ACWF delegation at the World Congress of Women was headed by Yang Yunyu. Yang, in light of her experience at the Congress and the role she came to have during this delicate period, became a leading figure not only within the ACWF but also for Chinese foreign policy. Upon her return she gave a report, at the Welcoming Ceremony of All walks of Life (各界人民欢迎大会) on July 18th. This sanctioned her role as Anti-Revisionist Fighter (反修战士), as she was praised afterwards by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chen Yi (Geng 2023). The meeting held in the Beijing hosted more than 10,000 women, and was held to warmly welcome some of the delegates participating in the World Women's Congress, to share with them the ACWF ouvert discontent upon the WIDF politics.⁴⁶⁵ Overall, Yang's report emphasizes the undemocratic nature of the Congress, highlighting the lack of genuine dialogue and respect for statutory democratic procedures, as emerges from the concluding words of Yang account:⁴⁶⁶

Oppose the most vicious enemy of women and children all over the world -

American imperialism:

Support the struggle of women all over the world against imperialism, old and new colonialism, and national independence, people's democracy, social progress, and women's liberation!

Long live the victory of the struggle of women in all countries of the world:

⁴⁶⁵ On top of this Beijing meeting, Yang Yunyu reported another mass rally organized by the Guangzhou Women's Federation (Geng 2023).

⁴⁶⁶ Yang Yunyu 楊蘊玉. "Guanyu canjia mosike shijie funü dahui qingkuang de baogao." 关于参加莫斯科世界妇女大会情况的报告 (*Report on participation in the Moscow World Women's Conference*). ZGFN 8 (August 1, 1963), 1-10.

Long live the great unity of women in all countries of the world!

Long live world peace! (The audience applauded for a long time)⁴⁶⁷

The tone is aggressive, forceful, and accusatory, specifically targeting the CSW and WIDF top leaders. Yang Yunyu's speech transcript was published in full-length on *Women of China*, including "sonic" details from the audience, including applause, and more notably, waves of laughter, underscoring the sharp criticism and derision directed at the WIDF's leadership:⁴⁶⁸

Our Chinese Women's Delegation, representing all the women of our nation, participated in the World Women's Congress held in Moscow with a solemn sense of responsibility to defend world peace and safeguard the fundamental interests of women and people of all nations, as well as with the sincere wish to strengthen solidarity with women worldwide. This congress, however, was poorly conducted under the manipulation of the Soviet Women's Delegation leader, Popova, vice president of the WIDF, and some other WIDF leaders [...]. A declaration to the women of the world, devoid of revolutionary content, was forcibly passed. During the WIDF member organizations' meetings, an opportunistic activity program for the WIDF was also forced through, using undemocratic means to elect a new WIDF executive committee.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Original text: «反对全世界妇女和儿童的最凶恶的敌人——美帝国主义：/ 支持全世界妇女反对帝国主义、反对新老殖民主义、争取民族独立、人民民主、社会进步、妇女解放的斗争！/ 世界各国妇女的斗争胜利万岁：/ 世界各国妇女大团结万岁！/ 世界和平万岁！（全场长时间地热烈鼓掌）.» (ibid.)

⁴⁶⁸ On using sound in Chinese politics from the mid-1950s to the Cultural Revolution, see Lekner (2021) and Lovell (2023).

⁴⁶⁹ Original text: «我们中国妇女代表团代表全国妇女，本着保卫世界和平、维护各国广大妇女和人民的根本利益的庄严责任感，同时也带着加强和各国妇女团结的诚愿望参加了在莫斯科举行的世界妇女大会。这次大会在苏联妇女代表团团长、国际民主妇联副主席波波娃和国际民主妇联的其他一些领导人的操纵下，开得很坏。[...] 大会强行通过了一个没有革命内容的“告世界妇女书”。在大会期间举行的国际民主妇联会员团体的会议上强行通过了一个机会主义的国际民主妇联的活动纲领，使用极不民主的手段，选举了国际民主妇联新的执行局.» (Ibid.)

The WIDF Congress relation with the geopolitical circumstances is stressed by Yang, featuring an open accusation of the US-USSR "peace strategy" (和平战略 Heping Zhanlüe) conspiracy.⁴⁷⁰ The leader of the ACWF delegation emphasized the hopes that Chinese activists had held prior to the congress, namely that it would uphold the revolutionary traditions of the WIDF's anti-imperialist democracy, contribute to the promotion of global women's unity, intensify the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, safeguard world peace, and advance the rights of women and children. However, it was for them a great disappointment, that it «completely betrayed the hopes and fundamental interests of women and people worldwide».⁴⁷¹ The dissatisfaction of the ACWF stemmed from a divergence that began well before the congress, reflected in the complete absence of WIDF events in its magazine. The shift in orientation is evident, and the Chinese delegate methodically listed the issues around which the rift unfolded, making the congress: «the most undemocratic and disgraceful congress in the history of the WIDF.»⁴⁷²

In summary, the disagreement boiled down to whether or not to oppose imperialism; whether disarmament and peaceful coexistence should be the overriding central tasks; whether to support the national independence movements; whether the WIDF should solely serve the foreign policy of the Soviet Union; and whether broad unity among all social strata should mean abandoning principles. In the face of such ideological differences, the Chinese delegation became the standard-bearer for the decolonial

⁴⁷⁰ «This conference was held on the eve of the Sino-Soviet talks and at a time when the U.S. Kennedy administration, under the guise of so-called "peace," was actively expanding its military preparations and intensifying the implementation of its grand conspiracy of a "peace strategy." », original «這次大會是在中蘇兩黨會談前夕舉行的，是在美國肯尼迪政府在所謂“和平”的煙幕下，積極擴軍備戰，加緊推行“和平戰略”的大陰謀的時候舉行的.» (Ibid.).

⁴⁷¹ «完全违背了全世界妇女和人民的願望和根本利益» (Ibid.).

⁴⁷² Original: «这是国际民主妇联历史上最为恶劣、最不民主的一次大会.» (Ibid.).

struggle and national independence, framed in an anti-imperialist context. The ACWF stances were supported by delegations from Asian countries and other former colonies or nations engaged in decolonial wars:

Faced with this situation, the ACWF Delegation could not stand by idly. In line with the principles of "upholding principles, strengthening unity, resolving differences, and fighting a common enemy," we, along with the delegations from Albania, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, and many other Asian, African, and Latin American countries, waged a resolute struggle to safeguard the fundamental interests of women and children, defend the correct path of the global women's movement, and uphold the revolutionary traditions and democratic principles of the WIDF. We raised the revolutionary banner of opposing imperialism and old and new colonialism, fighting for and defending national independence, and safeguarding world peace, engaging in a determined struggle against the small faction clinging to a mistaken course.⁴⁷³

The ACWF leader openly condemned the disappearance of anti-imperialism from the Soviet WIDF leaders' discourses. Yang explicitly denounces former "friends" such as Nina Popova, Dolores Ibárruri, and even President Eugénie Cotton, criticizing them by name and ridiculing their stance toward the U.S. She mocks their aspiration of obtaining peace without confronting imperialism. States Yang: «An Italian delegate even claimed that "certain great figures, such as the Pope, the Soviet Premier,

⁴⁷³ Original text: «面對着這種情況，中國婦女代表團不能不挺身而出，本着“堅持原則、加強團結、消除分歧、共同對敵”的方針，同阿爾巴尼亞、朝鮮、印度尼西亞、越南、日本代表團以及其他亞洲、非洲、拉丁美洲許多國家的代表團一起，為維護廣大婦女和兒童的基本利益，為維護世界婦女運動的正確路轉和國際民主婦聯的革命傳統、民主原則，高舉反對帝國主義、反對新老殖民主義、爭取和維護民族獨立、保衛世界和平的革命旗幟，同堅持錯誤路轉的一小撮人進行堅決的鬥爭.» (Ibid.).

and President Kennedy, have made peace declarations” (loud laughter).»⁴⁷⁴; and again: «The French Women’s Federation Vice President and the wife of the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, Mrs. Thorez, declared: “We women fear war” (laughter), adding, “We have gathered here with both fear and hope,” and “It’s either peace or death” (laughter).»⁴⁷⁵ For ACWF activists, these statements were seen as attempts to trivialize the «noble sentiments» (崇高感情 Chonggao Ganqing) of women and mothers. Accusing them of arguing that women's roles should be «confined to motherhood, bearing children, and protecting them». ⁴⁷⁶ Yang Yunyu stated, «While these views might appear apolitical on the surface, they are in fact deeply political. Their goal is to exclude women from political life. According to their ideas, women will never achieve complete liberation». ⁴⁷⁷

On top of ideological accusation, the ACWF leader denounced the unfair treatment of the WIDF towards its own and its allies’ positions, from the Executive Bureau onwards. In addition to what emerged from the UDI documents, Yang declaration further stresses that Bureau members were prevented from discussing many key issues related to the Congress, and the Council's authority was entirely revoked. The executive chairman and subcommittee chairs were selected by the so-called Congress Secretariat. The composition, membership, and powers of this Secretariat were known only to the leaders of the CSW and a few WIDF top leaders. Irregularities were also reported during the vote to elect new members of the WIDF Executive

⁴⁷⁴ Original text: «意大利一位代表竟然說什麼“有些伟大人物，例如梵蒂岡教皇、苏联总理和肯尼迪总统发出了和平的声明，（全場哄笑）表现了伟大的责任感”。» (Ibid.).

⁴⁷⁵ Original text: «法国妇联副主席、法共总书记多列士的夫人維美徐声言：“我們妇女就是怕战争”，（笑声）說“我們带着恐惧和希望聚集在这里”，“不是和平，就是死亡”。（笑声）» (Ibid.).

⁴⁷⁶ Original text: «把妇女的职能限于做母亲、生孩子、保护孩子.» (Ibid.).

⁴⁷⁷ Original text: «这些主张从表面上看来似乎是不問政治的，实际上这是一个很大的政治問題，她們的目的是要把妇女排除在政治生活之外。按照她們的主张，妇女永远得不到彻底解放.» (Ibid.).

Board, who were re-elected by default, leaving the composition largely unchanged, except for a few new additions (ibid.)

As from the Italian report, one of the main points of conflict occurred during the revisions of the interventions by the Japanese and Cuban delegations. Both ACWF and UDI criticized the undemocratic manner underscoring the discussion on the interventions. In contrast with the UDI, nonetheless, the ACWF criticized the amendments that watered down the strong denunciations of the imperialist policies of the "Western bloc."

Chinese sources emphasized that Fuki Kushida's report devoted a large portion to exposing the crimes of American imperialism: throughout the document, the central idea emphasized the need to oppose the war policies and aggression policies of imperialism. The WIDF requested modifications to the document, arguing that «If we call imperialism the enemy of peace, it will alienate women and weaken the forces of peace, which would be beneficial to imperialism.»⁴⁷⁸ The revisions made by the WIDF to the draft, initially 30 pages long, reduced its length by over 10 pages, with nearly all references to U.S. imperialism's crimes of aggression and exploitation being removed. Furthermore, during the discussion of the revised draft, WIDF Vice President Vaillant-Couturier, abruptly withheld the document, claiming the need to fix typing errors. According to Yang, the real intention was to remove additional sections on the Algerian War. Regarding this episode, Yang Yunyu openly stated:

Popova and some leaders of the International Democratic Women's Federation not only abused the authority granted to them by women of various countries, but also *emasculated* [emphasis mine] the anti-imperialist content from various documents. Moreover,

⁴⁷⁸ Original text: «如果說帝國主義是和平的敵人，這就疏遠了婦女，削弱了和平力量，對帝國主義有利。」 (Ibid.).

they created highly erroneous documents that go against the interests of the masses of women, based on their own will.⁴⁷⁹

WIDF was criticized because it «portrayed disarmament and peaceful coexistence as miracle cures.»⁴⁸⁰ Subsequently, a description of "peaceful coexistence" (和平共處 *Heping Gongchu*) as conceived by the WIDF is provided:

A Yugoslav representative said, "Active coexistence is the primary issue in the current women's movement," and "Striving for active coexistence is the only option to prevent war." Others claimed, "Only in the conditions of peace and peaceful coexistence among countries with different social systems can the struggle for women's rights in capitalist countries and the struggle for the liberation of women in colonial and newly decolonized countries proceed smoothly."⁴⁸¹

The Chinese perspective, along with that of their allies from decolonized countries, is summarized in the reports of interventions by representatives from Korea, Indonesia, Japan, and Zanzibar at the congress:

⁴⁷⁹ Original text: «波波娃和国际民主妇联的一些领导人，不仅滥用了各国妇女赋予她们的职权，阉割各项文件中的反帝内容，而且还按照自己的意志炮制出了违反广大妇女群众利益的、十分错误的文件.» (Ibid.).

⁴⁸⁰ Original text: «她们简直把裁军与和平共处说成是救世灵丹.» (Ibid.).

⁴⁸¹ Original text: «南斯拉夫的代表说：“积极共处”是当前妇女运动的“首要问题”，“争取积极共处，是排除战争的唯一的选择。”还有人說：“只有在和平和实现不同社会制度各国和平共处的条件下，资本主义国家争取妇女权利的斗争，殖民地和新兴摆脱殖民压迫的国家妇女争取解放的斗争才能顺利进行。”» (Ibid.).

Korean representative sternly pointed out, "To preach disarmament as the primary task of oppressed peoples engaged in struggles, while insisting that ensuring peaceful coexistence and achieving disarmament will naturally lead to national independence, will only harm the national liberation struggle. We must never beg for independence, freedom, and peace from imperialists, but must achieve them through struggle." The Indonesian representative said, "We believe that the demand for disarmament is not easy to achieve because it faces strong opposition from the imperialists. Therefore, we believe that there is an urgent need for a persistent struggle against imperialist aggression, and women must actively participate in this struggle." The Japanese representative said, "Imperialism claims peace and disarmament on the surface, but in reality, it pursues a dual policy of war and arms races. Therefore, women around the world must be vigilant and not be dazzled by flowery rhetoric." The representative from Zanzibar said, "We should not be deceived by the 'peace policy' of imperialism. Imperialism will never voluntarily disarm. To hope that imperialism will disarm is like expecting a man-eating tiger to go to the dentist to pull out its teeth!" (Applause)⁴⁸²

Additionally, the pro-imperialist stance of the majority of the delegates at the congress might have been intentionally implied through the use of the word 口头 (*koutou*), a homophone with 叩头 (*koutou*), which refers to bowing to the emperor.

⁴⁸² Original text: «朝鲜代表严正地指出：“鼓吹裁军是什么正在进行斗争的被压迫人民的首要任务，同时坚持說，确保和平共处和实现裁军会自然而然地带来民族独立，这种做法的结果只能損害民族解放斗争。我們絕不能向帝国主义者乞求独立、自由与和平，而必须通过斗争来争取。”印度尼西亚代表說：“我們认为，要实现裁军的要求并不是容易的，因为它遭到帝国主义者的强烈反对。因此，我們认为，迫切需要开展反对帝国主义侵略势力的坚持不懈的斗争，而妇女必须积极参加这个斗争。”日本代表說：“帝国主义口头上宣称和平和裁军，实际上奉行两面政策，进行侵略战争和军备竞赛。因此全世界妇女应有足够的警惕，不要沉溺于华丽詞句的迷恋。”桑給巴尔代表說：“我們不应当被帝国主义的‘和平政策’所愚弄，帝国主义决不会自动解除武装。指望帝国主义会裁军，就像期望一只吃人的老虎会上牙医那儿去拔掉牙齿一样！”（热烈鼓掌）。» (Ibid.).

This term was used to describe the manner in which these delegates formally expressed their support for decolonial struggles: «Although they paid lip service to supporting national independence movements, their actual actions were entirely contradictory.»⁴⁸³

Overall, the Chinese delegates accused the congress of orchestrating actions against them. Part of this alleged conspiracy included an attack by the Indian delegates on June 26, regarding the Sino-Indian conflict from the previous year: «The Chinese delegate strongly refuted these claims and firmly expressed opposition to bringing the border issue between two Asian countries into the Women's Congress.»⁴⁸⁴ Following the attack, a violation of basic democratic principles occurred when ACWF Deputy Leader Guo Jian, who had gone to respond to the accusations made by the Indian delegate, was rudely interrupted, and the session was adjourned. This led to a moment of chaos, with the Japanese delegates, followed by Albanian, Korean, and Indonesian representatives, taking the stage to demand the Chinese right to reply. When this request was denied, a total of 18 delegations, including Vietnam, Southern Vietnam, Laos, Mozambique, and Kenya, signed a document asking the Indian delegate to retract part of her speech and to restore the Chinese delegation's right to respond. As Yang declared «Many delegations witnessed the anti-China drama on June 26 and 29 and expressed their dissatisfaction.»⁴⁸⁵

In the final part of her speech, Yang listed, point by point, the actions that further contributed to the reprisal against the Chinese delegation and, more broadly, against the position of the decolonial countries, which China appeared to represent, even if

⁴⁸³ Original: «她們口頭上也侈談什麼支持民族獨立運動，但實際行動卻完全相反。」(Ibid.).

⁴⁸⁴ Original: «中國代表當時就給予了有力的駁斥，並且堅決表示不同意把兩個亞洲國家的邊界問題提到婦女大會上去。」(Ibid.).

⁴⁸⁵ Original: «許多代表團親眼目睹了六月二十六日和二十九日這兩幕反華丑劇，紛紛表示不平。」(Ibid.).

not formally. This isolation was evident even on an informal level.⁴⁸⁶ A dispute over the voting process, similar to what had occurred at the Bureau, resurfaced regarding the "Appeal to the Women from the Whole World," the final appeal of the congress. Regarding the appeal, the ACWF delegation leader denounced the lack of distribution of the draft appeal being voted on, with some delegations needing to have had the chance to read it in advance. The approval of the Appeal was then denounced as resulting from an unequal voting system that the appeal was ultimately approved.

The number of representatives from different continents at this World Women's Congress was extremely unbalanced, and the rights of representatives from large and small countries were highly unequal. Out of the 1,289 representatives attending the conference, nearly 700 were from 27 European countries. The United States and Canada had over 100 representatives, while the German Democratic Republic, West Germany, and West Berlin had 115 representatives. In contrast, the 34 African countries had fewer than 100 representatives, and the 23 Asian countries had fewer than 250 representatives. The total number of representatives from Asia, Africa, and Latin America combined did not even surpass the number of European representatives. Soviet Women's Committee Chairwoman Popova boasted in her opening speech that this was "the most representative congress in the history of international women's cooperation." But what kind of "representation" was this?⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ Yan denounces the fact that the Chinese delegation, despite being accommodated in the most luxurious hotel in the city, was placed there for the strategic purpose of being isolated from the other delegations. He even mentions an episode in which, after reaching the hotel where most delegations were staying, they were not hosted for dinner, under the pretext that they were not staying there. In addition to this, there was also isolation in the arena of discussions. Besides from the delegates of other countries, this was further manifested through the deployment of a selected audience, playing the role of 'cheerleaders' and thus manipulating the conference.

⁴⁸⁷ Original text: «出席這次世界婦女大會的各大洲代表的人數是很不平衡的，大小國家代表的權利是很不平等的。在出席這次大會的一千二百八十九名代表中，歐洲二十七個國家，就佔了近七百人，美國和加拿大這兩個國家就有一百多人，德意志民主共和國、西德和西柏林就有一百十五人，而非洲三十四個國家，還不到一百人，亞洲二十三個國家，不到二百五十人，亞洲、非洲和拉丁美洲三大洲出席大會的代表總人數，還趕不上歐洲國家出席大會的人數。蘇聯婦女委員會主席波波娃在開幕詞中吹噓說：“大會是國際婦女合作史上最富代表性的大會。”請問這究竟是什麼樣的“代表性”呢？» (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Yang stressed that the speaking time for each representative was determined at the discretion of the Soviet leadership. She references the incident involving the Chinese delegation's speech following the vote on the appeal. It was reported that the ACWF delegate was interrupted by WIDF vice-president Maria Maddalena Rossi, who was acting as the executive chairperson of the conference. Afterward, the floor was given to Ibárruri, whose speech was considered final, leaving no room for the additional interventions requested by the Albanian and North Korean delegates.

These manipulative practices were not only pointed out by the Chinese representatives and their allied countries but also by other women's groups, including as mentioned the Italian delegation, as reported by the ACWF leader. Support for China's bold denunciations is reported to also have come from other anonymous Soviet attendees, who thanked China for leading the fight against imperialism, a role the USSR no longer represented.⁴⁸⁸

The support that the ACWF received, particularly from previously colonized countries, was further solidified after the Moscow conference, as noted, through invitations extended to some women's representatives to visit the PRC. This included activists from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including Brazil, Comoros, Indonesia, Mozambique, Nepal, Venezuela, South Vietnam, and Zanzibar. These delegations held a "counter-conference" on July 14, in Beijing, where they expressed their dissent toward the Moscow conference and «unanimously and solemnly expressed their determination to fight against imperialism and old and new colonialism and for women's liberation to the end.»⁴⁸⁹ The goal of this meeting was to reaffirm the division

⁴⁸⁸ A "Soviet friend" is mentioned as having commented after the negative vote on the appeal to women worldwide: «The Communist Party of China is the true Leninist party.» Original: «中国共产党是真正列宁的党.» (Ibid.).

⁴⁸⁹ Original: «一致庄严地表示要把反对帝国主义和新老殖民主义、争取妇女解放的斗争进行到底.» (Ibid.).

between the two lines and to endorse, as well as position themselves as leaders of, the anti-imperialist movement:

We believe that after this sharp struggle between the two roads at the Moscow World Conference on Women, progressive women all over the world will have a clearer direction for the struggle, a firmer pace of struggle, strengthen the unity of their own ranks, take on the serious task of opposing imperialism, old and new colonialism, and striving for national independence, people's democracy, social progress and women's liberation, and march forward courageously towards new victories.⁴⁹⁰



Figure 4.6 «On July 8th, the Chinese women's delegation attending the World Women's Congress returned home and was warmly welcomed at the capital airport.»⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Original: «我們相信，經過這次在莫斯科世界婦女大會上兩條路的尖銳鬥爭以後，全世界進步婦女將更加明確鬥爭的方向，更加堅定鬥的步伐，加強自己隊伍的團結，把反對帝國主義、反對新老殖民主義、爭取民族獨立、人民民主、社會進步和婦女解放的嚴重任務擔當起來，向着新的勝利奮勇前進。」 (Ibid).

⁴⁹¹ Original: «七月八日，出席世界婦女大會的中國婦女代表團回國，在首都機場受到熱烈歡迎。」 (Ibid.).

The consequences of the 1963 World Congress of Women are destined to influence the WIDF membership and activities on the long run. Kim (2023a, 23, 101) reports that the Chinese delegation left the WIDF upon their return. Although WIDF-related reports disappeared from *Women of China*, it is not accurate to say that the Chinese federation completely withdrew from the WIDF.

The ACUDI documents attest the presence of ACWF representatives within the WIDF afterwards.⁴⁹² For instance, ACWF delegates attended the WIDF Council meeting (Salzburg, October 26-29, 1965), headed by Guo Jian. Her speech by the Chinese representative at the council echoed the themes presented at the 1963 Congress, once again emphasizing the sense of indignation and referring to it as «[...] a page of dishonor in the annals of the federation.»⁴⁹³ In Guo's speech, the WIDF's approach is criticized, particularly due to its rapprochement with the UN, described as a tool of U.S. imperialism – following the federation's reentry into the organization the previous June and its support for the principle of "peaceful coexistence," which was considered part of Khrushchev's revisionist policy.⁴⁹⁴ According to Guo, this stance was a thinly veiled endorsement of U.S. imperialism.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² Two years after the Moscow Congress, Chinese involvement in the WIDF is still noted in a letter dated November 8, 1965, from Rossi to Marisa Passigli, which mentions: «The new and surprising element was the attitude of the Chinese, cordial and even affectionate». *Letter from Rossi to Passigli*, Portovenere, November 8, 1965 (ACUDI 37, 196). In addition to the women's movement, the committee of the Chinese World Peace Council remains active, of which a delegation was present in Italy in November 1964 (Bulletin of the 'Italian Peace Committee' unique issue of July 1965 (ACUDI 36, 192).

⁴⁹³ «[...] une page de déshonneur dans les annales de la Fédération.» Guo Jian intervention at the WIDF Council in Prague, October 14-17, 1967 (ACUDI 37, 196-2).

⁴⁹⁴ Specifically, the WIDF status was re-established at the 42nd Session of the UN Economic and Social Council, held in New York, May 8- June 6, 1967 (de Haan 2010, 550).

⁴⁹⁵ Guo Jian intervention at the WIDF Council in Prague, October 14-17, 1967 (ACUDI 37, 196-2).

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the evolution and limitations of connections between feminist organizations, specifically how it mediated between coexistence and resistance in a rapidly changing global political landscape from 1956 to 1963. Key events, including the Hungarian Revolution, decolonization, the Sino-Soviet split, and the broader Cold War dynamics, significantly impacted the trajectory of women's movements, forcing a reevaluation of traditional maternalist models of feminism that had once united women across ideological divides. These models, which emphasized peace, motherhood, and unity, began to fracture as new political realities and ideological conflicts emerged.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and its suppression by the Soviet Union had a profound effect on women's organizations, including the Chinese and Italian ones. In Italy, UDI was forced to reconcile its ideological commitment to socialism with the realities of Soviet intervention, leading to internal divisions and a distancing from the Soviet model. The UDI, under the leadership of Marisa Rodano, sought greater autonomy from PCI, pushing for a focus on women's emancipation and equality as core strategic issues rather than mere adjuncts to broader socialist goals. This shift reflected broader tensions within the global women's movement, as the maternalist rhetoric of peace and unity came under increasing pressure from the realities of political violence and the demand for women's rights as citizens and workers, not just as mothers.

In China, the ACWF also faced a period of reevaluation, particularly following the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward. The shift in Chinese women's

roles, moving away from earlier ideals of active participation in production and society, marked a conservative turn, with a new focus on frugality and the management of the household. Despite this, the ACWF remained committed to anti-imperialist and revolutionary ideals, which placed it increasingly at odds with the WIDF. By the early 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split had extended into the realm of women's organizations, with China positioning itself as a leader in the anti-colonial struggle and a critic of Soviet revisionism.

The World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1963 marked the climax of these tensions. While intended to be a unifying event for women's organizations around the world, the Congress instead highlighted the growing ideological rifts. The Italian and Chinese delegations, representing two different trajectories within the global women's movement, found themselves on opposite sides of key debates. These events underscored the fundamental disagreements about the direction of the global women's movement – whether it should focus on peace and disarmament in the context of Cold War tensions, or whether the fight against imperialism and colonialism should take precedence.

The breakdown in relations between Italian and Chinese women's organizations and their distancing from the WIDF reflected broader geopolitical shifts. The UDI's move toward autonomy was emblematic of a wider effort to assert an independent feminist agenda, free from the constraints of both Soviet and anti-imperialist dogma. Meanwhile, China's continued alignment with decolonization movements and its hardline stance against both U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism signaled a desire to lead a distinct bloc within the international women's movement, one that prioritized national liberation and revolutionary struggle over peaceful coexistence.

This chapter demonstrates that the global women's movement of the 1950s and 1960s was far from monolithic. It was a space of contestation, where different visions of feminism – rooted in maternalism, emancipation, anti-imperialism, and national sovereignty – competed for prominence. The maternalist model, which had once provided a common language for women's activism, was no longer sufficient to address the complex realities of a world divided by Cold War ideologies, decolonization struggles, and the demands for women's rights as active agents in political and social life. The Congress of 1963, far from unifying the global women's movement, instead exposed the deep fractures within it, leaving behind a more fragmented but also more politically autonomous and ideologically diverse feminist landscape.

In conclusion, the figure of the woman transculturally emerges as a complex and evolving symbol, shaped by the intersections of political ideologies, national struggles, and feminist movements. Across different cultural contexts – from Italy to China – women were positioned as both nurturers and political actors, reflecting broader global tensions. While maternalist rhetoric emphasized women's roles as peacekeepers and mothers, the realities of decolonization, Cold War politics, and the fight for emancipation required a redefinition of womanhood. This figure evolved into one that embodied not only care and peace but also resistance, autonomy, and active participation in the socio-political transformations of the time. Thus, the trans-cultural figure of the woman became a dynamic force, navigating and challenging the boundaries of tradition, ideology, and national identity.

Conclusions: *The Opposite of War is Creativity*⁴⁹⁶

Chasing Sisterhood examined the transcultural dimensions of leftist women's activism during the first two decades of the Cold War, analyzing debates and initiatives in the development of human-rights norms. The study has foregrounded the hitherto underestimated global socialist-feminist network fostered by the WIDF. This study has been distinguished by an unprecedented bilateral focus on exchanges between two national mass organizations – the ACWDF/ACWF and the UDI – respectively the largest women's federations in Eastern Asia and Western Europe. These interactions were realized precisely because of broader efforts to construct a socialist transnational coalition. As a result, the mass feminist bodies within the WIDF were simultaneously guided by international geopolitical imperatives and by their own local sociopolitical contexts.

Meanwhile, the women activists who drove these exchanges sought to leverage cross-cultural encounters to consolidate their authority within domestic arenas and to extend their influence abroad, despite operating under domestic and international frameworks that confined their agency to spheres deemed “appropriate” for women. To navigate these constraints, they devised ad hoc strategies that semantically reclaimed their biological role as bearers of life, thereby positioning themselves – explicitly as women – as champions of human-rights protection. However, these strategies, deployed both domestically and internationally, ultimately came into open conflict when shifting global geopolitical dynamics curtailed the very spaces for effec-

⁴⁹⁶ The title drew on Zorica Mrsevic's (2001) chapter, *The Opposite of War Is Not Peace – It Is Creativity*, reporting witnesses of feminist voices during the conflicts within former Yugoslavia.

tive socialist-feminist dialogue. The most contentious moments in socialist policy-making during the Cold War also marked a gradual shift in the approach of mass women's movements, which progressively readapted their political agendas in relation to their respective reference formations – whether through the pursuit of necessary dialogue with an increasingly radicalized Chinese Communist Party or in partial contrast with a renewing, more open Communist front in Italy. These shifts aimed to preserve the political legitimacy the women mass organizations had gained in previous years and to continue legitimizing their efforts on behalf of women and human rights.

Initially “sisters,” later “mother-companions,” and ultimately rivals, the relationship between the UDI and the ACWDF/ACWF exemplifies the shifting dynamics of the socialist women’s movement during the Cold War. While shaped by the broader geopolitical climate, women’s activism also exerted its own transformative influence both locally and globally. Activists worked to construct a women-led infrastructure that boldly challenged the United Nations’ supremacy in defining and governing human rights. The study demonstrated how postwar generations of women activists played a crucial role in advancing not only women but also human rights. The *fil rouge* guiding this complex analysis was the question: What insights an analysis of the transcultural relations between Italy and China within the global socialist women’s movement in the initial phase of the Cold War could provide regarding the movement’s impact on the advancement of women’s rights and human rights? Through a detailed exploration of four critical chapters, this work has demonstrated how these transcultural exchanges shaped, challenged, and advanced the global women’s movement while revealing its tensions and complexities.

The thesis examined the policies devised to promote and safeguard women and human rights within the framework of the international socialist women’s movement

starting from the aftermath of World War II. This crucial period was analyzed along with its associated political discourses, propaganda efforts, and mass mobilizations. The research traced the trajectory from the late 1940s – especially the year 1949, which marked the formal establishment of the ACWDF – up to 1963, when the ties between the WIDF and both the Italian and Chinese women’s federations deteriorated, leading to a significant rupture and subsequent disengagement.

The research adopted a conceptual framework that situated the promotion of human rights within the historical and political realities in which socialist and communist women’s organizations operated. It argued that human rights advocacy – particularly in relation to women and children – was not pursued as a stand-alone or primary objective, but rather embedded within a broader ideological project led by communist organizations. In these respects, notions of “woman” and “femininity” were defined according to a Marxist-Leninist political discourse. Within this framework, what was referred to as “women’s work” – meaning both internal engagement within political structures and external dialogue with affiliated parties – was conceived as part of a broader transformative political mission that intersected with all spheres of society. These organizations explicitly distanced from the overall tradition of the 1920s feminist movements – associated to bourgeois liberal and socialist circles and thus rejected. The refusal of this bourgeois tradition helped legitimize the UDI position within socio-political contexts such as post-Fascist Italy, where the ideal of the woman as ‘angel of the hearth’ remained deeply entrenched. At the same time, the ACWDF/ACWF also found validation in the rejection of feminist ideals which were associated with a liberal tradition – despite the KMT’s ultranationalist politics promoting the patriarchal “good wife and wise mother” model – from which CCP sought to distance. Despite their ideological rejection of earlier feminist traditions, both transnational mass movements engaged with feminist ideals in practice, promoting

policies specifically beneficial to women and children. The ideological alignment with the policies of their respective reference parties effectively provided the UDI and the ACWDF/ACWF with crucial support, especially in the postwar years, thereby expanding their sphere of influence. In this sense, what later emerged as an ineffective ideological containment was, in practice, accepted because it allowed for the acquisition of a previously unexplored political space. This clearly emerged, for example, from Michetti's account of the post-1956 backlash, when the drop in morale within the party led to a sharp decline in support for the UDI, which materialized in a sudden drop in sales of *Noi Donne* as seen in chapter four.

Being aware of the necessity of ideological positioning allowed the author to explore how the advocacy for women's rights by socialist activists was inherently tied to a larger political agenda which dialogued with the political orientation and that also included the defense of children's rights, labor rights, and, crucially, the promotion of peace. This latter, in particular, emerged as the central organizing principle for much of the activity of the WIDF in the postwar years. The first chapter, *Mothers as Warriors for Peace: A Transcultural Alliance* demonstrated how this focus on peace was deeply shaped by the global context of the time – defined by the devastation of WWII and the continued eruption of anti-colonial wars tied to ongoing processes of decolonization.

Building on this framework, the thesis examined how discourses surrounding human rights were negotiated within the cross-cultural interactions between Italian and Chinese socialist women activists. This inquiry was approached from a multi-dimensional perspective, taking into consideration the array of influential actors who shaped and sustained these transnational exchanges. At its foundation, the research traced the ties between the ACWDF and UDI within the broader architecture of the international socialist landscape to which both organizations belonged.

The role of the Korean War in Transnational Feminism

Specifically, the first two chapters examined the creation and evolution of an initial “peace” infrastructure at the international level within the most significant post-World War II media conflict, namely the Korean War. The mobilization of women’s organizations in the international peace and Korea aid campaign provided, both in Italy and in China, the first opportunity to solidify the international socialist women’s front.

In both contexts, a concerted media campaign was mounted to advocate the laying down of arms and the signing of a peace treaty. This campaign fostered widespread anti-war sentiment and, for the first time, brought anti-colonial international politics into the pages of mass-circulation Chinese and Italian women’s magazines analyzed. A case in point is the UDI’s milk-collection drive, which brought the distant Korean conflict into resonance with Italian housewives’ memories of World War II by engaging them in gathering powdered milk to safeguard infants’ nutrition – invoking a spirit of universal motherhood that transcended national, ethnic, and class boundaries. The international diplomacy that developed around this Korean War campaign – and the explicitly political policies that criticized the architecture of post-war peace-building institutions – led to the formation of a parallel international network founded on new premises. In this light, ACWDF emerges as both an intermediary for Korean women’s demands and a pivotal coordinator of international humanitarian aid to Korea. At the same time, ACWDF turned into a key agent of Chinese peace propaganda in an overtly anti-imperialist, anti-American vein – thereby positioning itself in opposition to the US-backed international order.

Alongside the WIDF, the study also considered the contributions of other global institutions committed to advancing a socialist agenda for the promotion of human

rights, child protection, and peace. Chief among these was the WPC, which emerged as a key platform for the orchestration of peace-related initiatives aligned with socialist values, especially during the early 1950s. Collaborative efforts between the WIDF and WPC were examined in light of the wider strategic alignment with the broader communist front, particularly in relation to international political developments and in conjunction with the ideological orientations of the CCP, PCI, and, more broadly, the PCUS.

It highlighted how the Korean War was the primary catalyst for creating a global women's peace movement that transcended national borders. This war provided a possibility to experiment with transnational strategies for the development of socialist women's networks. Specifically, materialist discourses became instrumental in linking women's roles as mothers to their political roles as protectors of future generations. Women gained credibility as advocates for peace and human rights through their maternal identity.

The dissertation's first chapter stressed how the Korean transnational peace campaign was not simply a reaction to socialist propaganda but was a space for individual agency. As seen in the cases of Italy and China, women's activism in support of Korea was a complex and active engagement with global narratives. Italian activists, as the UDI President Maria Maddalena Rossi, expressed deep guilt and solidarity with Korean women, transforming personal pain into a collective plea for global peace. Similarly, Chinese and Korean women framed their struggles within the more significant anti-imperialist and decolonial movement, using the war as an opportunity to position Asia as a leader in the global socialist order. The "struggle for peace," often negatively connoted and ideologically charged by its Cold War entanglements, can also be understood as a "human rights struggle" – the flip side of the same coin. Although undeniably shaped by Cold War politics, it simultaneously advanced a form

of human-rights advocacy that helped disseminate these ideals globally. In doing so, it adopted a decolonial stance, contesting colonial assumptions still embedded not only in diplomatic circles but also among the broader public – and even among the activists themselves, as evidenced by the candid accounts of Dal Pozzo and Cesarini on the 1953 World Congress of Women (see Chapter 2). The maternalist strategy underpinned this process, emphasizing women’s inherent role as peacekeepers. Motherhood became a unifying force, surviving beyond the Korean conflict and helping to shape women’s roles in the global movement for human rights. This strategy, however, would later face challenges as global political dynamics evolved.

Maternalism as a Strategy for Women's Rights and Diplomacy

In this context fall the events of the crucial period between 1953 and 1956, years in which the WIDF – having entered open conflict with the UN – was expelled and, in response, sought to leverage the network it had built previously to create an alternative system that not only gave voice to women but was intrinsically and profoundly feminine. It is against this backdrop that one must understand the formation of a rapidly expanding network, which aimed to unite socialist-oriented women under the aegis of motherhood, thereby offering a concrete alternative to the value system promoted by the UD and grounded in maternalist principles. However, this re-reading of society according to the principle of “motherocracy” clearly exhibits significant limitations, insofar as it reiterates and exaggerates the patriarchal model of woman as mother. The WIDF’s internal policies – which promoted a traditional female role while mirroring liberal feminist strategies by celebrating women’s “natural” qualities as useful to society beyond the domestic sphere without questioning the domestic realm itself – drew explicitly on the “domestic feminism” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This reclaiming of the maternal role does not appear to have

been unwelcome to local authorities, as evidenced by the considerable coverage the 1955 congress received in national women's outlets, where it was prominently promoted; by contrast, it was virtually absent from both Chinese and Italian national media. Such patterns confirm Suzy Kim's (2023) analysis, which reads the World Congress of Mothers as an attempt to engage newly formed organizations and groups emerging from recently decolonized countries.

Women diplomats and activists made use of the maternity concept to develop international networks, solidifying their status as diplomats, cooperation specialists, and human rights champions. As shown in chapter two, *Creating a Worldwide Motherocracy* the Sino-Italian documents, in particular, showcased how women's organizations took advantage of the relatively peaceful post-Geneva Conference period to advance their political and social agendas

The post-Korean War geopolitical climate fostered the development of maternalist discourses within the women's movement, mainly as China's rise as a global player created new opportunities for diplomacy. Maternalism was reinterpreted to further women's rights and expand international diplomacy. The relationship between the ACWDF and the UDI provided a prime example of how maternalist rhetoric could be used to cement diplomatic ties, transcending cultural barriers without challenging ideology.

Sino-Italian Bilateral Exchanges: A Transcultural Model for Women's Emancipation

At the bilateral level, the end of the Korean War also ushered in new spaces for diplomatic engagement with China – one that aligned with the CCP's "people-to-people" diplomacy aimed at forging bilateral ties for diplomatic ends. It was in this context that the first direct exchanges took place, involving women's groups from both UDI

and the ACWDF. Although the portrayal of these exchanges often reflects an orientalist charm and an almost celebratory adulation of socialist development – as Brady (2003) has noted – it is important to recognize that they nonetheless laid the groundwork for enduring relationships. Even though this period of diplomatic opening lasted only a few years, women’s delegations fostered what Campbell (2023) calls a “creative confusion” regarding how the exchanges were structured – strictly contingent itineraries, predetermined agendas, and a narrowly defined roster of permissible topics – which, though rarely acknowledged outright, can be discerned in some contemporary accounts. For example, the volume *Anche lei possiede la Buona terra* and the essays published by Italian delegates in the special issue of *Il Ponte* hint at unspoken questions about the conduct of these visits. Such evidence betrays the incapacity of dialogue constrained by the rigid “political pilgrimages” (Hollander 1981) instituted by the Chinese side to achieve genuine exchange – many pressing issues were left unresolved, silenced, or skirted with embarrassed laughter and tactics exploiting linguistic misunderstandings. Notably absent were any debates on the practical difficulties encountered in implementing the new divorce law – issues that, by contrast, appear quite explicitly in *Women of New China* during the same years.

Indeed, *Women of New China* proved to be far more than a mere propaganda organ of the ACWDF through at least 1957. Although its primary audience was the federation’s women cadres, its reach was in fact quite broad at a moment when the CCP was rapidly expanding. The journal became a genuine forum for debate on the law’s application, including disputes over the division of marital property, the grounds for divorce, and even the horrific instances of spousal abandonment and femicide that followed the law’s enactment as demonstrated in chapter three: *Women Models: Mediating the Communist Dream of Liberation*.

The bilateral exchanges between UDI and ACWDF from 1954 to 1956 highlight how these delegations functioned as transcultural bridges between Italy and China, emphasizing the shared socialist feminist values while revealing the nuances of their political environments. The third chapter illustrated how these exchanges fostered rich dialogues on women's emancipation, education, and broader socio-political issues. Italian activists drew inspiration from their Chinese counterparts, seeing them as models of competent socialist women professionals who could balance maternal duties with political leadership. This is particularly clear from Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's depiction of Gong Peng, and from the materials dedicated to the Chinese Ministry of Health Li Dequan.

In Italy, these exchanges allowed UDI women to push beyond gendered boundaries, gaining political credibility within the male-dominated Communist Party. In China, the task of forging international alliances was also meant to ensure internal party support for women's work as part of a broader class struggle. The third chapter, also revealed the ideological tensions that arose from China's focus on alliances with other Asian countries, which led to a more limited visibility of its relations with Western Europe. Overall, it emerged that while maternalist discourses were powerful tools, they operated within specific political and cultural frameworks. As Sino-Italian exchanges deepened, the complexities of socialist feminism across different national contexts became more apparent.

1956 events marked the beginning of cracks in the maternalist framework. While it remained a powerful tool for peace diplomacy and the promotion of women's rights, the realities of decolonization, emerging Cold War tensions, and internal political struggles began to challenge its effectiveness.

The Decline of Maternalism and the Rise of Ideological Fractures (1956-1963)

If the Hungarian Crisis represented a plot twist for the Socialist ideological bastion, the post-1956 world order set in motion trajectories that would both radicalize political movements and foster the emergence of spheres of consciousness and development around explicitly women's concerns. In both cases, one observes a centrifugal push away from the increasingly centralized policies of the WIDF (Gradskowa 2021) and a concomitant assertion of necessary autonomy. These changes ran in parallel with a reconfiguration of leadership in both UDI and the ACWDF. For the UDI this was symbolized by the election of Marisa Rodano as its new president at the fifth Congress of the federation in April 1956. For the ACWDF, this was signaled by the removal of the term 'Democratic' from its name at the September 1957 Congress – a change related to the conclusion of the New Democracy phase and the formal entry into the socialist construction period, as ratified by the CCP's Eighth Congress. From that moment on, the political lines of the women's federations were realigned, culminating in the events of the 1963 World Congress of Women.

This realignment must be seen in light of the federation's dramatically expanded constituency. Whereas the WIDF's inaugural Congress in December 1945 brought together delegates from forty-seven countries (FDIF 1946), by 1963 its ranks had more than doubled, with 1,381 delegates representing 105 nations (Kadnikova 2011, 33). Much of this growth derived from newly decolonized states. Debates on women's rights, peace, equality, solidarity, anti-imperialism, and anti-colonialism reflected the socialist frame of reference at a glocal level. Indeed, from this moment the ACWDF increasingly oriented itself to represent the claims of these new actors – especially those still in the process of decolonization. The Federation demonstrated an open commitment to anti-imperialism and national liberation, as evidenced by its exchanges with women's groups in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia from the early 1950s onward. From the late 1950s, this orientation adopted increasingly martial

language, and in the early 1960s explicitly invoked the rhetoric of a “just war” (Forster 2023). This stance reached its apex in the “counter-Congress” organized in protest against the WIDF line during the 1963 World Women’s Congress in Moscow. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, maternalism began to show its limitations. In particular, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Sino-Soviet split, and the increasing pressures of Cold War politics forced women’s organizations to reconsider their approach. The World Congress of Women in Moscow in 1963 exposed the deep ideological rifts within the global women’s movement.

For the UDI, this period also marked a decisive turn toward greater autonomy not only from the WIDF but from the PCI as well. Under Marisa Rodano’s leadership, the Federation gradually abandoned maternalist rhetoric of peace and unity in favor of a robust agenda emphasizing women’s rights as citizens, workers, and political actors. This shift became visible in the pages of *Noi Donne*, where references to the WIDF – once a fixture – all but disappeared, supplanted by articles and testimonies devoted to emancipation and women’s solidarity. The UDI’s discourse increasingly converged with both socialist and Catholic women’s associations, even as it continued to champion international disarmament and peace. In doing so, it positioned itself in stark contrast to the WIDF’s equivocal stance, which, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, proved incapable of articulating the unequivocal anti-nuclear position that the UDI and its pacifist members demanded.

At the same time, the Sino–Soviet split further deepened the ideological chasm within the global socialist women’s movement. China emerged as a self-styled leader in the anti-colonial struggle, while both the USSR and the United States sought – ultimately unsuccessfully – to constrain its nascent nuclear program. Unlike the relative unity seen during the Korean War, the world-spanning conflicts of the early 1960s offered no forum for collective socialist-feminist solidarity. By mid-decade, the international

horizon of the socialist women's movement had irrevocably shifted. The maternalist model of unity was no longer sufficient to address the complex realities of global politics as new demands for national sovereignty, resistance, and autonomy emerged. The final chapter, *Unveiling the Limits of Maternalist Feminism: Mediating Coexistence and Resistance*, underscored that the global women's movement was far from monolithic. Maternalism, once a shared language for peace, became insufficient to meet the needs of a world divided by Cold War ideologies, decolonization, and demands for women's rights. The 1963 Congress highlighted these fractures, leaving behind a more fragmented, but also more politically autonomous and ideologically diverse, feminist movement.

Overall, the research contributes to the intricate mosaic of global socialist feminism, offering a perspective that, while necessarily partial, highlights the vibrancy of these dialogues and demonstrates how the dynamics within the contemporary movement continue to shape the current understanding of feminism, which remains strongly influenced by a Western-centric paradigm.

It contributed to fill a significant gap in Global Socialist Feminism, spotlighting the transformative role of women activists – particularly from leftist movements – in shaping a women-centered agenda that resonated across national and international political arenas. By challenging the Cold War's rigid bipolar paradigm, the research recovers the feminist efforts of the postwar decades, often sidelined in traditional narratives. By shifting attention to secondary actors in the global stage, this study disrupted Western-centric feminist scholarship and moved beyond the overemphasized "two feminist waves" framework. Through extensive archival research and a nuanced analysis of women's magazines, the study partly compensated for the lack of a WIDF archive.

The scarcity of sources – or of access to them – has long been shaped, as known, by the political upheavals following the collapse of the socialist bloc and the emergence of new global polarities, which remain acutely visible today. Such developments have, for instance, impeded research in the ACWF's archives in China and limited the availability of materials on pivotal figures like Maria Maddalena Rossi, forcing a reconstruction of her contributions from disparate, non-systematic records. Equally consequential has been a delayed recognition of the imperative to preserve the legacies of women activists and diplomats. A deliberate politics of erasure took hold in both the Chinese context (Wang 2017, 18) and the Italian one (Gabrielli 2005) during the period of de-Stalinization. Only in the 1970s did feminist movements began to acknowledge the urgency of safeguarding these memories – a belated awareness that today obliges us to undertake the painstaking, inevitably fragmentary work of reconstructing these women's ideas and achievements.

The dissertation highlighted how these women's organizations closely followed the directives of their affiliated parties, yet it also challenged the conventional historiographical view that their actions were wholly top-down or ideologically monolithic. Instead, it sought to recover the agency of the activists involved, proposing a more nuanced interpretation that recognized their contributions not only as instrumental to party goals but as expressions of political engagement driven by real commitment to ideals of equality and justice. This reconceptualization helped to illuminate the internal diversity of the socialist women's movement, as well as the tangible effects of their work – particularly in advancing the rights of women and children, and in shaping evolving understandings of what constituted “human rights” in the socialist world. This study redefined the landscape of Women and Cold War historiography by focusing on the largest yet critically underexplored Communist women's organizations in Western Europe and Eastern Asia. The international roles of organizations like the

UDI and the ACWF, alongside the contributions of leaders such as UDI's Maria Maddalena Rossi and ACWF's Li Dequan, challenge long-held assumptions about women's postwar domesticity. Instead, they reveals their indispensable leadership in advancing women's, children's, and human rights, both locally and globally.

The study nevertheless leaves several key questions unresolved. To what extent have cross-cultural exchanges influenced internal activism and the personal trajectories of individual activists? Were these dialogues, in certain instances, confined to the interpersonal level? Why, if women's work has – according to much historiography – served primarily to echo party policies, was their voice nonetheless systematically silenced? Finally, in the wake of the 1960s schism within the international socialist movement, how did contacts between socialist women in Europe and Asia evolve?

This latter question is partially addressed by archival evidence, which points to an increasing Japanese presence within the WIDF. This growth paralleled Japan's pursuit of international relations framed through an anti-imperialist, anti-nuclear, and anti-militarist lens, particularly as the U.S. expanded its presence in the region following its direct entry into the Vietnam War in 1965 (Hall 2011). Chinese women, too, closely followed the Vietnam War and the escalating American military footprint in the region, as evidenced by reports in *Women of China*. Meanwhile, the broader context of social militarization, which took shape in the early years and was later solidified with the launch of the Cultural Revolution, reshaped China's foreign policy. Countries accused of revisionism or alignment with the Soviet Union were largely excluded from Chinese international diplomacy (Chen 2001).

From the European perspective, future research would benefit from adopting a triangular approach that incorporates other key actors—such as the Union des Femmes

Françaises (Union of French Women, UFF), which to date lacks a consolidated archive for the period under consideration. Beyond the Sino–European axis, it must also be noted that, from the early 1960s, the principal allies in this framework were the women of Albania. Accordingly, forthcoming studies should broaden their scope to examine the ties that Chinese women began to cultivate –especially from October 1961 – with their Albanian counterparts in response to emerging trajectories within global communism. In this regard, a systematic analysis of the archival holdings of both the Union of Albanian Women and the FUDANREN would substantially extend the present research, helping to resolve the questions that remain open and filling persistent gaps in the historiography.

Expanding research to include additional avenues of dialogue between women’s federations can help bring to light aspects of history that remain in the shadows. It is essential to shift the direction of the spotlight, illuminating the details of these conversations to trace the complex and fragmented legacy of international women’s diplomacy. Only by doing so can we accurately reconstruct the contributions of the women who led this movement and the lasting impact they imprinted on social policies – policies that laid the foundation for today’s welfare systems and played a crucial role in advancing women’s, children’s, and human rights on both local and global scales. This was a hidden revolution, quiet yet profoundly transformative.

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Appendix I: Timeline of Congresses and Prominent Leaders of WIDF, ACWDF, and UDI

WIDF

Congresses and president

- I 26 Nov – 1 Dec 1945, Paris; “International Congress of Women”, Eugénie Cotton (France) elected president.
- II 1 – 6 Dec 1948, Budapest; Congress of Women for Peace.
- III 5 –10 Jun 1953, Copenhagen; World Congress of Women.
- IV 1 – 5 Jun 1958, Vienna; World Congress of Women.
- V 24 – 29 Jun 1963, Moscow; World Congress of Women.

General Secretaries

1946–1955 – Mari-Claude Vaillant-Cotourier (France).

1956–1957 – Angiola Minella (Italy).

1957–1963 – Carmen Zanti (Italy).

1963–1967 – Rosa Jasovich-Pantaleon (Argentina).

ACWDF (ACWF from 1957)

Congresses and president

- I 24 Mar- 3 Apr 1949, Beijing; Cai Chang Chairperson
- II 15-23 Apr 1953, Beijing
- III 9-21 Sep 1957, Beijing

UDI

Congresses and presidents

- I 20 – 30 Oct 1945, Florence. Women in Public Life, in the Struggle, in Reconstruction (*Le donne nella partecipazione alla vita pubblica, nella lotta, nella ricostruzione*); Rita Montagnana elected president.
- II 19 –23 Oct 1947, Milan. For a Happy Family, Peace and Work (*Per una famiglia felice, pace e lavoro*); Maria Maddalena Rossi elected president.
- III 14 – 16 Oct 1949, Rome. For the Future of Our Children, for Italy's Freedom and Progress: No to War (*Per l'avvenire dei nostri figli, per la libertà e il progresso d'Italia: no alla guerra*)
- IV 10 – 12 Apr 1953, Rome. The Italian Woman Builds Her Own Future (*La donna italiana costruisce il suo avvenire*), called Congress of the Italian Woman (*Congresso della donna italiana*)
- V 12 – 15 Apr 1956, Rome. For Women's Emancipation, for a More Advanced and Just Society, for Disarmament and Peace (*Per l'emancipazione della donna, per una società più progredita e più giusta, per il disarmo e la pace*), called Congress of the Italian Woman (*Congresso della donna italiana*); Marisa Rodano president.
- VI 7 – 10 May 1959, Rome. For Women's Emancipation, a Great Autonomous and Unitary Association (*Per l'emancipazione della donna, una grande associazione autonoma e unitaria*).
- VII 4 – 5 Jun 1964, Rome. Unity and Women's Emancipation for the Progress of Society (*Unità ed emancipazione delle donne per il progresso della società*)

Appendix II: Chronology of Relevant International Meetings

1945 (26 Nov-1 Dec)	International Congress of Women, Paris
1948 (1-6 Dec)	Congress of Women for Peace, Budapest
1949 (22 Apr)	World Congress of the Partisans for Peace, Paris
1949 (26-27 Apr)	WIDF Executive Committee, Paris
1949 (17-22 Nov)	WIDF Council, Moscow
1949 (10-16 Dec)	Asian Women's Conference, Beijing
1950 (17-20 Apr)	WIDF Executive Committee, Helsinki
1951 (1-5 Feb)	WIDF Council, Berlin
1951 (16 – 27 May)	WIDF Commission in Korea
1951 (20-24 Jun)	WIDF Executive Committee, Sofia
1951 (7-10 Dec)	WIDF Executive Committee, Berlin
1952 (12-16 Apr)	Conference for the Defense of Children, Vienna
1952 (18-20 Jul)	WIDF Executive Committee, Bucharest
1952 (2-12 Oct)	Asia Pacific Peace Conference, Beijing
1953 (5-10 Jun)	World Women Congress, Copenhagen
1953 (13-16 Jun)	WIDF Executive Committee, East Berlin
1954 (15-19 Jan)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Geneva
1954 (26 Apr-21 Jul)	Geneva Conference
1954 (30 Mar-30Apr)	17th UN Economic and Social Council, New York
1954 (early October)	Women's democratic Press editors meeting, Berlin
1954 (2-3 Nov)	WIDF Executive Committee, Berlin
1955 (9-13 Feb)	WIDF Council, Geneva
1955 (18-24 Apr)	Afro-Asian Conference, Bandung

1955 (22-29 Jun)	World Peace Assembly, Helsinki
1955 (7-10 Jul)	World Congress of Mothers, Lausanne
1955 (18-24 Jul)	Geneva Summit: Conference of the Four Big Powers,
1955 (6 – 8 Aug)	World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, Hi- roshima
1955 (2-4 Nov)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Moscow
1955 (8 Dec)	Celebration of the WIDF 10th anniversary, Paris
1956 (2-4 Feb)	1st meeting Permanent International Committee of Mothers for the Defense of Children, Lausanne
1956 (24 - 30 Apr)	WIDF Council, Beijing
1956 (14 – 17 Jun)	World Conference of Women Workers, Budapest
1956 (31 Oct - 4 Nov)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Rome
1957 (2 - 5 Apr)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Berlin
1957 (27 - 29 Apr)	2nd meeting Permanent International Committee Mothers, Lausanne
1957 (22 – 27 Jun)	WIDF Council, Helsinki
1957 (26 Dec- 1 Jan)	Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference, Cairo
1958 (15-24 Feb)	Asian-African Conference of Women, Ceylon
1958 (20-2 Feb)	3rd meeting Permanent International Committee Mothers, Sofia
1958 (1 – 5 Jun)	World Congress of Women, Vienna
1958 (10 Aug – 3 Sep)	Asian-African Film Festival, Tashkent (Uzbekistan)
1958 (Oct)	Afro-Asian Writers meeting, Tashkent
1959 (13 – 14 Jun)	Preparatory Meeting for the International Assembly of Wo- men - 50° anniversary of IWD, Malmö
1959 (12 – 15 Oct)	WIDF Council, Prague

1959 (10 – 12 Dec)	World Assembly of Women for Disarmament, Göteborg and Kungälv
1960 (21-24 Apr)	International Assembly of Women to commemorate 50 years of IWD, Copenhagen
1960 (29 Nov – 4 Dec)	WIDF Council, Warsaw
1961 (12-4 Jan)	Afro-Asian Women's Conference, Cairo
1961 (4-6 Oct)	WIDF Council, Budapest
1961 (11-2 Nov)	European Women's Meeting for Peace, Berlin
1962 (23-25 Mar)	World Assembly of Women for Disarmament, Vienna
1962 (28 May-2 Jun)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Prague
1962 (7-11 Dec)	WIDF Council, Berlin
1963 (18-19 Jun)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Moscow
1963 (24-29 Jun)	World Congress of Women, Moscow
1963 (5-9 Dec)	WIDF Executive Bureau, Berlin
1964 (20-25 Oct)	WIDF Executive Bureau and Council, Prague
1965 (10-15 Jul)	World Peace Congress, Helsinki
1965 (24-29 Oct)	WIDF Executive Bureau and Council, Salzburg
1967 (8 May-6 Jun)	42nd Session of the UN Economic and Social Council, New York
1967 (14-17 Jun)	WIDF Executive Bureau , Berlin
1967 (14-17 Oct)	WIDF Council, Prague
1969 (14-17 Jun)	World Congress of Women, Helsinki

Appendix III: Biographical Profiles of ACWDF/ACWF and UDI Activists⁴⁹⁷

Alessandrini, Ada (1909-1991)

Ada Alessandrini was born in Terni on December 20, 1909, into a devout Catholic family of modest means, Alessandrini received a strict upbringing. Initially steered toward technical studies, she defied expectations and pursued a classical education. With great personal sacrifice, she graduated from the University of Rome La Sapienza in 1932 with top honors, defending a thesis on the return of the popes from Avignon and Saint Catherine of Siena. The work was later expanded and published, earning her a prize from the Roman Society for National History. Specializing in palaeography and diplomatics, she worked at the Vatican Archives and continued her studies at the Roman Society's advanced school. Between 1934 and 1942, she taught literature, Latin, history, and geography in secondary schools across Umbria and Lazio. In the afternoons, she worked as a librarian. Evenings, however, were reserved for her growing anti-fascist activism. During the dictatorship, she contributed to clandestine press operations, organized partisan units, and protected political and racial refugees at great personal risk. After the Liberation, Alessandrini joined the Christian Democratic Party (DC), becoming a leading voice in its republican left-wing faction. She collaborated with the journals *Politica d'oggi* and *Tendenza*, and championed women's suffrage and popular unity across ideological lines. Alongside MP Guido Miglioli, she co-founded the "Christian Movement for Peace" and helped represent it within the leadership of the Popular Democratic Front. In 1949, she also became a

⁴⁹⁷ Scarce or none information was retrieved on the following activists: An Sao 安嫂, Giovanna Barezzi, Luigina La Pira, Maria Piccone Stella, Tang Mengcheng 唐孟城, Zhong Kantuo 钟刊托, Li Peizhi 李培之.

founding member of the “World Movement of the Partisans of Peace” in Paris. Her feminist and pacifist engagement deepened in the postwar years. She was active in the UDI and served on the council of the *Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes* from 1948. Her progressive convictions, rooted in Christian principles, often put her at odds with dominant positions within Catholic organizations, particularly during public debates over divorce and abortion laws. These tensions led to her resignation from the UDI, but she never abandoned her critical engagement. She stood unsuccessfully for election in 1952 on a civic list in Rome and again in 1953 on the slate of the Christian Socialist Movement. In 1965, she was commissioned by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei to lead a major research effort on early Lincean manuscripts and artifacts. Her archival expeditions took her to Naples, Florence, and Montpellier, where she conducted original studies on the works of Giovanni Heckius. This research, culminating in a monograph published in 1978, marked a pioneering contribution to the history of early scientific institutions in Europe. In her final years, Alessandrini joined the Italian Communist Party: a decision she described in a letter to a fellow comrade as spiritually liberating and morally consistent with the arc of her life. Yet she also asked that her affiliation remain private. Ada Alessandrini died in Rome on August 26, 1991. The biography has been constructed with the information collected in Salvini (2013) and FOLLB (2015).

Bai Lang 白朗 (1912 - 1994)

Bai Lang, originally named Liu Donglan, was born in autumn 1912 into a scholarly family in Shenyang. At 17, she married Luo Feng and moved to Harbin. While pregnant the following year, she joined anti-Japanese meetings led by Yang Jingyu and

turned her home into a CCP underground meeting site. In 1933, she began contributing to *Night Watch* 夜哨 (*Yeshao*), a supplement of the puppet regime's *Datong Newspaper* 大同报 (*Datong Bao*), alongside writers like Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong. Bai Lang's notable works from this period include *Only One Road* 祇是一条路 (*Zhishi Yitiao Lu*), *The Rebellious Son* 叛逆的儿子 (*Panni De Erzi*), and *The Trembling Halo* 惊栗的光圈 (*Jingli De Guangquan*). After *Night Watch* was shut down, she helped launch the weekly *Literature and Art* 文艺 (*Wenyi*) in *International Herald* 国际协报 (*Guoji Xiebao*), becoming its editor-in-chief. She contributed to various weekly editions such as *Children*, *Women*, and *Sports* too. In 1934, after Luo Feng was arrested by Japanese military police, Bai Lang, recovering from a miscarriage, managed to secure his release through persistent effort and sacrifice. Fleeing Harbin in 1935, they settled in Shanghai. Despite hardship, Bai Lang kept writing, publishing pieces like *Before and After the Occupation* 沦陷前后 (*Lunxian Qianhou*) and *A Woman's Punishment* 女人的惩罚 (*Nüren De Chengfa*). In 1939, she left behind her mother and child to join the Writers' Battlefield Visit Group. She traveled across war fronts to support soldiers, and later authored the diary-style *We Fourteen* 我们十四个 (*Women Shisi Ge*). In 1940, she published *The Old Couple* 老夫妻 (*Lao Fuqi*), a novella about a miser transformed by the brutality of war into a patriot. After the Wannan Incident in 1941, Bai Lang worked as an editor for the literary supplement of *Liberation Daily* 解放日报 (*Jiefang Ribao*) in Yan'an. Following Shenyang's liberation, she returned home and, in 1949, took part in the first National Congress of Literary and Art Circles. She became a full-time writer and in 1950 completed *For a Happier Tomorrow* 为了幸福的明天 (*Weile Xingfu De Mingtian*), which sold over 200,000 copies and was translated into Japanese and Korean. Her

abridged version *The True Teacher* 真正的老师 (*Zhenzheng De Laoshi*) was also widely read. In 1951, she represented Cai Chang and Deng Yingchao at the Executive Committee of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Sofia, Bulgaria. During the Korean War, she visited Korea six times to provide care and support for wounded soldiers. At Premier Zhou Enlai's request, she accompanied Mrs. Felton, a British Labour Party leader, to investigate U.S. military atrocities in Korea and drafted the Investigation Report by International Women on Atrocities Committed by U.S. and South Korean Forces in Korea 国际妇女对朝鲜美李军暴行调查报告书 (*Guoji Funü Dui Chaoxian Meili Jun Baoxing Diaocha Baogaoshu*). In July 1953, she attended the signing ceremony of the Korean Armistice Agreement at Panmunjom as a journalist. That same year, she participated in the World Congress of Women and was later invited to Helsinki to take part in Finland's "Women's Culture Day" celebrations. In 1956, she attended the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference. In 1956, while preparing a biographical novel, Bai Lang and Luo Feng were falsely branded as rightists. She was forced into labor reform in a coal mine, losing both her creative voice and dignity. During the Cultural Revolution, both suffered severe persecution. After the 1978 political rehabilitation at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, their names were cleared. Though her health improved, Bai Lang was unable to write due to neurological damage. She entered the Fourth National Congress in a wheelchair alongside Luo Feng, now elderly and frail. Bai Lang passed away peacefully on February 7, 1994, at the age of 82. She remains a shining example of a dedicated Party member and a pillar of modern Chinese literature. For more about Bai Lang see Yalu River (2014).

Bei, Adele (1904-1976)

Adele Bei was born in Cantiano (Pesaro) in 1904. She was a housewife when in 1925, she became part of the Communist Party. Until 1933, the year in which she was arrested because of her anti-fascist activism, she frequently travelled clandestinely from Italy to Paris to get in touch with the communist companions who lived there. When tried by the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State, Adele Bei openly challenged the judges and, being considered a dangerous individual, she was given a sentence of eighteen years in prison. After ten years, however, she was released after the fall of Mussolini. Very active in the Resistance, Adele Bei organised the participation of women against the nazifascists and, after the Liberation of Italy, she was the only woman appointed by the CGIL to become part of the National Council. A head of the UDI, on June 2, 1946 she was elected to the Constituent Assembly and claimed the importance of gender equality. In her life Adele Bei held many important positions in the political field, through which she had a chance to oversee the Job sector, the social welfare, the Trade and Finance sectors, and the Defence sector. She especially paid particular attention to the issues that influenced the women of her time with the aim of improving them. This attention also reflected in her language, choosing to use feminine terms instead of the generic ones. For more information on Adele Bei's life see ANPI n.d. and Borgato 2023.

Bergamaschi, Elsa (? - ?)

No biographical materials on Bergamaschi have been found. She appears in the context of WIDF meetings also in 1951, at the WIDF Executive Committee in Sofia (20–24 June 1951), where she gave a speech titled *Education and Peace (Educazione e*

Pace)(ACUDI, DnM, 8, 40). In 1968, the UDI named a research center after her, which carried out research and dissemination activities on women's emancipation. The center remained active until 1982, when the dissolution of the PCI led the UDI to undergo internal reorganization. No information has been found on the National Council for Childhood either; however, it was already active in 1953, the year in which the proceedings of a conference titled *The Child, the School, Society* were published. These include a speech by Bergamaschi herself, as well as contributions from other members of the UDI board and secretariat, including President Rossi, Ada Gobetti, Luciana Viviani, and the socialist Giuseppina Palumbo (De Sanctis, 1953).

Berti, Baldina (1920-2015)

Balda "Baldina" (also Balda Di Vittorio Berti) was born in Cerignola (Foggia) in 1920. Her father Giuseppe Di Vittorio was a national secretary of the CGIL and a Communist member of the Parliament. Due to her father's role, she travelled a lot and lived in different cities from a young age. When he was appointed head of the local Chamber of Labor in Bari, Balda and her family moved to the city when she was two, and, in 1926, she clandestinely went to France with her mother and brother to join her father who was already there, moving soon afterward to the Soviet Union following Di Vittorio's appointment as secretary of the Peasants' International. In 1936, she returned to France and, after having lost her mother, began her political activity within the French Communist Youth organizations, meeting, during this time, the Communist leader Giuseppe Berti, whom she later married. In 1938, she joined the PCI. With the beginning of WWII, in 1940, she was interned at Rieucros Camp (France) with other Italian anti-fascist women. Following the military collapse of France she managed to board a ship to the United States where she reunited, in New

York with her husband, who had been there since 1940. In New York, she attended courses at the Jefferson School, worked first in a factory and later as an office clerk at the École libre des hautes études, a university founded by exiled French intellectuals, and engaged in anti-fascist activism. At the end of the war, she returned to Italy. Besides being a leader in the UDI, in 1963 she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, and to the Senate in the following legislature. See FADN (2019b).

Bertolè, Ernestina (1920 - ?)

Born in Turin on April 1, 1920, Ernestina Bertolè was a partisan, trade unionist, and lifelong activist. Hired in 1940 as a metalworker at Olivetti in Ivrea, she emerged during the war as a key figure in the Resistance, fighting within the SAP Brigade of Ivrea, affiliated with the 75th Garibaldi Brigade. She also led the local Women's Defense Groups in the Canavese region, anchoring women's contributions to the broader anti-fascist struggle. After the Liberation, Bertolè became a labor leader. From 1945 to 1969 she served on Olivetti's internal commission, a rare and sustained position of authority for a working-class woman. She further extended her influence nationally, serving from 1960 to 1969 on the Central Committee of the Italian Federation of Metalworkers (*Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*, FIOM-CGIL), where she also contributed as an editor to the union's magazine *TASTO*. At the 1953 National Conference of Women Workers in Florence, Bertolè spoke on wage equality, citing the Olivetti case: while the wage gap between male and female employees stood at 10%, better than the national average, it still reflected persistent gender inequality. Her address helped frame labor parity not only as an economic issue but as a question of dignity. In 1955, Bertolè's was selected by the leadership of the UDI for her exemplary record at Olivetti; she was invited to join a delegation of Italian

women traveling to the People's Republic of China. This journey reflected the esteem in which she was held by postwar feminist organizations. In a surviving photograph from the trip, she appears in the front row, center, wearing a white blouse and a tartan-style long skirt. (ACUDI 20, 88-1) Her standing within the Olivetti community was deeply felt. When company doctor and Holocaust survivor Franco Nissim was removed from his position in the firm's social services, he directed his farewell letter not to the commission at large but to Bertolè and fellow worker Giuseppina Giachino, calling them representatives of all the women whose solidarity had touched him. Later in life, Bertolè served as a city councilor in Ivrea, first with the Italian Communist Party and later with the Socialist Party. In 2014, a kindergarten in Ivrea's La Sacca neighborhood was named in her honor, testament to her enduring impact on the life of the city and its workers (ASO 2024, Polo 900 n.d., and Palermo 2014).

Bocci, Ilia (1921-2014)

Ilia Bocci was born on October 5, 1921, in a small village near Sovicille, into a Catholic family with socialist leanings. She later moved with her family to Siena. After obtaining a teaching diploma, she worked at the state technical office during the Fascist regime. In a brief autobiographical account written in 1950, she recounts her initial approval of certain Fascist campaigns, followed by a progressive disillusionment after the Armistice of Cassibile. This shift led her, alongside many local youths, to engage in the partisan resistance and, following the end of the war, to join the PCI. Within the PCI, she held prominent positions, including roles in the press and propaganda committees, the provincial women's section, and the local chapter of the FGCI's girls division (UDI Siena Archive, A3).

Bonazzola, Valeria (? - ?)

Valeria Bonazzola was a Party functionary from Milan who played a pioneering role in the education of Communist cadres in postwar Italy. In the early 1950s, when the “Frattocchie” school, then the most prestigious training ground for future leaders of the PCI, was still a strictly male institution, Bonazzola was among the first four women admitted as part of a cautious experiment. Alongside three other trailblazing comrades, she lived and studied for three months under the austere and disciplined regime of the school, her conduct observed closely as a test of whether women could be integrated into the highest levels of Party formation. Her selection marked a significant step toward opening the path of political responsibility to women within the Italian Communist Party. For further details on Bonazzola, Valeria’s life see Mafai (1996).

Cabrini, Emilia (? - ?)

Emilia Siracusa Cabrini, her full name, was a member of the founding committee of the UDI meeting, which was held in Rome on September 12, 1944, and was composed of women from a variety of leftist parties. Marisa Rodano, another founder, in her book *The Memoirs of One Who Was There (Memorie di una che c'era)*, remembers Emilia Cabrini as "the representative of the Democrazia del Lavoro (later Democatic Labour Party)" (Rodano 2010, 24-5). She didn't have much political experience, in my opinion. Her party had most likely thrown her into the initiative. Following the liberation in 1943, a group of pre-fascist Italians created the progressive, secular Democrazia del Lavoro (later known as the Democratic Labor Party). The party joined the National Liberation Committee but did not have much impact

and was disbanded in 1948. For further study, see the volume by Lucio D'Angelo (1981).

Cai Chang 蔡畅 (1900-1990)

Cai Chang served for almost 30 years as the president of the ACWF. Described as charismatic in different accounts, Cai's activism is retraceable in her participation in the May 4th Movement in Hunan, where she grew up. She took part in the women's branch of the New Citizen Society 新民学会 (*Xinmin Xuehui*), founded by her brother Cai Hesun 蔡和森 (1895-1931) and Mao Zedong in 1918. In the early 1920s, she moved with her family to France and studied at Le Mondaine Preparatory School. In the French period, she emerged as a pioneer for the women's liberation cause and a leader within the Marxist movement, markedly influencing the New Citizen Society, and later of the CCP, to «actively recruit women to join the association» 积极吸收女子入会 (*Jijii Xishou Nuzhi Ruhui*) (Ji, Luo 2020, 47). In 1924, she was in Moscow studying at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, but in 1925, she was recalled to China to participate in the work mobilization for the Northern Expedition in Guangzhou. She successively served as the head of the Women's Committee of the Guangdong and Guangxi District Committee of the Communist Party of China, among other positions. She participated in various committees and education institutions pointing at women workers, students, and housewives. In early 1932, Cai was transferred to Jiangxi Province by the party organization to serve as the head of the Jiangxi Provincial Women's Department and concurrently the director of the Organization Department, where she organized women's cadre training classes. She continued to train cadres after moving to Yan'an, where she organized the production to

fuel the Red Army. In 1941, then secretary of the Women's Movement Committee of the CPC Central Committee, Cai went to various places in Yan'an and conducted a year-long investigation and research on women's work. She drafted the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on the Current Policy of Women's Work in Anti-Japanese Base Areas 中共中央关于各抗日根据地目前妇女工作方针的决 (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Ge Kangri Genjudi Muqian Funu Gongzuo Fangzhen De Jueding*) becoming central in the CCP organization of the party women's work on the long run. After the PRC Foundation, she was appointed president of the ACWDF. Her early work during a period of reconstruction focused on the production and thus on women's work; accordingly, she worked hand in hand with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, reporting concerns regarding women's work and addressing women's specific work and health conditions, promoting the women engagement in the labor force and at the same time welfare measures for the protection of children. She believed that the involvement of women in the workforce was tied to a change in their "feudal" social status, confining them to a stereotype of inferiority. Accordingly, she was also an active promoter of the Marriage Law. She founded the New China Women's Vocational School (which was renamed several times, now known as the China Women's University 中华女子学院, *Zhonghua Nüzu Xueyuan*), training a large number of female cadres nationwide. On Cai Chang's biography, see the article published on the 120th anniversary of her birth by Ji, Song (2022); also, Ji, Luo (2020) contextualizes Cai within the ACWF. Ji, Liu's (2020) article focuses on Cai's role in the international socialist network within the WIDF. Furthermore, wider-scope biographical materials are edited by the ACWF (Ping 1990; WOC 1983).

Cao Guanqun 曹冠群 (1916 - 2006)

Cao Guanqun was born in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. She joined the Communist Party of China in 1937. During the Anti-Japanese War, she served in key mobilization roles, including as a standing committee member of the Xi'an Women's National Salvation Association 西安妇女救国会常委 (*Xian Funü Jiuguo Hui Changwei*) and the Shaanxi Women's Labor Support Association 陕西妇女慰劳会常委 (*Shanxi Funü Weilao Hui Changwei*), where she also led Party work. She became an important figure in the Party's women's work in northwest China. Cao held posts in the Shaanxi Provincial Party Committee and in Yan'an, where she served in propaganda and organizational capacities. She was later appointed to the Women's Department of the Northwest Bureau, becoming a key figure in coordinating mass women's work across the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. After the founding of the PRC, Cao played a pivotal role in reorganizing women's organizations in the northwest. She was secretary of the Xi'an Municipal Women's Committee and head of the Provincial Women's Federation, later becoming deputy director and then director of the Northwest Regional Women's Federation. She also served on the National Women's Federation and its Party leadership body. In 1954, she was transferred to central government work in Beijing, where she held senior posts in the Women's Federation, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Ministry of Agriculture, including vice minister and Party group member. Cao was a member of the 12th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and served as a delegate to multiple National People's Congresses and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conferences. She retired in 1995 and passed away in Beijing in 2006 at the age of 90 (People's Daily 2007).

Cao Mengjun 曹孟君 (1903-1967)

Cao Mengjun was born in 1904. Originally from Changsha (Hunan province), it's here that she started her early education. However, due to her radical behaviour, she changed school four times before entering Xiejun High School, becoming the leader of the student's union of the school, and apparently concluding her studies there. It also seems that in 1925 she entered Peking University, however just one source mentions the completion of her studies there. According to some sources, she became a covert CCP member the same year. During the late 1920s or early 1930s, Cao Mengjun lived in Nanjing and married Zuo Gong 左恭, who seems to have been a protégé of Sun Fo 孫科, prominent KMT statesman. In Nanjing she worked in the Agriculture and Mining Department of the Republican government and she also organised a study group (*dushu hui*) with Wang Kunlun 王昆仑, Sun Xiaocun 孙晓村 and other friends, which, despite looking as an academic organization, was born to spread ideals against the Japanese occupation and about national salvation, under the influence of the CCP underground. However this wasn't the only organisation Cao Mengjun and her friends created. In 1931 and in 1933 they respectively created the non-aligned organisations Promotion of Women's Culture 妇女文化促进会 (*Funü Wenhua Cujinhui*) and Salvation Society 南京妇女救国会 (*Nanjing Funü Jiuguo-hui*). Besides Cao Mengjun also contributed in the creation of the National Salvation Association of Academic and Cultural Organizations 全国学术团体救国联合会 (*Quanguo Xueshu Tuanti Jiuguo Lianhehui*) and the National Salvation Association of All Circles 全国各界救国会 (*Quanguo Gejie Jiuguo Hui*).

Cao Mengjun also belonged to The Seven Virtuous Ones 七君子 (*Qijunzi*), one of the groups (the most famous one) arrested for openly protesting against the government to stop the civil war and fight against the Japanese during the mid -1930s. She was then realised in mid-1937, when the second alliance between the KMT and the CPP began, moving to Wuhan in 1938, where she married, after her divorce with her previous husband, Wang Kunlun, who she had known since the university period. Here she established the *National Wartime Child Welfare Association* 中国战时儿童保育会 (*Zhongguo Zhanshi Ertong Baoyu Hui*), through which she and her friends rescued and educated orphans or children whose parents were at war. But, when in August Wuhan was threatened by the Japanese, the children needed to be evacuated to safer areas and she was the one to accompany the last group. When Cao Mengjun arrived in Chongqing, she became director of Geleshan Nursery and Orphanage, which became well known for guiding children towards becoming independent and useful adults, giving them the tools to learn how to discuss between them, organising events and learning practical activities. In the last years of war, she took over the magazine *Women's Life* 妇女生活 (*Funu Shenghuo*) from Shen Zijiu, but, in 1941, it was closed down by the KMT, but she was supported by the CCP in starting a new magazine, *Modern Women* 现代妇女 (*Xiandai Funu*) in 1943, which had a good following thanks to leftist writers such as Mao Dun 茅盾, Jian Bozan 翦伯赞, Lao She 老舍, and Xia Yan 夏衍. After the war *Xiandai funü*'s headquarters moved to Shanghai, but the continued pressures from the KMT lead to its end in 1949. The same year she moved to Hong Kong thanks to her activity in the China Democratic League 中国民主同盟 (*Zhongguo Minzhu Tongmeng*) and in the China Democratic Revolutionary League 中国民主革命同盟 (*Zhongguo Minzhu Geming Tongmeng*), then she went back to Beijing. When the ACWDF was born (March-April), Cao

Menjjun became vice-secretary-general and member of the secretariat in charge of the day-to-day work of the federation, besides being elected to the CPPCC and the NPC. Cao Mengjun was especially part of the *Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries* 中国人民对外文化协会 (*Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Wenhua Xiehui*). She was often part of delegations related to the women's movement going abroad (Asia, Europe, Africa) and part of the reception group for foreign delegations. She also took part in the international peace movement and the Red Cross Society of China. She died in 1967 due to health conditions. For further details on Cao Mengjun's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 29–31).

Caporaso, Elena (1918-1999)

Elena Caporaso (also Elena Gatti Caporaso) was born in Roma in 1918. She graduated in law and became a lawyer. She was also active in the UDI, in which, from 1947 and until the Seventies, she held important positions serving on the executive and national committees, the national council, and the presidency. Together with Giuliana Nenni, she claimed through the UDI the necessity to approve civil rights laws. Elena Caporaso was also a member of the PSI. From 1949 to 1969 she held a national leadership role as a member of the executive board. Chen (2017) emphasizes that the proposal to collocate the International Children's Day 六一国际儿童节 (*Liuyi Guoji Ertong Jie*) on June 1 was put forward by the Italian delegation attending the WIDF Council in Moscow (17 - 22 November 1949), specifically by Caporaso transliterated as 海伦·加波罗佐 (*Hailun Jiabolozuo*), "Helen Gabrozo." This is

why Chinese sources often cite Elena Caporaso as Helen Gabrozo. In 1953, she was appointed as a Deputy and in 1968 she became part of the Senate. She held other important positions within the government until 1972. For more information about Elena Caporaso see FADN (2019c).

Carpi, Graziella (1884 - ?)

Graziella Carpi (also Graziella Carpi Sonnino, from her husband's name) was a significant figure in the Italian Jewish feminist movement of the early and mid-20th century. A long-standing member of the National Women's Union (Unione Femminile Nazionale), she was part of a constellation of Jewish and secular women activists in Milan who mobilized for the cultural, political, and social emancipation of women within and beyond the boundaries of their religious community. The Unione Femminile Nazionale, founded in 1899 by Ersilia Majno Bronzini, aimed to provide both a space for coordination among associations committed to female emancipation and a point of access for women not yet politicized, but whose potential could be directed to the benefit of society as a whole. The Union was distinguished by its openness to Jewish women, many of whom, like Carpi Sonnino, contributed to building a model of civic feminism that linked gender emancipation with democratic and national renewal. Listed among the members of the Union across the decades were leading Jewish feminists and intellectuals, including Nina Rignano Sullam, Ada Treves Segre, Margherita Grassini Sarfatti, and Carpi Sonnino herself. These women formed a crucial segment of the Milanese associational landscape and helped shape a feminist discourse attentive both to class-based inequalities and to the civic role of women in a modernizing Italian state. In the immediate postwar years, Carpi Sonnino

joined the executive committee of a vocational retraining school for women, established in response to the mass dismissal of female laborers from wartime industrial employment. Together with Ada Treves Segre and other Union members, she helped organize courses in sewing, embroidery, mending, and tailoring: practical skills designed to help women excluded from postwar labor markets due to structural discrimination and lack of formal training. This work exemplifies the continuity between Carpi Sonnino's interwar feminist commitments and her postwar efforts to address the gendered consequences of economic reconstruction. For more information on Graziella Carpi Sonnino's biography see UFN (2017).

Chen Xuezhao 陈学昭 (1906-1991)

Chen Xuezhao, originally called Chen Shuzhang and Chen Shuying, was born in 1906 in Ninghai (Zhejiang Province). During her writing career she used the pen names Ye Qu, Shi Wei, Xue Zhao and Hui. After having studied in the Girls' Normal School of Nantong County she enrolled in Shanghai Patriotic Girls' School 上海爱国女学 (*Shanghai Aiguo Nuxue*). In 1923 she became part of the Qiancao Literary Society 前草文学社 (*Qiancao Wenxue She*), publishing, in the Shanghai newspaper *Shibao* 申报 (*Shibao*), her first work *The New Women of My Ideal* 我所期望的新妇女 (*Wo Suo Qiwan De Xin Funü*) and starting also to teach in different schools. In 1927 Chen Xuezhao moved to Paris where, at the Clermont-Ferrand University, she started her Ph.D. in Western literature, completing her studies in 1935 and moving back to China, where she spent a period travelling. Between 1927 and 1931 she also became special journalist for the newspaper *Dagong bao* 大公报., and constantly contributed to the Shanghai *Shenghuo zhoukan*. In 1940 Chen Xuezhao went to the

communist capital Yan'an, becoming editor of the newspaper *Jiefang Ribao* 解放日报 and a teacher of literacy at the Central Party School 中央党校 (*Zhongyang Dangxiao*). After having joined the CCP in 1945 and with the creation of PRC in 1949 she held several positions in different and important roles. However, in 1957, also Chen Xuezhao was accused of being a rightist. After the Cultural Revolution, after ten years, she successfully resumed her writing career. For more information on Chen Xuezhao's biography see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 84–5).

Conti, Bruna (? - ?)

Bruna Conti was an Italian partisan, archivist, and scholar. During World War II, she played a leading role in the Italian Resistance, directing anti-fascist efforts in the Apuan Alps. Her early political engagement and personal courage were emblematic of the many women who risked their lives to help liberate Italy from Nazi occupation. In the postwar years, Conti continued to serve the historical memory of her country through the archive. She became a long-standing collaborator at the Gramsci Institute in Rome, where she curated and organized the personal archives of major Italian cultural figures including Sibilla Aleramo, Pier Paolo Pasolini e Luchino Visconti. Her meticulous work in archiving the Aleramo Collection (Fondo Aleramo) became a cornerstone of the institute's archival holdings. She edited *A Journey Called Love: Letters 1916–1918* (*Un viaggio chiamato amore. Lettere 1916–1918*, Feltrinelli, 2000; 2015), the intense correspondence between Sibilla Aleramo and Dino Campana, which inspired a film of the same name. She also authored *The Passage* (*Il passaggio*, Feltrinelli, 2000), a literary-biographical exploration of Aleramo's life,

and published the short story collection *O & O* (2002), offering a more personal dimension to her literary output.

Conti's personal life was also entangled with the political passions of her time. Between 1948 and 1949, she began a relationship with fellow former partisan and Communist leader Luigi Longo. Longo, whose wife Teresa Noce had endured imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps, had previously lived with another comrade, Caterina Picolato. His eventual union with Conti, which produced a son, marked the definitive rupture of his marriage to Noce. The relationship between Longo and Conti reflected not only private complexities but also the deeply interwoven nature of political and personal lives forged in wartime solidarity. Bruna Conti's legacy lies in both the battles she fought and the memories she preserved. This biography has been written using the information collected in Feltrinelli n.d. e Fistorazzi (2014).

Dal Pozzo, Giuliana (1922–2013)

Giuliana Dal Pozzo was an Italian journalist and editor, born in Siena, who directed the magazine *Noi Donne* for over twenty years and worked with *l'Unità* and *Paese Sera*. Between the late 1960s and 1970s, she succeeded Miriam Mafai at *Noi Donne*, helping to modernize the publication and open it to emerging feminist themes. In 1969, she published a controversial investigation on left-wing masculinity, and through the long-running reader column *Parliamone insieme*, she addressed topics such as divorce, abortion, and contraception. In 1988, she founded *Telefono Rosa*, a national volunteer-based organization supporting women who experienced domestic and workplace violence. On this subject she authored books related to gender violence, *Così fragile, così violento* (Editori Riuniti). She also published the two-volume encyclopedia *La donna nella storia d'Italia*, the novel *Ilia di notte* (with Elisabetta

Pandimiglio, Editrice Datanews), and the memoir *La Maestra. Una lezione lunga un secolo* (Memori). She received the Saint-Vincent Prize for Journalism and, in 2007, was named Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic. For more information on Giuliana dal Pozzo's biography Strazzeri (2021) and Ansa (2013).

Deng Yingchao 邓颖超 (1904 – 1992)

Deng Yingchao was born in Nanning (Guangxi Province) in 1904. She was not only Zhou Enlai's wife, but also one of the most active women in the communist movement since its beginning. After the death of her father, a minor official in the Qing government, her strong and independent mother supported her education by teaching her and letting her practice medicine. In 1913, and until 1920, Deng Yingchao, after having settled in Tianjin with her mother, attended the First Tianjin Women's Normal School. She started her revolutionary activities when she was fifteen, in 1919, at the time of May Fourth Movement, becoming leader of the anti imperialist student movement in her city and organizing with Zhou Enlai, Guo Longzhen, Ma Jun, Liu Qingyang, Zhang Ruoming, and Chen Xiaochen the Tianjin Students' Union 天津学生联合会 (*Tianjin Xuesheng Lianhehui*), the Tianjin Women's Patriotic Association 天津女界爱国协会 (*Tianjin Nüjie Aiguo Xiehui*), and the Awakening Society 觉悟社 (*Juewushe*). She also collaborated in organizing the anti-government demonstration in Nankai University on October 10, suffering injuries after police intervention. During her years as a student she demonstrated several times to be willing to fight for the independence of her country (she was part of the women's patriotic and liberation movements, sometimes going by the code name Yi-hao 一号, which means Number One), but also to break the gender schemes through organizations such as

the Tianjin branch of the Women's Rights Alliance 女权运动同盟会天津分会 (*Nüquan Yundong Tongmenghui Tianjin Fenhui*), which was re-formed in 1923 as the Guiding Star for Women Society 女星社 (*Nüxingshe*), establishing also the Guiding Star for Women Adult Education School 女星第一补习学校 (*Nüxing Diyi Buxi Xuexiao*). Deng Yingchao also created and contributed to various newspapers and magazines, such as, for example the *Women's Daily* 妇女日报 (*Funü Ribao*). In 1922, Deng Yingchao and three other members of the Tianjin branch of the Women's Rights Alliance sent a petition to the government in order to grant legal, educational and civil rights to women and to outlaw prostitution, concubinage and footbinding. After having occupied two teaching positions from 1920 to 1924, in 1925 she became a member of the CCP. As a member of the CCP she was really active in promoting parliamentary government through the Tianjin Women's National Congress 天津妇女国民大会 (*Tianjin Funü Guomin Dahui*), and she encouraged women to take part in the reform of society by creating the Tianjin Women's Association 天津妇女协会 (*Tianjin Funü Xiehui*) and organized a commemorative meeting for International Women's Day. She was also elected chair of the presidium of the Tianjin All-Parties Alliance 天津各界联合会 (*Tianjin Gejie Lianhehui*), a patriotic united front. The same year Deng Yingchao was sent by the CCP to Guangdong to avoid being arrested. Here she met again and married Zhou Enlai, with whom, over the years, she adopted many war orphans. After the collapse of the KMT and CCP Alliance (1927), Deng Yingchao moved to Shanghai where she worked undercover as secretary of the Women's Work Committee of the CCP Central Committee 中共中央妇女工作委员会 (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Funü Gongzuo Weiyuanhui*). Between 1931 and 1934, she was in the Jiangxi soviet where she found herself in ideological clashes with Trotskyites, starting to advocate for a stronger

focus on the trade union movement. Despite the conflict that her views arised with Mao Zedong, she was still chosen to cover high-level positions. Between 1938 and 1943 she was in Chongqing and Nanjing, the KMT wartime capital, where she served in different official roles, and she did the same in 1945, working in Chongqing and when the Sino-Japanese War ended. Deng Yingchao also replaced Cai Chang as secretary of the CCP Central Committee's Women's Committee and in 1949 with the creation of PRC she was elected vice-chair of the ACWDF. In 1978, at the ACWF's first conference held since 1957, she became honorary chair. As part of the ACWF, Deng Yingchao strives for gender equality and women's independence, as well as focusing on the importance of protecting the rights of children and young people. She died in Beijing in 1992. For further insight into Deng Yingchao, in addition to Lee and Stefanowska (2003, 131-5), one may consult numerous sources in Chinese, many of them produced by the ACWF (1990) and related publishers such as Chinese Women's Publishing House (TMC, TWF 1987). Notable biographical accounts include the two-volume work by Jin Feng (1993a, 1993b), as well as a more recent study by Wu (2012).

Desanti, Dominique (1914–2011)

Dominique Desanti was a French intellectual. Different sources claim she was born in Moscow or in Paris, respectively in 1914 or in 1919. Her first name is known to be Anner Persky. Her father was a Russian émigré with ties to Georges Clemenceau, so that her early years were marked by political awareness. Her father was killed by the SS during the Nazi occupation of France. Desanti became active in the Resistance during World War II, contributing to underground publications and working against the German occupation. During this time she met and married the philosopher Jean-

Toussaint Desanti, a fellow activist with whom she shared both a personal and political partnership that lasted until his death in 2002. Together, they produced the clandestine newsletter *Sous la Botte* and remained deeply involved in leftist intellectual circles throughout the postwar years.

A committed Communist for much of her life, Desanti also became a prolific writer. She published widely as a journalist, novelist, and biographer, and her literary output was often intertwined with her political convictions. Her sprawling 1997 autobiography, *Ce que le siècle m'a dit*, serves not only as a personal history but as a reflection on the turbulent twentieth century, opening with a tribute to her father and filled with portraits of the many thinkers and activists who shaped her era. Simone de Beauvoir held a special place in Desanti's memory. She recounted their early encounters with affection and detail, recalling how Beauvoir once arrived breathless at her apartment, carrying a manuscript by Sartre for her to type. These recollections were among many she shared during her appearance at a 2004 conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Society in California, where she delivered a talk entitled "The Daughter of the Mandarins." Desanti passed away in Paris in 2011. In a tribute, Culture Minister Frédéric Mitterrand praised her as "a woman who brought together beauty and intellect, passion and clarity," noting the enduring power of her work and the mythic status she and her husband held in French literary life. For more information on Dominique Desanti's biography see Rochester and Test (2011) e Trespeuch-Berthelot et al. (2017).

Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–86)

Ding Ling, whose original name was Jiang Wei 蒋伟 (courtesy name Bizhi 冰之 and pen name Bizhi 彬芷, Congxuan 从喧, etc.) one of modern China's most famous writers, was born in 1904 in Changde (Hunan Province) into an official-gentry family. Her father passed away when she was three, leaving two young children, his wife and his debts. To be able to provide for her family, Ding Ling's mother decided to become a teacher and began her studies in Hunan First Normal School for Women, a decision that will form the basis for Ding Ling's unfinished 1932 novel *Mother* 母亲 (*Muqin*). Ding Ling soon demonstrated to have her mother's same strong will and became a precocious activist. As a matter of fact, in 1919 the ideals brought by the May Fourth Movement reached Taoyuan in Hunan Province, influencing fifteen years old Ding Ling. In 1921, she was one of the seven female students who decided to begin their studies in Yueyang Boys' School, transforming it into a co-educational high school. In 1922 she went to Shanghai with her friend Wang Jianhong, after having broken off an arranged marriage, and, after having studied at a leftist girl's school, they went to Shanghai University. In 1924 Ding Ling moved to Beijing, where she met the young poet Hu Yepin 胡也频, soon starting to live with him. In 1927 she launched her literary career by writing *Mengke* 孟克 (*Mengke*), a story inspired by Ding Ling's attempts to become a movie actress, and sometime later, she wrote the book that made her become China's most famous woman writer, *Miss Sophie's Diary* 莎菲女士的日记 (*Shafei Nüshi De Riji*), which portrayed with a boldness unknown at the time a woman's sexual feeling. Ding Ling moved to Shanghai, which was becoming a literature centre. During her first three years as a writer, she focused on stories that had as many characters women living alone and trying to find their own

voice. Considering how deep was the description of her protagonists' feelings, people started to assume that those characters were a reflection of the author herself, assumptions that, despite the denial, brought some party ideologues to criticize under a moral and political point of view. During this period, Hu Yeping was more and more involved with the CCP, and in 1931 he was arrested by the KMT government and secretly executed, an event that reinforced Ding Ling's commitment to the revolutionary cause. She left her son with her mother in Hunan, returned to Shanghai and, following the CCP instructions, she became editor of the literary magazine of the League of Left-Wing Writers, *Big Dipper* 北斗 (*Beidou*), using this as a chance to focus on new subjects and towards a revolutionary genre. However, after just seven issues, *Beidou* was forced by the government to close down and Ding Ling to hide. However she was arrested 1933 and brought to Nanjin, where she was put under house arrest with her new partner Feng Da 冯达. The daughter of the couple, who was born in 1934, was sent in Hunan to her grandmother. Thanks to the help of the CCP, Ding Ling managed to escape and reached the party's headquarters in Bao'an (Shaanxi Province) in 1936. Elected director of the Literature and Art Association 文艺协会 (*Wenyi Xiehui*) she wrote different pieces for party papers and journals. When the Sino-Japanese War started in 1937, she organised the Northwest Front Service Corps 西北战地服务团 (*Xibei Zhandi Fuwutuan*), with the aim to incite an anti-japanese spirit by travelling with other artists as Chen Ming 陈明, who became spouse in 1942.

In 1945 Ding Ling and Chen Ming went to North China, where they took part, the following year, to different land reform movements, experience that influenced the novel *The Sun Shines on the Sanggan River* 太阳照在桑干河上 (*Taiyang Zhao Zai Sanggan He Shang*), her last published work of fiction for nearly thirty years. When

in 1949 the PRC was established, Ding Ling became part of its cultural bureaucracy. After having organised the Central Literary Institute 中央文学研究所 (*Zhongyang Wenxue Yanjiusuo*), she also, at one point, became the head of the Literary Bureau of the Party's Propaganda Department 党中央宣传部文学处 (*Dangzhongyang Xuanchuanbu Wenxue Chu*) and also had a chance to travel abroad for the first time (to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union) as part of official delegations, focusing her writing on public occasions and events related to the party. Following the increasing frequency and worsening of the political campaigns against writers, in 1952 she resigned as an editor for the *Literary Gazette* 文艺报 (*Wenyi Bao*), but in 1954, she was accused with her friend Cheng Xia 程侠 (who was still an editor for the *Gazette*) of anti-party activities, an accusation that, despite the case was reviewed, led her to be considered a rightist and be expelled from the party in 1957, following the anti-rightist campaign which hit China. She was branded as a rightist until 1978, the year in which her label will be removed, after 12 years in exile with Chen Ming 陈明 in Heilongjiang, limited freedom and five years in a suffered solitary confinement, which started in 1970. In 1978 she asked to return to Beijing and started to work again on her writing and occupy important roles in order to slowly rehabilitate her reputation. For more information on Ding Ling's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 138–43), Wang (2004, chapter 2) Barlow (2004, chapter 4-5).

Dong Bian 董边 (1916 - 1998)

Dong Bian was the successor to Shen Zijiu as the head of *Women of New China*. Born 1916, Dong Bian spent her childhood being considered, as she was the third daughter of a small landlord in Shanxi province, the cause of misfortune of her family,

which failed in having a son. Despite her hardships, though, Dong Bian, who has started to work in the fields and do chores since the age of five, decided to go on a hunger strike when, after her fourth year of elementary school, her father decided not to let her continue her studies. Her strike had the effect she wished and she managed to finish elementary and middle school in Xin county (as the only girl in her classroom), before successfully passing the exams to enter the elite Shanxi province's school Taiyuan Girls High School, willing to become one day an educated and independent woman, like Shen Zijiu, who she first got to know by reading the magazine *Women's Life* 妇女生活 (*Funü Shenghuo*). However, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, in July 1937, impacted her path by bringing students from school into the resistance. In 1938, influenced by the feminist and nationalist ideals promoted in *Women's Life*, she became part of the Eighth Route Army. Dong Bian continued her studies in the Women's University and Yan'an University and, in 1941, she became a researcher (the only woman in her group) for the Party Central Political Research Office 中共中央政策研究室 (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Zhengce Yanjiushi*), where she met the writer Tian Jiaying 田家英 (1922-66), with whom she strongly agreed under a political and intellectual point of view, developing romantic feelings for him, which led to marriage in 1942, after having agreed on determined conditions imposed by Dong Bian in order to have a balanced couple life and freedom in pursuing her ambitions. As a matter of fact in 1944 she decided to leave her new-born baby in the care of another woman to progress in her career and, after several experiences, she met her husband again in 1948 in Xibaipo, the new location of the CCP Central Committee. Taking in consideration the activism she was involved with, Dong Bian wished to be assigned basic jobs. When Deng Yinchao sent her an invitation, the opportunity arrived for her. Dong Bian became one of the editors of *Women of New*

China and was tutored by her idol Shen Ziju, taking up her place as the head of the magazine in 1956, up until 1966. After becoming editor-in-chief, Dong Bian stopped signing with her own name the numerous articles she wrote, preferring to remain an anonymous hero, as it was the norm of the time. For her biography see Wang Zheng's article (2010, 831-833).

Fazio, Rosetta (1913-2004)

Rosetta Longo (also Rosetta Fazio Longo) was born in Campobasso (Molise region) in a wealthy family. By the end of the Twenties, she moved with her family to Rome, where she started University, studying Literature and Law. When Italy became officially involved in the war, Rosetta Fazio Longo became a teacher and adhered to the “Association of Middle Teachers” (Associazione degli insegnanti medi), an anti-nazi underground organisation born to support the population. After the Liberation, she became part of the UDI, becoming one of its delegates at the International Women's Congress in Paris in 1945 and starting to contribute to the UDI's periodical *Noi Donne*. In 1947, and until 1959, during the 2nd National Congress of the UDI she was appointed as Secretary-General. In 1948, Rosetta Fazio Longo was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. For more information about Rosetta Fazio see FADN (2019g).

Fibbi, Giulietta Lina (1920-2018)

Giulietta Lina Fibbi was born in Fiesole (Firenze) in 1920. In 1923, her family had to leave Fiesole and move to France to escape from the fascist persecutions. She was just fifteen when she decided to join the French Communist Youth Federation, becoming also a director, at the age of seventeen, of the French Girls' Union. With the

beginning of WWII, due to her anti-fascist activism, Lina was arrested by the French police and deported to the concentration camp Rieucros. Here, advised by the PCI, she asked the French authority to be repatriated, but, despite her request being accepted, she was arrested once again at Ventimiglia's border by the Italian police. She had to spend six months in prison in Firenze before being released with two years of probation due to lack of evidence. With the fall of fascism, Lina Fibbi was appointed to work in the underground service of the PCI's Interior Directorate. She became a member of the General Command of the Garibaldi Brigades, which had just been created in Milano, and began organizing the Women's Defense Groups. Lina Fibbi's main role was that of managing communications and connections and carrying out sensitive missions on behalf of the Garibaldi Command. After the Liberation she focused on different tasks related to the political and labour union fields. (ANPI n.d.d).

Floeanini, Gisella (1906-1993)

Gisella Floreanini was born in Milano in 1906. After losing her mother at the age of four, she grew up with her father, a progressive and laic man. In 1929 she obtained her diploma as a pianist at the Conservatory and started to give piano lessons to help her father during the economic crisis. She immediately demonstrated to be against fascism from its beginning, becoming active in the underground opposition. In 1934 she joined the movement for Justice and Freedom and in 1936 Gisella Floreanini became part of the PSI. She contributed to the fight against fascism by spreading underground press and helping the families of the political persecution victims. Because of her actions she had to move to Switzerland. During her time in the country she matured under a political perspective, starting to believe that it was necessary not

only to fight against the regime, but also against the society's tendency to relegate women to the private sphere. Her new point of view led her to join, attracted by its activism, the Communist Party between 1941 and 1942. She was arrested in 1944, being released three months later. Following her release from prison, she moved back to Italy, where she reached the newborn partisan Ossola Republic, where she organised the Women's Defense Groups. In the Ossola Republic she was appointed as the second representative of the PCI in the Government Council. She was assigned the ministry of the Assistance and Relations with Mass Organizations, which was one of the most challenging, as it was related to supporting food and health needs for the population of a mountain area in such a delicate position. After the fall of the Ossola Republic, Gisella was the only member of the Government Council who did not take refuge in Switzerland. Through an exhausting and dangerous journey, she reached the brigades of Cino Moscatelli in the Valsesia region and became part of the Resistance. She was the only woman to be appointed as president of a provincial Committee of National Liberation, that of Novara. In this role she liberated the last political prisoners in Novara and welcomed the Allied forces upon their arrival. After the Liberation Gisella Floreanini was appointed to the National Consultative Council. She also became deputy during the first two legislations, secretary of the *Unione nazionale soccorso infanzia* (National Union for Child Welfare Assistance) and national executive of the UDI. For more information on Gisella Floreanini's life see ANPI n.d.c and Braga 2023).

Gallo, Elisabetta (1921-2014)

Elisabetta Gallo was born in 1921 in Asti (Piemonte region). After finishing her studies and obtaining her diploma, she started her career in politics in 1948 when, as a member of the Communist Party, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. The same year, for 5 months, she was part of the VIII Transportation Board, while by the end of the year and until 1953 she was a member of the Agriculture and Forest Board. Elisabetta Gallo was also the UDI's manager, a role that allowed her to travel with the first delegation sent to Korea in 1951, becoming the spokesperson of the A Box of Milk ("Una scatola di latte") campaign and aiming at supporting Korea from Italy through various activities which were held in the whole country. Elisabetta Gallo also gave her contribution to the Gramsci Institute Foundation's Archive in Rome. For more information about Elisabetta Gallo see FADN (2019d).

Gong Pusheng 龚澎生 (1913–2000)

Gong Pusheng was a prominent Chinese diplomat and an early member of the Chinese Communist Party active in foreign affairs. Born in Shanghai to a family originally from Hefei, Anhui Province, Gong was educated at St. Mary's Episcopal Girls' School and later at Yanjing University, where she studied English and became involved in anti-Japanese activism and Marxist study circles. In 1936, after receiving her B.A., she worked among students and rural populations in Shanghai. She joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1938. In 1939, Gong represented China at the World Congress of Christian Youth in Amsterdam and the League of World Students in Paris. Upon her return, she was sent to the United States to build international support for the Communist cause. She studied at Columbia University, earning an M.A. in

Religion in 1942. During the early 1940s, she traveled extensively across the United States, delivering speeches to foster sympathy for China's struggle against Japanese invasion, and built relationships with public figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Pearl Buck. After World War II, Gong served with the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in New York. In 1949, she returned to China, participating in preparations for the First CPPCC. She married fellow diplomat Zhang Hanfu 章汉夫 and became deputy director, then director, of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this role, she represented the People's Republic of China at the United Nations and the Red Cross, achieving an early diplomatic victory in 1957 at the Nineteenth International Conference of the Red Cross in New Delhi. Gong suffered political persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Her sister Gong Peng 龚澎 died in 1970, her mother in 1971, and her husband was persecuted to death in 1972. After the fall of the Gang of Four, Gong returned to diplomatic service. In 1979, she was appointed ambassador to Ireland, where she helped build friendly Sino-Irish relations. She later served in non-governmental roles, including as vice-president of China's U.N. Association and as a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross's International Politics Group. Throughout her life, Gong Pusheng was committed to international diplomacy and the promotion of China's global legitimacy. She and her sister were among the most influential women in the early decades of the People's Republic of China's foreign service. For more information about Gong Pusheng see Lee, Stefanowska (2003).

Guo Jian 郭建 (1913-2000)

Guo Jian was born on the 24th of January in Zhuzhou, Hunan. Already since high school, she demonstrated an interest in anti-Japanese activities and in 1934, when she enrolled at Qinghua University in Beijing she became part of the student movement. Guo Jian was a prominent figure in the Chinese women's movement and a dedicated activist throughout her life. After the September 18 Incident, she became involved in the Anti-Japanese salvation movement, advocating for the boycott of Japanese goods. In 1934, she enrolled at Tsinghua University, where she emerged as a key participant in the December 9th student movement, playing a significant role in establishing the Vanguard of the Chinese Nation's Liberation 中华民族解放先锋队 (*Zhonghua Minzu Jiefang Xianfengdui*). During the early stages of the Anti-Japanese War, she became acquainted with Deng Yingchao and Guo Jian, forging important connections that would influence her work. By 1936, she was elected Vice President of the Beijing Women's National Salvation Federation 北京妇女界救国会 (*Beijing Funüjie Jiuguohui*), representing Tsinghua University in the Beijing-Tianjin Students' Union 京津学生联合会 (*Jing-Jin Xuesheng Lianhehui*) and actively participating in the Youth and Women's National United Anti-Japanese Salvation Federation 青年妇女全国统一抗日救国会 (*Qingnian Funü Quanguo Tongyi Kangri Jiuguo Hui*). In 1937, she joined the Chinese Communist Party, and in 1938, she contributed to the wartime women's cadre training group under the restructured Women's Guidance Committee of the New Life Movement 新生活运动妇女指导委员会 (*Xin Shenghuo Yundong Funu Zhidao Weiyuanhui*), led by Soong Mei-ling. Working directly under Deng Yingchao, she maintained close contact with the Women's Committee member of the Yangtze Bureau, engaging in anti-Japanese united

front efforts. She assisted leaders like Shi Liang, Liu Qingyang, and Shen Zhiqiu in organizing salvation activities for women in National Government-controlled regions. Following the Wan Nan Incident in 1941, she relocated to Hong Kong from Chongqing and later worked in the anti-Japanese base in the Suzhou region. During her career, she held various important roles, including Director Secretary of the Grain Tax Office for the Suzhou Regional Government, Deputy Secretary of the Economic Committee for Jiangsu and Anhui, and Director of the Economic Office, Goods Management Bureau, and Grain Bureau. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Guo Jian continued her impactful work, serving as Director of the Industrial and Commercial Office of the Northern Jiangsu Regional Government. Guo Jian was also elected secretary of the ACWF secretariat in 1961. She held several significant positions, including Deputy Director of the Shanghai Financial and Economic Committee, Director of the Municipal Commercial Bureau, Director of the Municipal Planning Committee, and Secretary of the Women's Committee of the Shanghai Municipal Committee. Additionally, she was a member of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party and served as Director of the Shanghai Women's Federation. A renowned international women's activist, she traveled to over 30 countries and regions across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe, participating in numerous international conferences. During the Cultural Revolution, she faced false accusations, yet she remained resilient. In 1978, she was appointed Deputy Minister of Transport of the People's Republic of China and served as Deputy Secretary of the Party Group, and she held the position of vice-minister of Communications between 1978 and 1982. She was also a member of the Standing Committee of the Third National People's Congress and was elected to the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection during the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Guo

Jian passed away on March 23, 2000. For further information on Guo Jian's biography see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 188–9) and (ACWF 2000a; Research Department 2000, 297).

Guo Lanying 郭兰英 (1930-)

Guo Lanying was born in December 1930 in a poor family in Pingyao, Shanxi Province. She was the sixth of several children in a household struggling with poverty. At a young age, Guo was sent to a traditional opera troupe as a performer under harsh conditions resembling indentured servitude. In the opera troupe, Guo endured long-term abuse and extreme discipline. Despite the cruelty, she persevered, and her talent soon emerged. She became a key performer, but it wasn't until 1946, after years of hardship and as the troupe began to decline, that she finally regained her freedom. She later recalled the day she left the troupe as one of the most emotional of her life. Afterward, she joined the cultural troupe of North China United University and began her journey as a singer and actress. Her early stage experience, combined with her tireless dedication, helped her quickly stand out. She performed in popular plays such as *Madam Wang Goes to Market* 王大娘赶集 (*Wang Dama Ganji*), *The Literate Couple* 夫妻识字 (*Fuqi Shizi*), and *Brother and Sister Open Up Wasteland* 兄妹开荒 (*Xiongmei Kaihuang*), earning widespread acclaim. In 1949, Guo Lanying represented the Chinese Youth Delegation at the World Festival of Youth and Students in Hungary. Her performance of *The Women's Freedom Song* 妇女自由歌 (*Funü Ziyou Ge*) gained international attention. Upon returning home, she starred as Xi'er in the revolutionary opera *The White-Haired Girl* 白毛女 (*Baimao Nü*), a role that brought her national fame and cemented her legacy in Chinese performing arts. During the

height of her career, Guo married renowned sheng musician Fang Pudong 方浦东. Initially, their marriage was affectionate and promising. However, during a rural performance while pregnant, Guo suffered a miscarriage. In the wake of the trauma and resulting infertility, their marriage collapsed. In the years that followed, Guo met painter Wan Zhaoyuan 万兆元, a disciple of Li Kuchan 李苦禅. The two married in 1969. This union brought her long-sought stability and deep companionship. Wan supported her work and even encouraged her shift from stage performance to education. With his help, she founded the Guo Lanying Art School 郭兰英艺术学校 (*Guo Lanying Yishu Xuexiao*), aimed at helping underprivileged youth pursue music. The school has since become one of China's most respected art education institutions. To keep the school running, Wan managed its operations, painted to raise funds, and never compromised on artistic quality. Years of overwork led to serious health issues, and in 1998, he passed away. His death was a heavy blow to Guo, but she channelled her grief into her students and continued her educational mission. In 2016, at age 86, Guo Lanying returned to the national stage at the invitation of CCTV, performing *My Motherland* 我的祖国 (*Wo de Zuguo*). In the following years, she continued to appear in performances, including at the Spring Festival Gala. Though she never had children of her own, Guo Lanying nurtured thousands through education and art. Today, at over 90 years old, she remains a revered figure in Chinese cultural history. For more information about Guo Lanying see Ban (2013), Liu (1986).

Guo Xiuyi 郭秀仪 (1911 - 2006)

Guo Xiuyi was born in May 1911 in Shanghai to a prestigious family originally from Zhongshan, Guangdong, she received a refined education and developed artistic interests early in life. In 1926, while studying at Shanghai Women's Arts School, she famously cross-dressed to play the male lead in the acclaimed stage drama *The Lady's Fan* 少奶奶的扇子 (*Shao Nainai De Shanzi*), and her performance was featured on the cover of the prestigious pictorial *The Young Companion* 良友画报 (*Liang You Huabao*). In 1929, she began work at the Su-Zhe-Wan Regional Tax Bureau. A graceful and self-possessed young woman, she was admired by many but eventually fell in love with General Huang Qixiang 黄琪翔, a prominent Nationalist military leader and co-founder of the China National Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party 中国农工民主党 (*Zhongguo Nonggong Minzhu Dang*). After the failed Fujian Rebellion in 1933, Huang went into exile in Germany and proposed to Guo from Berlin. She accepted and traveled alone to Europe in 1934, where they were married in Germany. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Guo Xiuyi took on a leading role in humanitarian resistance efforts. In 1938, alongside Soong Mei-ling 宋美龄, Deng Yingchao 邓颖超, and others, she co-founded both the Women's National Salvation Committee 妇女抗日救国委员会 (*Funü Kangri Jiuguo Weiyuanhui*) and the Chinese Wartime Childcare Association 中国战时儿童保育会 (*Zhongguo Zhanshi Ertong Baoyu Hui*). These organizations collectively rescued and sheltered more than 30,000 war-orphaned children. Guo served as a standing director of the association, as well as deputy director of its Economic Committee and Recruitment Department 经济委员会与人事部 (*Jingji Weiyuanhui yu Renshi*

Bu). She led large-scale fundraising initiatives in Wuhan, including personally managing the Hankou Donation Station, where she went into the streets to raise money. She contributed over 20,000 yuan of her own funds and financed the long-term care of 442 children. At the time, her fundraising total was second only to that of Soong Mei-ling. During her husband's tenure as commander of the Eleventh Group Army, she led the Women's Corps 妇女工作队 (*Funu Gongzuodui*), braving enemy fire to rescue the wounded and support frontline troops. After the war, she received the Victory Medal and in 1995 was honored as one of only three women among 100 national Anti-Japanese War Veterans. After 1949, Guo became active in national reconstruction and peace efforts. She donated family homes in Nanjing and Guilin to the state, supported the Korean War effort, and served as a member and standing committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference 中国人民政治协商会议 (*Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi*). She also served as honorary vice-chair and acting chair of the advisory committee of the China National Democratic Construction Association 中国民主建国会 (*Zhongguo Minzhu Jianguo Hui*). Guo Xiuyi's contributions extended deeply into the world of Chinese fine arts. In the early 1950s, under the introduction of Hu Jieqing 胡絮青, wife of Lao She 老舍, she formally apprenticed under the master painter Qi Baishi 齐白石, becoming one of his most accomplished and cherished female disciples. Gifted and meticulous, she quickly mastered Qi's signature styles in figure painting, landscape, flora and fauna, aquatic life and animals. Qi Baishi often inscribed and praised her works personally, a testament to their close, almost father-daughter-like relationship. Guo carefully preserved a large number of original Qi Baishi works gifted to her or painted specifically for her and her husband. These works include: *Rain Tilling* 雨耕图 (*Yugeng Tu*, 1952), *Lychee and Grasshopper* 荔枝蚱蜢 (*Lizhi Zhazheng*, 1951), *Peony and Wind*

Bamboo 牡丹·风竹 (*Mudanfeng Zhu*, 1953), *Plum Blossoms* 梅花 (*Meihua*, 1954), *Mouse and Oil Lamp* 老鼠油灯 (*Laoshu Youdeng*), *Peach Blossoms in Running Script* 桃花·行书 (*Taohua Xingshu*), *Red Plum Blossoms* 红梅花开 (*Hongmei Huakai*), and *Three Friends of Winter* 牡丹三友 (*Mudansan You*), co-painted by Qi Baishi and Ma Wanli (马万里). Guo Xiuyi passed away on November 16, 2006, at the age of 95. She is remembered not only as a wartime heroine and humanitarian but also as a devoted artist, student of Qi Baishi, and custodian of cultural heritage. For more information about Guo Xiuyi see AJWMN (2017a), QBPCA (2022), SQBPCA (2022).

He Xiangning 何香凝 (1878–1972)

He Xiangnin (He Ruijian), was born in a wealthy family which, originally from Nanhai County, Guangdong Province, lived in Hong Kong, where her father built his business in tea and real estate. Since a young age, He Xiangnin demonstrated to be interested in education (asking permission to her father to study with her brothers) and refused to bind her feet, a decision that will lead to an arranged wedding with the young and progressive, born in California and educated at Queen's college in Hong Kong, Liao Zhongkai 廖仲恺 (1877–1925), who wished to for a life without bound feet. Despite the wedding was arranged, He Xiangning found in Liao Zhongkai a supportive partner who shared with her the same love and interest of the salvation of China. Thanks also to He Xiangning's support, Liao Zhonkai went to study in Japan in 1902, followed one year later by her. There she enrolled in the Tokyo Women's Normal School and had a chance to meet different young Chinese who believed in

the revolutionary movement, creating a network with them after meeting Sun Yat-sen that same year and becoming part of Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui 同盟会, being not only one of the earliest members, but also one of the first women members. In that period, she returned to Hong Kong to give birth to her daughter Liao Mengxing 廖梦醒, leaving her with her family. When she completed her studies at the Tokyo Women's Normal School, in 1906, she enrolled in a Tokyo art school where she learned painting. Besides studying, she dedicated these years to do propaganda through the creation of revolutionary flags and emblems, giving birth to her son Liao Chengzhi 廖承志 (1908–83). She graduated and moved back to Hong Kong in 1911, the same year in which the Revolution began. After three years, following Yuan Shikai's betrayal, He Xiangning and Liao Zhongkai were exiled to Japan with Sun Yat-sen, where they stayed until 1916, when they returned to China, in Shanghai. He Xiangning kept giving her support to the war effort by securing naval support for Sun Yat-sen and by creating with his wife Song Qingling the Women Devoted to the Needs of Soldiers Leaving for War 女界出征军人慰劳会 (*Nüjie Chuzheng Junren Weilaohui*) in order to raise funds (by also selling her paintings) and gather clothes and medicines. In 1922 He Xiangning also offered great help in rescuing her husband and Sun Yat-sen who disappeared in a military crisis and in 1924 she participated in KMT's first meeting in which she underlined the importance of moving towards women equality and becoming later the minister for Women, organizing, as well, the first International Women's Day rally. He Xiangning kept working for the revolutionary cause and, despite being in constant danger, especially following the assassination of Liao Zhongkai, she also kept advocating Sun Yat-sen policies and declaring the importance for the KMT to create a united front with the CCP, and strongly opposing to Chiang Kai-shek. In 1931, following the decision of Wang Jingwei to join

Chiang Kai-shek, He Xiangning traveled to Europe (England, France and Germany), coming back to Shanghai the same year, when the Japanese invaded Manchuria. She soon made her position clear by criticising the KMT's stance, by aiding refugees and helping militaries and political prisoners. She also cooperates to obtain the Seven Virtuous Ones' freedom. When war against Japan was declared in 1937, He Xiangning continued to actively support her country by opening her home as a centre for national resistance efforts and by rallying women and inspiring them to carry on duties for their country and demonstrating their abilities and skills. Her sense of patriotism and confidence in a bright future for China is clear from the poetries she wrote in this period. After the war, He Xiangning kept opposing Chang Kaishek and wrote articles advocating peace. In 1948, she and other leftist members of the KMT formed the Revolutionary Committee of the KMT 国民党革命委员会 (*Guomindang Geming Weiyuanhui*) to oppose Chiang's leadership and in 1949 she was invited by the CCP to assist in Beijing to the creation of the new China. In the 1950s, He Xiangning chaired the Committee on Overseas Chinese Affairs 华侨事务委员会 (*Huaqiao Shiwu Weiyuanhui*), earning the title Mother of Overseas Chinese 华侨之母 (*Huaqiao zhi mu*) for her efforts to support and integrate overseas Chinese into national development. She retired in 1959, after having served as honorary chair of the ACWF, as deputy chair of CPPCC, deputy head of NPC, chair of the KMT Revolutionary Committee and chair of the Association of Artists. For further information on He Xiangning 's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 200–4).

Hu Naiqiu 胡耐秋 (1907 - 2003)

Hu Naiqiu was born on June 13, 1907, in Danyang, Jiangsu Province. A committed educator, editor, and women's rights activist, she became a key figure in the Chinese democratic and women's liberation movements across both the Republican and socialist eras. After graduating from Jiangsu Provincial College of Education in 1930, Hu spent much of the 1930s working in primary and community education across cities such as Yangzhou, Nanjing, Nanning, Beiping, and Nanchang. In 1936, she moved to Shanghai to join the anti-Japanese national salvation movement. There, she joined the Shanghai Women's National Salvation Association 上海妇女界救国会 (*Shanghai funüjie jiuguohui*). In 1940, she formally joined the PCC. Her editorial career was closely tied to the influential Life Bookstore 生活书店 (*Shenghuo Shudian*), founded by the renowned journalist Zou Taofen 邹韬奋. Starting in 1937, Hu held numerous editorial and administrative roles, including secretary of the editorial department, assistant editor of *Anti-War* 抗战 (*Kangzhan*) and *National Resistance* 全民抗战 (*Quanmin Kangzhan*), director of proofreading and personnel, and president of the affiliated publishing house for *Women's Life* 妇女生活 (*Funü Shenghuo*). During the war years, she helped publish materials, even as the Japanese occupied Shanghai and later Hong Kong. In 1941, Hu followed colleagues to Hong Kong, where she helped re-launch *Life Weekly* 生活周刊 (*Shenghuo Zhoukan*), co-founded Guanghua Bookstore 光华书店 (*Guanghua Shudian*), and managed operations at the Hong Kong branch of the National Vocational Education Society's bookstore. With the outbreak of the Pacific War and Japan's invasion of Hong Kong that December, Hu was one of over 800 Chinese intellectuals and democrats evacu-

ated in a major rescue mission coordinated by Liao Chengzhi 廖承志 under the direction of Zhou Enlai, an operation described by Mao Dun 茅盾 as “perhaps the greatest rescue in wartime history.” Amid this turmoil, Hu grew close to fellow publisher Xu Boxin 徐伯昕, and the two formed a lifelong partnership. Xu, a co-founder of Life Bookstore and later a prominent figure in China’s publishing administration, shared her commitment to progressive publishing. Together, they helped establish the Chi Heng Correspondence School 智恒函授学校 (*Zhi Heng Han Shou Xue Xiao*) in Hong Kong in 1947, a short-lived but significant institution aimed at educating youth under KMT rule. Hu served as dean of studies, recruiting scholars such as Hu Sheng and Qiao Guanhua to teach philosophy, economics, and the social sciences. After returning to mainland China in 1949, Hu attended the First National Women’s Congress and began decades of work at the ACWDF. She served in multiple departments, including as deputy head of the Propaganda and Education Division, deputy editor-in-chief of *Women of China/ Women of New China*, head of the International Propaganda Department, and, in 1957, was appointed Secretary of the Federation’s Secretariat. She was elected a deputy to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th National People’s Congresses. Throughout her career, Hu remained devoted to the intersection of women’s empowerment and cultural progress. In 1945, under the pen name Yang Ming 杨明, she wrote *Taofen’s Life in Exile* 韬奋的流亡生活 (*Taofen de Liuwang Shenghuo*), a personal account of Zou Taofen journey through war and resistance. The book was later republished in 1979 by Sanlian Press and became a valuable record of wartime intellectual history. Hu Naiqiu passed away on April 7, 2003, in Beijing at the age of 96. For more information about her see Xinhua Net (2003), GOSCNPC (1955) and Wang (2019).

Iotti, Nilde (1920-1999)

Leonilde “Nilde” Iotti was born in Reggio Emilia in 1920. She graduated in Literature in 1945 from the Università Cattolica di Milano, where she enrolled after having won a scholarship. That same year she started to work as a teacher and she joined the communist side during the Resistance, becoming a partisan and contributing to transport flyers, food, medicines and woolly socks with her bicycle. Through the Women’s Defence Groups she became very active in the process which led to the Liberation.

In 1945, the UDI asked her to investigate the conditions of the families in need, a request that will make her political career begin. In 1946, Nilde Iotti became a member of the Italian Parliament. During her years as part of the Constituent Assembly, she fell in love and built a relationship with Palmiro Togliatti, Rita Montagna’s husband.

On July 20, along with Angela Gotelli, Maria Federici, Teresa Noce, and Lina Merlin, she was chosen to draft the Constitution. Her report on the family remains relevant even today and contributed to the writing of Articles 29, 30, and 31 of the Italian Constitution.

The relationship with Palmiro Togliatti caused Nilde Iotti many difficulties due to the rigid moral ideals of the PCI, but, despite her colleagues’ mistrust, she continued to do her best in the political field. At the end of this difficult period in her political life, Nilde Iotti was re-elected as a deputy, taking on important roles in the Central Committee, in the national secretariat of the UDI, and in the Reggio provincial committee (Raganelli 2023).

Kang Keqing 康克清 (1912-1992)

Kang Keqing was born as Kang Guixiu in 1912 in Wan'an County, Jiangxi Province. Daughter of a fisherman, she once stated that her poor origins were the reason why she became a revolutionary. After she first entered into contact with roving communists in 1926, she became, at the age of fourteen, a communist youth inspector, soon joining the the Communist Youth League and becoming a captain of Young Pioneers of China 中国少年先锋队 (*Zhongguo Shaonian Xianfeng Dui*). Since her youth Kang Guixiu demonstrated to have a military interest, joining the Fourth Red Army commanded by Zhu De 朱德(1886–1976), who will later become her spouse. Kang Guixing changed her name to Kang Keqing in 1930 and became a member of the CCP in 1931. Kang Keqing was not involved in fights, but focused on propaganda, organization activities related to the military field, and in the training of local peasant women at the Red Military Academy (1932). In 1934 she also led a small group of men into a battle against the KMT's forces, succeeding. The same year, during the Long March of the First Front Red Army, Kang Keqing carried out other duties such as recruiting soldiers, confiscating goods to the landlords and gathering wounded people at the end of the day's march. In 1935, she became part of the section of the Red Army under the command of Zhu De and Zhang Guotao 张国焘. Zhang Guotao challenged Mao Zedong's control of the CCP moving his forces on different routes from those under Mao's Command and making Kang Keqing and Zhu De his virtual prisoners. After being assigned to the Women's Bureau, Kang Keqing reached Bao'an in 1936, she moved with the communists to Yan'an, where she attended the Anti-Japanese University 抗日军政大学 (*Kangri Junzheng Daxue*). When in 1937 the Sino-Japanese War started she managed to be sent in the Taihang Mountains where the in the Taihang Mountains (under Zhu De's control) was. Until 1939 her

role was that of an organizer with the headquarters and remained the same also when she became honorary chair of the Southeast Shanxi Women's National Salvation Confederation, 晋东南妇女救国联合会 (*Jindongnan Funü Jiuguo Lianhehui*). In 1940, when Kang Keqing returned to Yan'an, she was enrolled in the Party school and in 1945, when the Sino-Japanese War came to an end, she became part of the CCP Central Committee's Women's Council and, in 1947, of the group preparing for the 1949 first National Women's Congress, where the ACWF was established and where she was elected to the Standing Committee (occupying this position until 1983). In 1957 she was elected deputy chair of the federation, the same year in which the anti-rightist campaign was launched and which saw her in charge of a rectification movement, a position that, in time, will lead her to feel mortified. However, two years later, after her husband was accused of going against Mao Zedong, she was accused of being a rightist herself. For further details on Kang Keqing's biography see Ye, Zhang and Nie (1989), Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 270–72) and Kang's autobiography (2011).

Lei Jieqiong 雷结琼(1905-2011)

Lei Jieqiong 雷结琼 was born in 1905 in Taishan County, in the Guangdong Province. Her youth was highly influenced by her father, Lei Zichang 雷子章, who sent his daughter to study at the primary school attached to Guangdong Women's Normal School. This institute was well-known for being progressive and it's here that Lei Jieqiong comes into contact with ideals such as that of democracy and starts to learn about science. In this environment she also starts to read the magazine *The New Youth* 新青年 (*Xing Qingnian*). In 1924, when she was nineteen, she moved to California

and started to learn English, continuing her studies in the University of Southern California, obtaining a M.A. in Sociology in 1931. She then moved back to China, where she started to work as a professor at Yen-Ching University, in the Sociology department. In this role, she demonstrated her strong opposition to the Japanese invasion of China. When Japanese troops entered the Northern part of the country, Lei Jieqiong protested against the KMT for not having show any resistance, by creating in 1935, accompanied by her students, the December 9th Movement, and by joining the National Salvation Movement in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, in 1937, when the Japanese troops reached Beijing. She remained in Nanchang until 1938, when she had to move to Ji'an following the Japanese invasion of Nanchang. During the time she spent in Nanchang, she was an advisor for the reform movement for the advancement of women in Jiangxi, a colonel, and in charge of a training class for women in the Jianxi Political Movement Institute. When in Ji'an Lei Jieqiong met and created a friendly connection with Zhou Enlai, who, a few years later, will write a comment on a report which made it possible for Lei Jieqiong to escape labor-reform during the Cultural Revolution. In 1940 she collaborated in establishing the Zhongzheng University of Jiangxi supervising, at the same time, the Jiangxi Provincial women Office, and in 1941 she held the position of professor at Soochow University in Shanghai, lecturing as well in other universities. In the same year she married Yan Jingyao 严镜尧 (1905–76), who studied in the field of social science and Marxism–Leninism, completing his P.h.d., and with career experiences both in England and Russia. In 1945, Lie Jieqiong and her husband contributed to establish the China Association for Promoting Democracy 中国民主促进会 (*Zhongguo Minzhu Cujinhui*). In 1946, Lei Jieqiong was also involved in what is known as the Xiaguan Massacre, when she and other ten people were attacked at Xiaguan station as sent to

Nanjing by the Shanghai Union of People's Associations to request the KMT to avoid a civil war. By the end of that year, after having gained experience both as a lecturer and a revolutionary, she took once again the role of professor in the Sociology Department in Yen-ching University. Besides her political and academic career, Lie Jieqiong also published different essays, starting from 1933 with her article on *Morning Daily* 晨报 (*Chenbao*), with the article titled *Social Work and Birth Control* 社会服务与节制生育 (*Shehui fuwu yu jiezhi shengyu*), and a series of essays published between 1938 and 1941 in the magazine *Women of Jiangxi* 江西妇女 (*Jiangxi funü*). After 1949, Lie Jieqiong had a chance to cover different administrative and academic positions. For further details on Lie Jieqiong's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 293–95).

Li Dequan 李德全 (1896-1972)

Li Dequan was born in Tong County, Beijing. Early in her life, she participated in pro-democracy movements. After graduating from the Methodist Women's College, she worked as an assistant pastor at a Congregational church. In 1924, she married Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 (1882-1948). Li organized the National Refugee Children's Association 战时儿童保育会 (*Zhanshi Ertong Baoyu Hui*), during the Second Sino-Japanese War and was vice chairman and established the Chinese Women's Association 中国妇女联谊会 (*Zhongguo Funu Lianyihui*) acting as its chairman. In January 1948, she was elected to the central executive committee of the Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang and joined the Chinese Communist Party in December 1958 (Guo, 2008). Li was elected to the Executive Council of the WIDF in 1948 and re-elected in 1953. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, she

was appointed as the first Minister of Health of the PRC central government, advocating for the legalization of abortion. She also served as chairman of the Red Cross Society of China. Her additional roles included vice chairman of the China-USSR Friendship Association, member of the State Council's Commission of Culture and Education, vice chairman of the China National Sports Commission, and vice chairman of the China People's National Commission for Children Protection.

The professionalism of Li Dequan emerged during the Sino-Japanese War, as the founder of the China Wartime Children's Welfare Association 中国战时儿童保育会 (*Zhongguo Zhanshi Ertong Baoyu Hui*) alongside Cao Mengjun in 1938 (Gu, 2006). When Li Dequan was appointed as the new Minister of Health in 1949, she garnered considerable respect across various circles. While her husband had been the more prominent figure (she was known as Madame Feng Yuxiang in international settings), Li established a strong domestic and international reputation as an effective administrator of relief services during and after the anti-Japanese War. In the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Li Dequan actively advocated for enhanced healthcare delivery in rural areas, a stance that was not universally shared at the time (Manning 2023, 137). Under her leadership, the Ministry of Health (MOH) implemented guidelines to strengthen the development of grassroots health stations and promoted epidemic prevention efforts. Her significant role in the campaign to eliminate the 'four pests' further underscored her impact on public health. At a time when the MOH, influenced by Western practices, was primarily focused on high-level medical care, Li Dequan was laying the foundation for a new national disease prevention program. Additionally, she strongly emphasized women's health, consistently reminding deputy ministers and medical directors, “Don’t forget about women and children.” In the early 1950s, the PRC achieved a significant milestone that few

other developing nations had accomplished: a substantial reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates. This success was attributed mainly to Li Dequan's dedicated and strategic efforts, the networks she was part of, and an expanding grassroots infrastructure of women birth attendants, enabling the new regime to systematically improve health outcomes within a few short years (Ivi, 154). See Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 302-3); For further details on her biography see Liu (1995) and Cheng, Lin (2017).

Li Xianmin 李献敏 (1911-1991)

Li Xianmin, also known as Lee Hsien Ming or Ming Tcherepnin, from her husband Alexander Tcherepin's name, was a talented pianist. She was the first female graduate (with honors) of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music 上海音乐学院 (*Shanghai Yinyue Xueyuan*, formerly Shanghai National Conservatory of Music 国立上海音专, *Guoli Shanghai Yinzhuang*) in 1933. In 1934, she was awarded the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship 庚子赔款奖学金 (*Gengzi Peikuan Jiangxuejin*), enabling her to pursue studies at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Belgium. Afterwards, she continued her education in Paris under the tutelage of her mentors, Alfred Cortot and Isidore Philipp. While in Europe she married the pianist and composer, Alexander Tcherepnin. Amid World War II, she and her husband found themselves compelled to stay in Nazi-occupied Paris. After the war, the couple moved to the US, where they were offered teaching positions at DePaul University in Chicago. (Ramey 2024; Keleide 1984; Ouyang 1990). The author couldn't find any in-depth biographical account of Li in English and Chinese; the only available materials are those from her husband's biography and interviews published on the occasion of her last visit to the PRC in

1989. The political role of Li in the context of the 1945 UFF conference is that of delegate for «the Chinese Embassy to strengthen cultural ties between China and France.» (Comité, 13). Li's role as a political ambassador for the Republic of China would deserve more research beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, it stands as a further example of how, in 1945, the political orientation of the WIDF was open to countries and political formation of various political roots.

Lin Qiaozhi 林巧稚 (1901–83)

Lin Qiaozhi was born in 1901 in Gulangyu Island near Xiamen, Fujian Province. The death of her mother from cervical cancer inspired her to study gynaecology. In 1921, during the entrance exam to enter Peking Union Medical College, her friend, who was taking the exam with her, fainted. When Lin Qiaozhi was called to assist her, she demonstrated to be calm and efficient, a behaviour that allowed her to be admitted despite not finishing her exam. She graduated in 1929 with the highest mark of her year and started her career at the Peking Union Hospital as a resident doctor of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department. In 1931, she formally obtained the role of chief resident doctor. In 1932, she was offered to further her studies abroad, going to England and Austria and coming back to Beijing in 1933. In 1935, she specialised in gynaecology and obstetrics and in 1937 became an associate professor. In 1939 Lin Qiaozhi went to Chicago and was admitted to the Honorary Society of Natural Sciences. Following her return to Beijing, she became the first Chinese woman to be promoted to the role of head of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department at the Peking Union Hospital.

In 1941, due to the Pacific War, Union Hospital closed, and Lin Qiaozhi opened a private clinic and gave her contribution in founding and became head of the Zhonghe

Hospital's Gynecology Department. When the was came to an end, she became part time professor at Peking University and in 1945 she became head of the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department Two years later, with the reopening of the Peking Union Hospital she became head professor of gynaecology and obstetrics, maintaining this position also when the hospital changed its name in Capital Hospital 首都医院 (*Shoudu Yiyuan*) in 1951 with the new PRC government. Lin Qiaozhi's excellent work in her medical field made her gain the recognition not only of thousands of patients and the scientific community, but also of the PRC, which she joined in 1955, becoming a member of the Standing Committee. In 1956 Lin Qiaozhi talked to Mao Zedon about the need to control population growth and, the same year, she was elected deputy president of the The Chinese Medical Association 中华医学会 (*Zhonghua Yixuehui*). She also became editor and was elected chair of the *Journal of Chinese Gynecology and Obstetrics*. One year later Lin Qiaozhi became a member of the Medical Section of the State Council's Scientific Planning Committee 国务院科学规划委员会医务组 (*Guowuyuan Kexue Guihua Weiyuanhui Yiwuzu*). With the Cultural Revolution Lin Qiaozhi was accused to be a reactionary and to be an American spy, losing her titles and responsibility (regained once the Cultural Revolution ended). She greatly contributed to scientific research, discovering cures for many diseases related to women's health and changing women's life, giving her contribution as well to the country's family planning program. For more information on Lin Qiaozhi's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 343–6).

Lu Cui 陆瑾 (1914 - 2015)

Lu Cui was born in 1914 in Huzhou, Zhejiang. As a university student at Tsinghua in 1935, she joined the Communist-led December 9th Movement, a pivotal student protest in Beijing against Japanese aggression and Kuomintang appeasement. At the time, Lu was a senior in the Department of Sociology and served as a member of the Tsinghua Student Committee for National Salvation 清华学生救国会 (*Qinghua Xuesheng Jiuguohui*). Her impassioned speech during a rally outside the closed gates of Beijing was immortalized in a photograph published on the back cover of the December 21 issue of the influential magazine *The People's Life* 大众生活 (*Dazhong Shenghuo*), where she stood on a stool addressing the crowd with a loudspeaker. Lu quickly became a leading public face of the movement. Her image and rhetoric were used extensively in the Communist press, especially in *The National Salvation Times* 救国时报 (*Jiuguo Shibao*), to symbolize the mobilization of Chinese women in the anti-Japanese resistance. She represented a new archetype of the politically engaged female intellectual: educated, eloquent, and unafraid to take the lead in public demonstrations. The widespread publication of her photograph and reporting on her activism served as an emotional and moral rallying point for women's participation in the broader national salvation movement. In 1936, Lu was appointed Director of the Propaganda Department of the National Federation of Students for National Salvation 全国各界学生救国联合会宣传部主任 (*Quanguo Gejie Xuesheng Jiuguo Lianhehui Xuanchuanbu Zhuren*) and formally joined the Communist Party. That September, she was sent to Geneva to attend the First World Youth Congress 首届世界青年大会 (*Shoujie Shijie Qingnian Dahui*), where she delivered a speech that brought China's anti-Japanese struggle to an international stage. In 1938, she again

represented China at the Second World Youth Congress 第二次世界青年大会 (*Dierci Shijie Qingnian Dahui*), and subsequently traveled through France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada to raise awareness of the war and solicit support. She also helped raise funds for Dr. Norman Bethune's medical team and the China Peace Hospital. Upon returning to China in 1940, Lu studied at the Marx-Lenin Institute in Yan'an and later worked with the Central China Bureau of the CCP, the New Fourth Army headquarters, and in the Suwan Border Region. In 1947, she was sent abroad once more as the Chinese representative to the WIDF in Paris. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Lu became a member of the Standing Committee of the ACWDF and served as Director of its International Department. In September of that year, she attended the first session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference 中国人民政治协商会议 (*Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi*) as a representative of China's women. She also served as Secretary-General of the Asian Women's Conference and stood atop Tiananmen Gate with fellow women leaders on the day of the founding ceremony. Throughout the 1950s, Lu participated in major international peace and women's conferences in Budapest, Copenhagen, Paris, and Warsaw, and was elected to both the Executive Committee of the WIDF and the World Peace Council. She studied at the Central Party School from 1956 to 1957, later serving as Director of Education and Culture for Beijing's Dongcheng District 北京市东城区教育与文化局局长 (*Beijing Shi Dongcheng Qu Jiaoyu yu Wenhua Ju Juzhang*). During the Cultural Revolution, Lu was imprisoned for eight years in Qincheng Prison. Following her rehabilitation in 1978, she worked with the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries 中国人民对外友好协会 (*Zhongguo Renmin Duiwai Youhao Xiehui*), becoming Executive Director and later Vice President. She also served as

Vice President of the China-US People's Friendship Association 中美人民友好协会 (*Zhong-Mei Renmin Youhao Xiehui*) and as a board member of the China Children and Teenagers' Fund 中国儿童少年基金会 (*Zhongguo Ertong Shaonian Jijinhui*). In 1980, she was Deputy Head of the Chinese delegation to the UN's Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen 联合国第二次世界妇女大会 (*Lianheguo Di Er Ci Shijie Funü Dahui*). Lu was a delegate to the 2nd, 5th, 6th, and 7th National Committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. In her later years, Lu returned to Tsinghua University on several occasions to share her experiences and inspire students with the memory of the December 9th Movement. In one such visit in 2005, at the age of 91, she called on youth to love, serve, build, and defend the nation. Her photograph from the 1935 protest remained one of the most iconic images of the student resistance, printed in publications and displayed in exhibitions for decades. For more about Lu Ci see Ban (2013), Gu (2005) and Ma (2010).

Lussu, Joyce (1912-1998)

Born Gioconda Beatrice Salvadori Paleotti, she was an Italian writer, translator, and poet. A partisan during the resistance, she was awarded the silver medal for military valor for her role as captain in the Giustizia e Libertà brigades. A polyglot, born into a bilingual Italian-English family, she also speaks French and German. A careful interpreter of the condition of women and human rights, Lussu dedicated several essays and poems to these themes during her prolific career. Streets, libraries, and museums are dedicated to her figure to testify the importance of her work. Several books have been written about her figure over time, and seminars have been organized;

among the most recent works are the recent volumes of Trenti (2009) and Ballestra (2022).

Lü Xiaodao 吕晓道 (1904–1998)

Lü Xiaodao was born in 1904 in Yuyao, Zhejiang Province. She graduated from the Department of Sociology at Datong University in Shanghai and became an active member of the Kuomintang (KMT), where she was aligned with the Central Club faction. Her father was Lü Binglin 吕炳林. She had two older sisters and a younger brother, Lü Shangen 吕尚根. In 1923, she entered Datong University in Shanghai. That same year, after leaving university, Lü moved to Hangzhou for work and formally joined the KMT. She became involved in women's and youth organizing throughout Zhejiang Province. In 1926, during the Northern Expedition, she was sent to Guangzhou to study at the Women's Movement Training Institute. After graduating in 1927, she held a series of leadership positions: Chair of the Zhejiang Provincial Women's Movement Committee 浙江省妇女运动委员会主席 (*Zhejiang Sheng Funu Yundong Weiyuanhui Zhuxi*), Executive Director of the Chinese Women's Political Research Association 中国妇女政治研究会常务理事 (*Zhongguo Funu Zhengzhi Yanjiuhui Changwu Lishi*), Deputy Director of the KMT Central Women's Movement Committee 国民党中央妇女运动委员会副主任 (*Guomin Dang Zhongyang Funu Yundong Weiyuanhui Fu Zhuren*), and alternate member of the KMT Central Executive Committee 国民党中央候补执行委员 (*Guomin Dang Zhongyang Houbu Zhixing Weiyuan*). In 1934, Lü traveled to Japan to study in the social sciences at the University of Tokyo. She returned to China in 1936, just as Japanese forces

began their incursion into North China. During the Suiyuan Campaign, she was stationed at the front under General Fu Zuoyi 傅作义, where she carried out propaganda and morale-building efforts. With the outbreak of full-scale war in 1937, Lü co-founded the Women's Cultural Society 妇女文化社 (*Funu Wenhua She*) in Nanjing with Xu Kairui 徐凯瑞 and Ren Peidao 任佩道. She served as its Executive Director and published its wartime special issue, *Women's Culture* 妇女文化（南京）战时特刊 (*Funu Wenhua (Nanjing) Zhanshi Tekan*). That same year, she was appointed Head of Labor Affairs and Executive Committee Member of the Chinese Women's Patriotic Relief Association 中国妇女慰劳抗战自卫将士总会 (*Zhongguo Funu Weilaokangzhan Ziwei Jiangshi Zonghui*). When the association expanded to Hankou, she joined its Standing Committee there. In 1938, Lü became Executive Director of the Wartime Children's Care Association 战时儿童保育会 (*Zhanshi Ertong Baoyu Hui*) and also joined the Chinese Wartime Children's Relief Association 中国战时儿童救济协会 (*Zhongguo Zhanshi Ertong Jiuji Xiehui*). Between 1938 and 1940, she taught seminars on the Three Principles of the People, wounded-soldier education, and civic education for women cadres of the 新生活运动妇女指导委员会 (*Xin Shenghuo Yundong Funü Zhidao Weiyuanhui*), alongside Chen Yiyun 陈逸云, Tang Guozhen 唐国楨, and Huang Peilan 黄佩兰. By 1942, she had joined the editorial board of *Women's Resonance* 妇女共鸣 (*Funü Gongming*), chaired by Chen Yiyun. In 1944, she served as supervisor of the Women's Volunteers for Military Service Promotion Association 妇女志愿从军促进会 (*Funü Zhiyuan Congjun Cujinhui*). In May 1945, Lü was elected an alternate member of the KMT's Sixth Central Executive Committee 中国国民党第六届候补中央执行委员 (*Zhongguo Guomindang Di Liu Jie Houbu Zhongyang Zhixing Weiyuan*). The following year,

she was elected to the Constituent National Assembly 制宪国民大会代表 (*Zhixian Guomin Dahui Daibiao*). After the KMT government's retreat to Taiwan, she continued her service on the Central Women's Movement Committee 中央妇女运动委员会 (*Zhongyang Funu Yundong Weiyuanhui*). In early 1949, Lü helped establish the Women's Anti-Communist Alliance 妇女反共同盟会 (*Funu Fankong Tongmenghui*) with Deng Huifang 邓蕙芳, Zhuang Jing 莊靜, Cao Wanzhen 曹婉珍, Yang Jun 楊俊, Xiong Shuheng 熊叔衡, and Wang Muxin 王慕信. On February 12, 1949, she joined the presidium of the newly founded National Peace Promotion Council 全国和平促进会 (*Quanguo Heping Cujinhui*) as the representative of the National Women's Association 全国妇女会 (*Quanguo Funühui*). In 1950, she became a founding member of the China Women's Anti-Communist and Anti-Soviet Union United Association 中华妇女反共抗俄联合会 (*Zhonghua funu fangong kang'e lianhehui*). In 1970, Lü moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, before eventually returning to Taiwan. She officially retired in 1987. In October 1988 and again in October 1990, she visited relatives on the mainland. Lü Xiaodao passed away in Taipei in 1998. For more information about Lü Xiaodao see (AJWMN, 2017b) and IMHAS (n.d.).

Madonna, Serena (? - ?)

Madonna, Serena was a professor of art history, vice president and member of the Executive Committee of the UDI⁴⁹⁸. Her political consciousness was shaped during

⁴⁹⁸ *L'Unità* "Vivace conferenza dell'UDI!" (Vivacious UDI Conference) (1963, July 12).

the Second World War, when she endured severe hardship under the German occupation. Following the Liberation, she became a prominent voice within the UDI, representing the organization at key international forums. As a delegate and speaker at the Congress of the WIDF held in Moscow in 1963, she articulated the Italian delegation's critique of the Federation's procedural and structural rigidity. Madonna defended the UDI's walkout during the reading of two introductory reports, framing it as a protest against the manner in which those documents were presented as institutional consensus despite opposition from the Bureau. Madonna's long-term advocacy for internal reform of the Federation, first advanced by the UDI in 1958, highlighted her commitment to a more agile and representative international feminist structure, one that could reflect the diversity of national contexts. During the 1963 Moscow congress, she noted that support for this position came not only from several European and Latin American delegations but also, in part, from the Soviet representatives themselves. In the cultural and environmental sphere, Madonna transferred her political engagement to *Italia Nostra*, an association for the protection of Italy's historic and artistic heritage. She became one of the leading voices advocating for the education of younger generations on the importance of heritage protection. In 1975, she curated and introduced issue no. 121 of *Italia Nostra's Bollettino*, dedicated entirely to environmental education, following a ministerial circular promoting ecological engagement in schools nationwide. Her editorial outlined the pedagogical and civic responsibilities of cultural institutions in shaping youth awareness. Although she eventually left *Italia Nostra* due to internal disputes, her legacy within the association, and within Italian civic culture more broadly, endures. To know more about Serena Madonna see Pacelli (2019), Riggio (2009), Italia Nostra (2019).

Maiorelli, Lidia (1930 - ?)

Lidia Maiorelli was an Italian communist militant active in the postwar youth and women's movements. According to a CIA report published the 5th of June 1950, she joined the PCI in 1946 and became one of the leading figures of ARI (Associazione Ragazze d'Italia), a women's organization affiliated with the FGCI (Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana). ARI was designed to politically and ideologically mobilize young women within the PCI's broader framework. In 1950, Maiorelli was part of the Italian delegation of the WFDY (World Federation of Democratic Youth) that visited the People's Republic of China. Over the course of a forty-day mission, the group visited eighteen cities, meeting workers, peasants, students, and local youth organizations. On October 30, the delegation was received by Mao Zedong. In 1951, Maiorelli's name appeared in the children's weekly *Il Pioniere*, highlighting her role in socialist youth education (*Il Pioniere* 1951). She remained politically active in Italy: in 1955, she participated in an assembly of PCI women's cells in Monterotondo, near Rome, where she gave a speech on organization and female emancipation⁴⁹⁹. She was married to Arrigo Morandi, also a PCI militant and national leader of ARI. Her political trajectory reflected the PCI's efforts to promote women's political engagement in the 1950s, often framed through an internationalist and anti-imperialist lens. Lidia Morelli's biography has been built using CIA (1950), CIA (1951), Samarani and Rostagni (2018).

⁴⁹⁹ "Assemblee popolari delle cellule femminili (Popular assemblies of the women's cells) *L'Unità*, 17 September 1955

Marcellino, Nella (1923-2011)

Nella Marcellino was born in Torino in 1923. Her father was an anti-fascist, who was arrested by the Germans in Paris, while her mother participated in the occupation of factories in 1920. She spent part of her youth in France and Belgium. She was only fifteen during her first undercover mission travelling from Bruxel to Paris on behalf of her father. In the Forties, in France, she will start to take part in the first groups of young anti-fascists, getting into contact with some members of the PCI. In 1941 went back to Torino, continuing her anti-fascist fight and becoming one of the organizers of the 1942 and 1943's strikes and supporting the Patriotic Action Groups in the Piemonte region. After 1945 she covered different political roles, such as, Senior member of the Women's Commission of the Italian Communist Party in Bologna, Deputy of the Parliament in 1948, and Head of the Organization Board of the Italian Communist Party in Milano in 1951. During her role as Deputy she was also appointed twice as head of the National Women Board. In the Sixties she was active in the labour union. (ANPI n.d.g).

Matera, Anna (1909-2003)

Anna De Lauro Matera was born in Napoli in 1909. After obtaining a teaching diploma, she enrolled in the Oriental Institute of Napoli and in 1932, she graduated in Literature and Foreign Languages. The following year, she moved with her family to Foggia, where her father, a station manager, had been assigned a new position. In 1936, she held the position of English teacher at the Lanza Classical High School and, two years later, she married Vincenzo Matera, a bank clerk.

Her political involvement began at the end of 1943, when she came into contact with Professor Antonio Vivoli and lawyer Domenico Fioritto, a prominent leader of the pre-fascist Socialist Party. After joining the PSI, she was elected to the Foggia City Council in 1946 and appointed Commissioner for Public Education, a position she held until 1948. She would serve continuously as a city councillor for 25 years, until 1971.

In 1953, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies for the first time and re-elected in 1958, serving on the Standing Committee on Culture and Public Education and the Special Committee for the Ratification of Legislative Decrees issued during the Constituent Assembly period.

Within the party, she held national leadership roles. In 1955, after the 31st National Congress in Torino, she was elected to the Central Committee and appointed as head of the Women's Commission; in 1957, at the Venice Congress, her positions were confirmed and she was also elected to the Executive Committee, as its only female member. In 1959, she was part of the Central Committee. In 1961, she worked with the National Alliance of Peasants as part of its national leadership, and she also served in the national presidency of the UDI. For more information about Anna Matera see FADN (2019a).

Mattei, Teresa (1921-2013)

Teresa Mattei was born in Genova in 1921. From a young age, she demonstrated her strong anti-fascist ideals when, in her High School years, she protested against a professor who praised the racial laws. These ideals and her activism against fascism led her to be arrested twice. As head of the Youth Front, she participated in the Resistance in Florence and organised the assassination attempt against Giovanni Gentile.

Following the Liberation, Teresa Mattei, the youngest of the women elected to the Constituent Assembly, founded with Maria Federici, in 1947, the Organization for the Moral Safeguarding of Children. After covering the role of secretary of the Bureau of the Constituent Assembly from 1946 to 1948, she refused, in 1955 to be a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, and her disagreements with Palmiro Togliatti's moralist and sanctimonious ideals led her to be expelled by the PCI. However, her disappearance from the political scene did not stop her from continuing her activity in relation to children's welfare (ANPI n.d.h and Codrigrani 2023).

Merlin, Lina (1887-1979)

Lina Merlin was born as Angelina Merlin in Pozzonovo in 1887 in a progressive family. She qualified as a primary school teacher, then she went to France and obtained the qualification to become a middle school French teacher, deciding however to keep teaching to younger children. In 1919 she became a member of the PSI. With the start of fascism, she refused to pledge to it and was dismissed as a teacher. In 1926, due to her anti-fascist activities, she was arrested several times and in the end she was given a sentence of five years in prison, after which she went to Milano to continue to put into practice her ideals against the regime. In 1943, she took part in the Resistance. During this period she organised, alongside other women, the Women's Defense Groups. After the Liberation, and after having obtained a role as a Head of the Socialist Party, Lina Merlin gave her contribution in the foundation of the UDI. She was appointed to be part of the Senate both in 1948 and 1953, while she became a Deputy of the Chamber in 1958. She remained a member of the Socialist Party until 1961, leaving definitively politics in 1963. Lina Merlin also wrote a book about her

life titled *My Life (La mia vita)*, which was published ten years after her death (in 1979). (ANPI n.d.f).

Minella, Angiola (1920-1988)

Angiola Minella was born in 1920 in Torino. Her father was shot and killed during a fascist aggression in front of their house when she was only twelve. She graduated in literature and became a teacher, but in 1943, with the start of the war, she decided to follow her passion for the field of medicine and participated to a training course for nurses of the Italian Red Cross, starting, after the first year, to work in a temporary hospital in Bra (Cuneo). In 1944, Angiola Minella had an active role in the Resistance and after the Liberation she decided to give her contribution to politics as a member of the PCI in Savona. Here she met Piero Molinari, with whom she shared the same political ideals, and married him a few months later, without her mother's approval. During these years she was also active in the organization of UDI, becoming one of the regional and national directors of the Union and promoting with Nadia Spano the campaign "Let's Save Childhood" (Salviamo l'infanzia), through which she supported the children in need. In 1946, she was elected in the City Council of Savona and, in June of the same year, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly. Angiola Minella was part of the Chamber of Deputies during the Third Legislature and later in the Senate of the Republic during the Fourth and Fifth Legislatures. Between 1953 and 1957, she also gained importance at an international level when, in 1955 she was sent by the UDI, in agreement with the PCI, to represent Italy in the WIDF, based in East Berlin, where she became Secretary-General. In Parliament, she focused primarily on issues related to motherhood, childhood, unemployment, peace, education, the

environment, and workplace safety. To know more about Angiola Minella's life see Gaballo (2023) and ANPI (n.d.j).

Montagna, Rita (1895-1979)

Rita Montagna was born in Torino in 1895 from a Jewish family with socialist ideals. When she was fourteen, she started to work in a tailor's shop. Aware of her right as a worker, she participated in the seamstresses' strikes in Torino between 1909 and 1911. In 1914 she decided to adhere to the PSI. In 1917 she participated in the protests for bread in her city and in 1919 in the movements for factories occupation. Rita Montagna also contributed to the creation of the PCI and was sent as a delegate to the Third Congress of the Communist International in Moscow. With the beginning of fascism she became a clandestine and continued to contribute to the activities of the Party. During this period, she also met Palmiro Togliatti, marrying him in 1924 and giving birth to a child the following year. The family was exiled from Italy, where they came back in 1944 to participate in the Resistance. Rita Montagna believed in the necessity of including women in politics in order to overcome what the war and fascism left behind, becoming one of the founders of UDI and, later, one of its national executives. She was also very active in the campaign aimed at achieving universal suffrage. In 1946, Rita Montagna was elected to the Bureau of the Constituent Assembly and was active in the campaign of 1948, after her relationship with Togliatti ended. She was also elected to the Senate during the first and second legislature (Gaballo 2023).

Nenni, Giuliana (1911-2002)

Giuliana Nenni was born in Faenza (Ravenna) in 1911. She was the daughter of the journalist and historical leader of the PSI, Pietro Nenni. When Nenni's family had to escape to France in 1926 (the year in which Pietro Nenni became secretary of the PSI), Giuliana Nenni started her studies in French Civilization at Sorbonne University and became editor of the socialist magazine *Populaire*, adhering to the PSI in 1934. In 1935 she became politically active in the Italian Popular Union in Paris, and in 1936 she became secretary of the Anti-Fascist Committee (Comitato di lotta anti-fascista). With the fall of Mussolini, Giuliana Nenni came back to Italy and after WWII, she contributed to the creation of the UDI with Rita Montagnana, Rosetta Longo e Marisa Conciari Rodano. She was the first politician to claim the necessity of a Divorce Law. In 1948 and 1953, she was appointed to the Chamber of Deputies, while in 1958 and 1963 she became part of the Senate. Even after her retirement, she didn't lose her passion for politics and socialism (ANPI n.d.d).

Noce, Teresa (1900-1980)

Teresa Noce was born in Torino in 1900 from a poor family. Due to financial difficulties, she had to interrupt her studies before completing primary school, but kept studying as an autodidact. At eleven she was already working in a tailor's shop, participating in her first strike for a better salary and working hours. At seventeen, she started to work as a lathe turner and in 1920, along with other young people, she founded the Socialist Youth Club of Porta Palazzo, in Torino, where she met the engineering student Luigi Longo, who would become her husband and father of her sons. In 1921 she became a member of the PCI. In 1923, when she was an editor for

the magazine *The Voice of Youth* (*La voce della gioventù*), Teresa Noce was arrested in milano and in 1926 she and her husband had to leave the country. During the period of her exile, Teresa Noce continuously moved from Moscow to Paris, frequently reaching Italy clandestinely to organise the fight against fascism. In 1936, with Xenia Sereni, she founded in Paris *Noi Donne*. After having spent some time in Spain, she relocated to France once again in 1938, publishing her autobiography *Youth Without Sun* (*Gioventù senza sole*). With the beginning of WWII Teresa Noce is interned in the Rieucros camp. Freed by the Soviets, she was appointed by the French Communist Party to direct an organization of immigrant workers called MOI, and gave her contribution in the fight against the Germans. In 1943 she was arrested in Paris and later deported to the concentration camp Ravensbrück and then to do forced labor in an ammunition factory in Holleischen (Czechoslovakia). She will be able to return to Italy in 1946. Here, she will become one of the women to be part of the Constituent Assembly, besides being elected deputy in 1948. Between 1948 and 1949, following the numerous occasions of infidelity from her husband, Teresa Noce decided to opt for a consensual separation to avoid gossip within the communist party, of which Longo was vice secretary. However, in 1953, he forged her signature to obtain the annulment of their marriage in San Marino, as it still wasn't possible to divorce in Italy, an event that, naively, an unaware Teresa Noce tried to publicly deny, as against the principles of the Party. Despite her obvious innocence, the PCI didn't appreciate the fact that now, her private life was under the eyes of the public, so she was expelled from the central committee, starting a life away from the political and public field. For more information on Teresa Noce's life see ANPI n.d.i and Gaballo 2024.

Passigli, Marisa (? - ?)

Marisa Passigli was a key figure in postwar Italian feminist and socialist activism, known for her strategic role within the UDI. As a member of the UDI's Executive Committee, Passigli shaped both national and international feminist discourse, advancing a model of emancipation grounded in mass participation, internal pluralism, and international solidarity. In 1953, she contributed to the preparation of a national conference focused on producing a *Charter of the Rights of Italian Women and Women Workers*. Her political activities unfolded within the broader geopolitical landscape of the Cold War. In 1959, Passigli, alongside Baldina Di Vittorio Berti, represented the UDI at a meeting of the Soviet Women's Committee. Her participation aligned with the UDI and Italian Communist Party's broader position that peaceful relations with the USSR were essential to global stability and working-class solidarity. UDI's publication *Noi Donne*, to which Passigli contributed, consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining ties with the Soviet bloc and critiqued Western efforts to restrict international feminist exchange. Passigli also served as the lead delegate on a UDI mission to Spain during the country's democratic transition after the Franco dictatorship. In this capacity, she represented the organization during the politically volatile aftermath of the January 1977 *Matanza de Atocha*, when five labor lawyers were assassinated in Madrid. Her presence reinforced the UDI's position as a transnational actor in feminist resistance against authoritarianism. Throughout her political life, Marisa Passigli advanced a socialist-feminist vision that integrated local mobilization, cultural action, and international diplomacy. For more about Marisa Passigli see Branciforte (2019); Cosmai (2017); Pojmann (2008).

Picolato, Rina (1900-1963)

Caterina “Rina” Picolato was born in Torino in 1900. When she completed primary school, she started to work in a tailor's shop and as a mechanical operator. In 1918 she joined the PSI, soon becoming one of the city's most active female activists. In 1920, the seamstresses from the women's high-fashion company, began a protest led by the local Chamber of Labour, asking for better salaries, which successfully concluded one month after its start with the right to appoint the internal committee. Caterina Picolato was therefore hired to work at the Chamber of Labour, starting her political career. She was also active in the Socialist Women's Propaganda Committee (Comitato di propaganda femminile socialista). When the PCI was founded, Caterina Picolato joined the Party, becoming part of the Communist Trade Union Committee and becoming vice-secretary of the Torino's section. In 1921 she participated to the 3rd Comintern Congress, following the commission on women's labor. Being considered, according to the fascism ideals, a subversive individual, she moved to Milano with Teresa Noce to escape the repressive crackdown, changing her name to Maria Marchini and starting to work as a seamstress. However both of them were arrested and released in December of the same year. Due to her health conditions, she had to reduce her political activism. However, she kept in contact with the underground communist organization and contributed to help the families victims of the repression of these years. Between 1941 and 1942, she helped Umberto Massola in rebuilding the Communist Party in Torino and the surrounding areas. In 1943 she was the only woman to be appointed in the temporary direction of the PCI and, as a responsible for the Northern area of Italy, she met in Milano Giovanna Barcellona, Lina Fibbi, Lina Merlin e Ada Gobetti, with whom she created the basis for the Women's Defense Groups (GDD) which were officially recognised in 1944. The

GDD followed anti-fascist ideals and claimed the importance of equality in every aspect of life. After the Liberation, she continued to be part of the PCI and, during the Fifth Congress in Roma in 1945, she was appointed head of the Women Commission within the Central Committee. Caterina Picolato refused to hold important positions in the UDI, in 1947 she was elected during the First National Congress of the CGIL in the Executive Committee and as part of the National Women's Commission. Confirmed as a member of the CGIL Executive Committee again in 1960, that year her health conditions did not allow her to celebrate the victory of the equal pay campaign. Under her leadership the CGIL Women's Commission consistently promoted workers' demands, such as maternity protection, the fight against discrimination, and equal pay (Righi 2015).

Pisoni, Ines (1913 - 2005)

Ines Pisoni Cerlesi was an Italian antifascist activist, communist leader, and trade unionist. A prominent figure in the Resistance, she later became a central advocate for gender wage equality in postwar Italy. Born in Trento on 28 April 1913 to a lower-middle-class Catholic family, Pisoni worked as a domestic economy teacher in Riva del Garda, where she also directed a local applied arts school. She later taught in Levico, Fiera di Primiero, Istria, and Trento. Following the fall of the Fascist regime on 25 July 1943, she joined the Resistance under the alias "Serena." In this role, she served as secretary of the underground Communist Party's local organization, carrying out essential liaison and organizational work. She initiated the publication of *The Proletarian* (*Il proletario*), a clandestine antifascist newspaper in Trentino. During the Resistance, she met Mario Pasi, a communist doctor from Ravenna whom she

had first encountered in 1938 at Trento's Santa Chiara Hospital. Known by the nom de guerre "Montagna," Pasi would become Commissar of the Unified Command of the CLN (Committee of National Liberation) in his region. At his urging, Pisoni moved to Ravenna in 1944 to avoid surveillance. There, she became a leader in the underground Communist Party and helped organize the Women's Defense Groups. Pasi was arrested and, after being tortured, hanged by fascists on 10 March 1945 in Belluno's Bosco delle Castagne. Pisoni learned of his death only later, while returning from a search for him in Alfonsine (RA). During a period of enforced rest due to illness, she wrote her partisan diary, later published as *I Will Be Called Serena (Mi chiamerò Serena)*. In 1948, she resumed political activity and was first assigned by the PCI to the women's section. She was later "placed" in the UDI, then led by Maria Maddalena Rossi, where she worked in the childhood sector under Luciana Viviani. Finding the experience unfulfilling, she transitioned to trade union work in the CGIL. Within the CGIL, she joined the National Women's Commission, established at the first unified congress in Florence in 1947 with a mandate to study "problems specific to working women." Her work coincided with the 1948–50 fragmentation of Italy's labor front, which saw the Catholic, republican, and social-democratic components leave the CGIL to form the CISL and UIL. As a result, many women left the Women's Commission. Its activities resumed publicly only in the early 1950s, with Rina Picolato as head and Pisoni collaborating alongside Irea Gualandi. In January 1954, she participated in the First National Conference of Working Women, held in Florence. The conference adopted the Charter of Women Workers' Rights, which prominently demanded equal pay for equal work, a cause that became central to Pisoni's political and trade union commitment. She spoke at the 1957 Milan conference *Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value*, and she signed the first cross-union agreement on wage equality for CGIL on 16 July 1960. In the early 1960s, she served as an

observer for the World Federation of Trade Unions at the International Labour Organization (ILO) and participated in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. As a journalist, she received the Saint Vincent Prize for Journalism for her articles on the condition of women workers, which recognized her as one of Italy's foremost experts on gender pay equity. In her final years at the CGIL, she directed the union's training institute and edited her journal *Training and Qualification* (*Formazione e qualifica*). She died in Rome on 4 October 2005 (Salfi n.d.)

Prospero, Ada (1902-1968)

Ada Prospero (also Ada Prospero Marchesini Gobetti) was born in Torino in 1902. In 1923 she married Piero Gobetti, met in her high school years and in 1925 she graduated in philosophy and started to teach while improving her knowledge in literature and pedagogy. During the fascism, her house was used as an underground centre for anti-fascist intellectuals, who created the Justice and Freedom (*Giustizia e libertà*) movement.

In 1924, Piero Gobetti was assaulted while coming out of their home, an attack that left serious injuries on his body. Following this event, the couple moved to France, where Piero passed away in 1925 due to his poor health conditions caused by the assault, leaving his wife and their new born baby Paolo. Piero's death left profound emotional wounds on Ada, who tried to find peace by dedicating herself to translation and in 1928 she became an English teacher. In this period she will continue her political activism and to build stronger connections with people with her same ideals. In 1937, she remarried with Ettore Marchesini, a technician for the Italian Agency for Radio Broadcasting.

In 1941, she contributed to the foundation of the Partito d'Azione and in 1943, together with her son Paolo, she joined the Resistance, establishing a partisan unit in Cordola hamlet in Meana di Susa. Together with Lina Fibbi and Pina Palumbo, Ada Prospero Gobetti also contributed to the creation and organisation of the Women's Defence Groups. Her work *Partisan Diary (Diario Partigiano)* is a result of the experiences that Ada lived in these years.

With the Liberation, Ada Gobetti was appointed as vice-mayor of Torno. In the following years, she worked as a translator, as a writer, as a journalist and as a pedagogue (Tosi 2023).

Cinciari, Marisa (1921–1923)

Marisa Cinciari, more often cited as Marisa Rodano from her husband's name, was born 1921 in Rome. Daughter of a business man and a Jewish woman, started her studies in literature, a subject that she will study also at Rome University. She took part in the Resistance against fascism as part of the Catholic Communist Movement and as an activist in the women's defence groups. Her anti-fascist activities led to a period of incarceration in 1943. In 1944 she married a councilor of the PCI, Franco Rodano, and became co-founder of the UDI. In 1946, she became part of the PCI and she was among the first women to appear to give their vote in one of the schools in the Roman administrative division Esquilino during the Referendum and choose between monarchy and republic. Marisa Rodano lived an intense political career in which she spoke on many occasions about the situation of women in Europe and about the importance of gender equality, touching also topics such as that of single-parent families. From 1946 to 1956 she was a city council member and from 1948 to 1968 a member of the Italian parliament. During these years, from 1963 to 1968,

Marisa Rodano also held the position of first woman to be vice president of the Chamber of Deputies. She also held other important positions, such as that of senator until 1972. From 1972 to 1979, she became a member of the council of Rome province, while, from 1979 to 1989 she was elected as European parliamentarian. For more information about Marisa Rodano's biography see Rivitti 2023 and Rodano 2010.

Romagnoli, Tullia (1918– 2015)

Tullia Romagnoli (also Tullia Caretoni Romagnoli, from her ex-husband's name) was born prematurely in Verona on December 30, 1918. Her mother, Eugenia Monzani, died of the Spanish flu shortly after childbirth. Raised in Milan in a secular, intellectual household, Romagnoli was the daughter of the noted Hellenist Ettore Romagnoli, who taught at the University of Pavia and later at Rome. She grew up in a culturally rich environment frequented by major literary and academic figures such as Luigi Pirandello, Giuseppe Tucci, and Massimo Bontempelli. Her early education at the Manzoni lyceum in Milan, a rare secular school for girls at the time, contributed to her formative distancing from clerical institutions and the emerging fascist orthodoxy. Her political consciousness was awakened by the 1938 Fascist racial laws, which led to the exclusion of her Jewish classmates and professors from school and university. This rupture marked a decisive moment in her intellectual and ethical development. Though her father, a conservative and member of the Accademia d'Italia, was not a fascist ideologue, she explicitly rejected his social milieu after his death in 1938, choosing instead a path of political independence and dissent. Romagnoli joined the Partito d'Azione during the Second World War and participated in the

Resistance, performing clandestine duties and contributing to the military structure organized by leaders such as Ferruccio Parri and Raffaele Cadorna. At the Liberation, she was assigned to the Ministry of Culture under Rodolfo Siviero to assist in the recovery of artworks looted by the Nazis. She was also present at the 1945 Women's World Congress in Paris, representing both the *Unione Donne Italiane* and the *Partito d'Azione*, and bearing early witness to the global subordination of women in postwar politics. In the postwar period, Romagnoli entered the *Partito Socialista Italiano*, where she rapidly assumed leadership roles. From 1957 to 1966 she was a member of the PSI's Central Committee, and from 1959 served on its National Executive. She was responsible for the party's commissions on education, gender equality, and social security. Between 1963 and 1983, she served four terms in the Italian Senate, representing the constituency of Mantova. She was vice president of the Senate in two legislatures and a member of parliamentary commissions on public instruction, foreign affairs, and cultural heritage. Romagnoli was a central figure in the formation of the *Sinistra Indipendente* in 1968, following her departure from the PSI after the fusion with the social democrats. With Parri and Riccardo Lombardi, she helped construct a space for democratic socialism distinct from both Soviet-aligned communism and centrist accommodation. Though elected on PCI lists, she never joined the Communist Party. Her legislative contributions included support for the legalization of divorce and abortion, the reform of family law, and the expansion of public education. She consistently opposed the death penalty and affirmed the necessity of recognizing same-sex unions as a matter of civic equality. Her work in the European Parliament from 1971 to 1984 as part of the Foreign Affairs Committee further broadened her international outlook. Romagnoli's political philosophy emphasized the structural integrity of democratic processes. She was sharply critical of post-First Republic developments: the collapse of the party system, the erosion of meritocratic norms, and

the substitution of representative democracy with clientelistic nomination practices. Her consistent call was for the restoration of political culture grounded in responsibility, transparency, and civic education. For more information see Catalano (2013) and Minnesso (2021). For more information about Tullia Romagnoli see FADN (2019h).

Rossi, Maria Maddalena (1906-1995)

Born in 1906 in Codevilla (Pavia), Maria Maddalena Rossi grew up in a large and well-off family. During her adolescence, she came into contact with Maria Giudice, a prominent figure among the socialists of the time, an encounter that would leave a lasting mark on her. After earning a degree in Chemistry from the University of Pavia in 1930, she found work at the Zambelli chemical plants in Milan. In 1937, together with her husband, the chemist Antonio Semproni, she joined the underground PCI, where she began an active period of political militancy. She participated in the work of the International Red Aid and helped raise funds for the anti-fascist struggle. Discovered by the regime's police in December 1942, she was arrested in Bergamo, tried, and sentenced to internal exile in Sant'Angelo in Vado, where she remained until July 25, 1943. After the war, Maria Maddalena Rossi was a communist MP for the first three republican legislatures from 1948 to 1963 and president of the UDI from 1947 to 1956. The range of issues on which the deputy Rossi was committed was very wide: from the protection of illegitimate children and unmarried mothers, outcasts within the respectable society, to the pauperism of populations devastated by the war. In January 1946 she organized the first aid for 4000 children from Cassino, in Lazio, and other areas particularly affected by the war, on which the journalist

Francesco Di Giorgio published a volume (2020), to the various aspects of family law, up to the issues of international politics in the context of the Cold War, starting from the discussion of peace treaties to arrive at the first steps of European integration (Signori 2022). It was precisely during the years of the Korean War that Rossi brought to Parliament – probably stimulated by those events and by the international political commitment aimed at spreading them – the denunciation of one of the most scabrous and controversial chapters of the Italian liberation. A question of hers in the Chamber in 1952 lifted the veil of reticence and repression on the acts of violence of the *goumiers*, the colonial soldiers, mostly Moroccan (hence the Italian name “marocchine” with which the sad episode is remembered), part of the French troops who, going up the peninsula with the Anglo-American forces between April and June 1944, were responsible for war crimes against the civilian population, fueling a case history of rapes, murders, looting and violence, which still remain unpunished today. For more information about Maria Maddalena Rossi see also FADN (2019f), Signori (2022).

Shen Ziju 沈兹九 (1898-1989)

Shen Ziju was born in 1898 in a business family from Hangzhou. She graduated from the provincial Girls Normal School in Zhejiang, and started working as a teacher in elementary school. She got married and had a daughter at 17, but lost her husband soon due to health complications. In 1921, after having refused to satisfy the expectations of widowhood, she left her daughter with her family and went to Tokyo to continue her studies, where she stayed until 1925. In China she kept holding

teaching positions in Huangzhou. As a woman belonging to the May Fourth generation, Shen Zijiu strongly believed in gender equality, ideals for which, in 1931, she ended her second marriage due to her husband's different views. The same year, with the Japanese invading China and her father going through bankruptcy, she decided to go to Shanghai, where she started to translate Japanese articles into Chinese language for the magazine *Collection of Current Affairs* 時事類編 (*Shishi leibian*), being invited after one year to become an editor for *The Women's Garden* 婦女園地 (*Funu yuandi*), a new weekly supplement of *Shanghai News* 申報 (*Shen bao*) which became a space for women to express their suffering and to amplify their demands. Before *The Women's Garden* was closed by the Nationalist government in 1935, Shen Zijiu had managed to create her connections with the underground Communists and found the magazine *Women's Life* 婦女生活 (*Funu shenghuo*), with which she became famous. In her role of activist she participated to the 1938 Lu Mountain meeting of women, organised by Song Meiling 宋美齡, and she also became head of the cultural affairs group in the New Life Movement Women Supervision Committee 新生活运动妇女指导委员会 (*Xin shenghuo yundong funü zhidao weiyuanhui*), promoting coalition between women of different social status and supporting the education of women who worked in factories. Shen Zijiu officially adhered to the CCP in 1939 and in 1940, following Zhou Enlai's will, she became the assistant (and, later, wife) of the writer, translator and editor Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之, with whom, from Singapore, she published progressive journals for Chinese people who lived abroad. In 1940, after her return to China she became editor-in-chief of *Women of New China*, ACWF's official journal. For Zijiu biography see Zheng (2010, 829–31).

Shi Liang 史良 (1900–85)

Shi Liang was born in 1900 in Changzhou (Jiangsu Province) from a family with economic difficulties. Her father, however, succeeded in supporting her first education by teaching her about classics and history and, when she was fourteen, her family could afford to send her to school. Shi Lian completed primary school in two years (starting from fourth grade) and enrolled at Changzhou Women's Normal School in 1915, graduating from there around 1921. During her school years, she read many progressive books and articles and she also participated in the May Fourth Movement in 1919, representing the students from Changzhou. After a teaching experience she continued her studies at Shanghai University of Law and Politics in 1923, becoming one of the first students to receive education in that field, graduating in law in 1927, after the first KMT-CCP united front was created. Deeply involved in progressive politics since her high school years, also during university she committed herself to her political ideas and in 1925 she participated in a pro-labor student demonstration, being arrested for one night. That same year she edited the appreciated student magazine *Erasing the Shame* 雪恥 (*Xuechi*). After having taken part in the Northern Expedition, she began her legal career in Shanghai in 1931, becoming one of the two women admitted to the Shanghai bar. After some experience in a law office, she opened her own one, specializing in marriage and political cases and gaining an insight of the unfairness women of her time had to undergo. She also became part of the China League for the Protection of Civil Rights 中国民权保障同盟 (*Zhongguo minquan baozhang tongmeng*), wishing to provide legal support for political prisoners and understanding with time, that law in those days was nothing more than pretence. After having assisted to police violence on women on March 1932 International Women's Day's rally, she formed in 1934 with other women the Women's

National Salvation Association of Shanghai 上海妇女界救国联合会 (*Shanghai funüjie jiuguo lianhehui*), which became part, in 1935 of Song Qinglin's National Salvation Association 全国各界救国联合会 (*Quanguo gejie jiuguo lianhehui*), with which she marched in september 1936 for the fifth anniversary of the Japanese invasion. These types of activities led to her arrest the same year as one of the Seven Virtuous Ones. They were released on bail the day after, but an order was issued and Shi Liang had to hide in order to deal with all those documents in her position that might have incriminated others, giving herself up to the police at the end of that year. On July 7, 1937 the second KMT-CCP united front was declared and The Seven Virtuous Ones released at the end of the month. During the war against Japan, Shi Liang contributed to resistance efforts and served on several major women's and patriotic organizations. In this period she also married a Shanghai lawyer named Lu Diandong 陆殿东. In 1949, not long before the creation of the PRC, Shi Liang went to Beijing on the occasion of the first meeting of the ACWF and the CPPCC, being elected in the role of Executive Committees of both organizations. After 1949, with the establishment of the PRC, she became minister of Justice and part of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee 政治法律委员会 (*Zhengzhi falü weiyuanhui*) and, later, member of the Law Commission. In 1953, she was elected deputy chair of the ACWF and deputy chair of the Committee for the Enforcement of the 1950 Marriage Law. Throughout her long career, Shi Liang often represented China overseas as part of official delegations, going to France (1949), Austria (accompanying Song Qingling to the World Peace Congress in Vienna in 1952), Czechoslovakia (1956), India (1956 and 1967), Ceylon (1958) and Russia (1950). In 1957, she participated in a preparatory meeting of the International Jurists Conference in Syria. Shi Liang also met dignitaries from foreign countries in Beijing. For more information on Shi Liang see

Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 450–5), Shi autobiography (1987) and the recent propagandistic work by the Celebrity biographies editorial department (2018).

Song Qingling 宋庆龄 (1893–1981)

Wife of the revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan, 1866–1925), Song Qinglin (Soong Ching-ling) was born in Shanghai in 1893 in a Christian progressive family. She was the second of six children, and one of the three famous Soong sisters. After attending missionary schools in Shanghai, between 1907 and 1913 Song Qinglin went to the USA to continue her studies at the Wesleyan College, Macon (Georgia), from which she graduated. In 1914 she replaced her sister as the English secretary of Sun Yat-sen in Japan. By working together, they started to develop romantic feelings for each other and married despite the opposition of Song Qingling's family. Hers was a childless marriage as in 1922 she had a miscarriage during a military coup. From 1916, she was a great supporter of her husband's revolutionary work and kept promoting his ideals even after his death in 1925. She was also determined to be heard. When Sun Yat-sen's friend Liao Zhongkai was assassinated by the KMT right seems to be the event that led Song Qingling towards developing interest in the CCP. In 1926, she was elected to the KMT Central Executive Committee and contributed to the organization of the Northern Expedition of 1926–27. When the left dominated government was established in Wuhan, she moved there from Guangzhou. The same year Chiang Kai-shek, her future brother-in-law, established an alternative capital in Nanjing, she signed a telegram in which she condemn him for the assassinations of communist leaders and members carried out in the previous months and clarify in an article on the People's Tribune 汉口民众导报 (*Hankou minzhong daobao*), that she was willing to take her distance from the KMT, moving to Moscow

in August, where she met various Soviet officials and Stalin. After six months in Moscow, exchanging telegrams with Chang Kai-shek, who wanted her to return to China, Song Qingling went to Europe, mainly in Berlin, where she stayed until 1931. She briefly went back to China in 1929 for the reinterment of Sun Yat-sen body in a tomb in Nanjing, and while in China she was reelected KMT Central Executive Committee. However she made it clear that her views on Chang Kai-shek hadn't changed. In 1931, Song Qingling's mother passed away and she moved back to China for good. When that same year Japan invaded China, Song Qingling, seeing Chang kai-shek refusing to declare war, definitely distanced herself from the KMT, writing an article titled *The Guomindang Is No Longer a Political Power*. With the Japanese attack, supported by Chang Kai-shek, Song Qingling offered her support to those who had been directly affected by the war. In 1932 she founded the China League for the Protection of Civil Rights 中国民权保障同盟 (*Zhongguo minquan baozhang tongmeng*) with Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 and Yang Xingfo 楊杏佛, through which she managed to free from the KMT jail leftist students, Comintern officers and communists. In 1933 Yang Xingfo was assassinated. The league had to cease its existence. However, its activities continued. In 1935 the seven leaders of the National Salvation Association 全国各界救国会 (*Quanguo gejie jiuguohui*), the Seven Virtuous Ones, were arrested in Shanghai and imprisoned for six months in Suzhou, where Song Qingling organised, in 1936, a protest with a small group, obtaining a positive response from thousands of civilians. That same year, the Xi'an incident occurred. Chang Kai-shek was kidnapped by Zhang Xueliang 张学良, one of his generals, who demanded to form a coalition with the communists against the Japanese, an action that led to the formation of the KMT-CCP alliance. Possibly, Song Qingling acted as

a liaison between the Comintern and the CCP during the incident, reporting a message from Stalin to the CCP in which he asked to keep Chang Kai-shek alive to avoid a civil war. With this second united front, she was elected to the Central Committee of the KMT and during the Fifth Congress in February 1937, Song Qingling and her leftist colleagues gained the majority on the decision to re established Sun Yat-sen's policies of allying with Russia and the CCP and to give support workers and peasants. When six months later Japanese troops invaded Shanghai, Song Qingling went to Hong Kong and formed the China Defense League 保卫中国同盟 (*Baowei Zhongguo tongmeng*), in order to support China against Japan, gathering money and materials from all over the world, providing medicine, equipment and provisions. Song Qingling had to leave Hong Kong in 1941, following a Japanese attack, and went to Chongqing. Her Defence League suffered from the loss of support from Southeast Asia, which fell under the control of the Japanese. However, the advantage of being in Chongqing was that of coming into contact with international figures that, through the League, offered their support. In 1945, Chang Kai-shek invited Mao Zedong and other communist leaders in Chongqing to discuss the importance of maintaining a post war unity. On this occasion, Song Qingling met Mao Zedong. However, in 1946, Chang Kai-shek renewed the civil war. Besides gathering funds for hospitals, orphanages and medicines she transformed, once back to Shanghai, the Defence League into the China Welfare Foundation 中国福利基金 (*Zhongguo fuli jijin hui*), whose aim was that of helping the children of her country. In 1949, after having refused the position of leader of the Republican government (following Chang Kai-shek's resignations), when Shanghai went under the communists' control in May, she was invited to the CCP anniversary, and in September reached Beijing with Deng Yingchao. She was elected vice president of China and an executive member of the First CCPCC,

becoming one of the leaders of the new China. In 1948 she became honorary chair of the ACWDF, maintaining the same position until the end of her life. Keeping her commitment to women's and children's welfare, Song Qingling became president of the Association for the Protection of Children. She also launched the magazine *China Reconstructs* 中国建设 (*Zhongguo jianshe*), edited by Jin Zhonghua, Israel Epstein, and Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley, to promote China's global image, highlighting China's progress in culture, education, and sports, earning international respect. The magazine originally published in Chinese and English, it later expanded to include editions in French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and German. Song Qingling famous collection of essays was published in 1952 under the title *The Struggle for a New China* 为中国奋斗 (*Wei Xin Zhongguo fendou*) (Song 2019). The book contains 64 speeches, articles and statements made by Soong Ching Ling from 1927 to 1952, all of which were selected by Soong Ching Ling herself. On the title page is Soong Ching Ling's dedication: "Dedicated to the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers - the heroic defenders of the people's cause. For more information on Song Qingling's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 466–74) and Eunson (1975).

Tedesco, Giglia (1926-2007)

Giglia Tedesco was born in Roma in 1926 in a liberal and antifascist family. She enrolled in the Faculty of Law, but, with just one exam missing, she didn't graduate. After the war, she was a student working at the Ministry of the Treasury while also engaging in political activity, initially with the group of Catholic communists until its dissolution in 1945, and then with the Communist Party. It was in this context that she met Marisa Cinciari Rodano, Franco Rodano, and Antonio Tatò, whom she

would marry in 1960. In 1946, she organized, with Teresa Mattei and Erminia Romano, a conference of female co-operators, whose participants formed a National Committee, and decided to join the League of Cooperatives. From 1948 to 1956, Giulia Tedesco Tatò held a leadership position in the National League. Between 1959 and 1973, she held leadership roles in the UDI and in 1963, she led the Italian delegation to the WIDF Congress in Moscow, where she decided to leave the federation. Giglia was an early supporter of the feminist movement, recognizing its transformative potential. For more information about Giglia Tedesco see FADN (2019e).

Viviani, Luciana (1917-2012)

Luciana Viviani was born in Napoli in 1917. She was the daughter of the actor and theatre author Raffaele Viviani, from whom she inherited a passion for art and culture. During her University years, as a Foreign Languages and Literatures student, she joined the anti-fasist movement. She took part not only in the Resistance, but also in the fight for women's rights. Luciana Viviani participated in the foundation of the PCI in Napoli and since 1945 she was active in the Party and dedicated to the democratic rebuilding of the nation. Luciana Viviani was one of the first women to be elected to Parliament in 1946, a role that she kept for four legislations. Luciana Viviani was also an active member of UDI since the year the Union was born, in 1944. In 1948, she was appointed as a Deputy, a role that she kept until 1968. For more information on Luciana Viviani's life see ACMDN (2013).

Xiang Jingyu 向警予 (1895-1928)

Xiang Jingyu was born in a progressive family in 1895, in Xupu (Hunan province). Intelligent and energetic, she was an early member of the CCP and leader of the women's movements in Shanghai during the first united front with the KMT, she is remembered as a martyr since 1949 (when the communists came to power), as she had been an exemplary communist citizen, dedicated to the CCP's cause, besides being an educated, hard working woman. Xiang Jingyu graduated from the privately funded Zhounan Girls' School in Changsha, known as a centre of student activism, where she met Cai Chang, who introduced her to her brother Cai Hesun 陈独秀 (1896-1931) and his friend Mao Zedong. Xiang Jingyu strongly believed that China could be changed through education and, for that reason, she established a school in her hometown, where she worked as the principal until 1919, returning to Changsha and helping Cai Chang to organize, through the Sino French Education Society, a program aimed at allowing women to join a work-study program in France, on the same line of that founded by Mao Zedong and Cai Hesun one year earlier. Xiang Jingyu joined the program and went to France, accompanied by Cai Chang, Cai Hesun and their mother in 1919, where she started to believe in Bolshevism as a model for China and embracing its view of the "woman question". Here in 1920, she also married Cai Hesun. Their wedding was far from traditional as they both referred to their union as the "Xiang-Cai Alliance". Two years later, the couple moved back to China, in Shanghai, where they both joined the CCP. In 1923, after the Party approved the first united front, she joined the KMT and, in the same year, she became editor of *Women's Weekly* 妇女周报 (*Funu zhoubao*), with experience gained the year before by contributing to different women's publications. The themes emerging from her texts are related to the woman's condition and her anti-imperialist ideals.

For what concern the role of women in society, Dong Bian kept believing in the importance of a proper education, stating the importance of including women, but advocating the importance of separated schools and organizations, as, in practice women didn't have the right preparation, were afraid of speaking in public and were often dominated by the male presence. Another important theme in her writing is the evident ambiguity of the women related ideology of the CCP, which believed in gender equality and the fact that equality, due to prejudice and lack of resources, wasn't actually a priority.

Xiang Jingyu also had an affair with Peng Shuzhi 彭述之, protégée of the party chairman Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, worsening a disagreement in relation to the party organization between them and Cai Hesen and Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, besides causing her to lose her role as a leader in the women's movement. After the affair, Xiang Jingyu and Cai Hesen moved to Moscow, coming back to China in 1927 where, in Wuhan, she became part of the Propaganda Department of the Wuhan General Trade Union. When in 1928 the communists were officially expelled from the government by the left-wing KMT, she was arrested in Wuhan's French Concession and executed on May 1 of the same year. For further details on Xiang Jingyu's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 577–579).

Xie Bingxin 謝冰心 (1900–1999)

Xie Bingxin was born as Xie Wanying in 1900 in Changle, Minhou County (Fujian Province). But it is with the name Bing Xin that she is known as one of the most admired Chinese writers of her time. Daughter of an educated woman and a naval officer, she had a chance to come into contact with both traditional and modern ideals,

starting to read from a young age, thanks to her mother's support, both Chinese classics and translations of literature from all over the world. She studied at Bridgeman Girls' School in Beijing and in 1918 enrolled in the Union Women's University, which, one year later, merged with Yanjing University. After graduating in 1923, Bing Xin started an M.A. in English literature at Wellesley College (USA), completing it in 1926. Back in China she taught at Yanjing, Qinghua, and Peking Universities and married in 1929 Wu Wenzao 吴文藻, a socio-anthropologist and ethnologist. Characteristic of Bing Xin personality is that she remained mostly apolitical throughout her life, preferring to dedicate herself to literature, with a productive career which lasted seventy years. This choice, despite the way the dramatic political event of the time had influenced her life, allowed her to be free from controversies. Bing Xin's career started with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, with the piece *About the Trial on the Twenty-first* 二十一日庭审的感想 (*Ershiyiri tingshen de ganxiang*), published in the August 1925's issue of the *Beijing Morning Herald* 北京晨报 (*Beijing chenbao*), through which she gave a first hand account of the student movement. During those harsh years she found herself facing many hardships. In 1936 she went to the USA with her husband and came back to China at the start of the war against Japan. Between 1938 and 1946 she spent her time in a virtual exile, away from Wu Wenzao, teaching at Southwest Union University (Kunming, Yunnan Province), then she went to Japan, where, from 1949 to 1950, she was professor of modern Chinese literature at Tokyo University. Bing Xin, moved back to China in 1951, where she became part of different cultural exchange missions and had a chance to be involved in many overseas travels until 1965. The details of these travel experiences are reported in some of her writings. During the Cultural Revolution, due to the fact that Wu Wenzao was accused of being a rightist, she found herself working in labor

camps. Due to her outstanding literary career, which also reflected the themes connected to her experiences, described with realism, but never lacking the innocence and the feeling which she used to describe with honesty, led her to achieve many titles. She was deputy to the Fifth NPC, member of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC, and vice-president of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. For more details on Bing Xin's life see Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 18–20).

Xu Guangping 许广平 (1898–1968)

Xu Guangping was born in a declining official family in 1898 in Guangzhou (Guangdong Province). She demonstrated from the start to have a rebellious behaviour, refusing to bind her feet and to accept an arranged marriage. In 1917, after her father's death, she moved to Tianjin for studying purposes and became part of the Tianjin Women's Patriotic Association 天津女界爱国同志会 (*Tianjin nüjie aiguo tongzhi hui*), as well as a member of the editorial staff of the association's magazine *Enlightening Weekly* 启示周刊 (*Qingshi zhoukan*). After graduating in 1921, Xu Guangping entered the Beijing Beijing Women's Higher Normal School, which became Beijing Women's Normal University in 1924. In 1923, the setting became a place of collision between conservative and progressive ideologies, and the president Xu Shoushang 徐守璋 (1882–1948) was replaced by the conservative Yang Yinyu 杨荫渝 (d. 1938). The conflicts that arose in the college brought with them a two months closure due to mass resignation of the professors, on which Xu Guangping had a sceptical view. For this reason, she sought Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881–1936) opinion and started a correspondence with him. Influenced by the writer's ideas, she decided to be politically involved and became one of the students' representatives, who were in

1925 expelled by Yang Yinyu. The conflicts that arose in the college led to polemics between the *Modern Review* 现代评论 (*Xiandai pinglun*) circle, whose head was Chen Yuan, and the *Spinner of Words* 语丝 (*Yusi*) circle, whose head was Lu Xun. Xu Guangping felt attracted by the interest that Lu Xun was showing towards the students' cause and fell in love with him, becoming his disciple and leaving Beijing with him, taking separate ways, following the March Eighteenth Incident of 1926. She went to Guangzhou, where she joined the KMT, founding Herschel in another conflict: the one that arose between the CCP members and their allies in the KMT and its rightist members. Lu Xun reached Xu Guangping in Guangzhou but in 1927 they left for Shanghai after giving their resignation following the communist massacre committed by the KMT. At the time Xu Guangping was working at the Guangdong First Women's Normal College. In Shanghai Xu Guangping, in order to support Lu Xun's literary movement, became his assistant and started to take care of the house, giving birth to his child in 1929. When in 1936 Lu Xun died, Xu Guangping kept honoring his works and legacy, also by publishing different essays about her late husband, which were gathered in two volumes in 1951 and 1954. In 1941, she was arrested and tortured by the Japanese, writing about her terrible experience in a book that was published in 1947. When Japan surrendered, Xu Guangping became in 1945, head of the China Women's Association 中国妇女联合会 (*Zhongguo funü lianyihui*) and, 1946, she became editor of *Friends of Women* 妇友 (*Fu you*), supplement of the *Wenhui Daily* 文汇报 (*Wenhui bao*). In 1948, she had to move to the northeast in the communist liberated areas to escape persecution from the KMT, and in 1949 she held different minor positions and in 1949 she started to represent the Chinese Association for the Promotion of Democracy 中国民主促进会 (*Zhongguo minzhu cujinhui*). Xu Guangping also founded Lu Xun's museums and archives. For

further details on Xu Guangping's biography see Fan (1986) Lee, Stefanowska (2003, 601–3) and Chen (2011).

Yang Yunyu 杨蕴玉 (1919-2022)

Yang Yunyu, originally from Henan Province, got first involved in revolutionary work in October 1936 and joined the CCP in April of the following year. During the Anti-Japanese War, she served as the secretary of the county committee of the Communist Party of China in Xiyang and Zuoquan County, the anti-Japanese base of Taihang Mountain, and the deputy secretary of the Women's Committee of the North China Bureau of the Communist Party of China 中共中央华北局妇女委员会 (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Huabei ju funü weiyuanhui*) during the Liberation War. After the PRC foundation, she was a party group member and deputy minister of the Ministry of Education. Deputies to the First, Second, and Third National People's Congress, a member of the Standing Committee of the Third National People's Congress 第三届全国人民代表大会常务委员会 (*Disanjie Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui changwu weiyuanhui*), and representatives of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China 中国共产党第八次全国代表大会 (*Zhongguo Gongchandang di baci Quanguo Daibiao Dahui*). She was also involved in the ACWDF from May 1949 to October 1953. She worked at the Beijing local federation, being engaged in significant reforms, among which closing down of brothels and reforming prostitutes, promoting the establishment of grassroots women's federations, organizing women to carry out production and self-help, working hand-in-hand with the local federation of trade unions; the implementation of the marriage law after the 1953 campaign. In October 1953, she transferred to the national ACWDF, where she

served as the secretary of the Secretariat of the Chinese Federation to the WIDF. From then on, she began her career as a recruit on the foreign affairs front. For four years, she was under the management of the ACWDF, but her work was under the management of the WIDF. After the 1957 ACWF Third National Congress, Yang was succeeded by Wu Quanheng 吴全衡 at the WIDF secretariat and started to serve as the secretary of the Secretariat of the ACWF, in charge of foreign affairs and the International Liaison Department. From 1962 to July 1963, she worked again as the ACWF resident secretary at the WIDF until she was succeeded by Zhang Jiexun 张洁珣 (JPP 1988).

Yu Ruzhou 于汝洲 (1901 - 1988)

Yu Ruzhou was born in 1901. She studied at Peking Union Medical College but did not complete the program, later graduating from Shanghai Renhe College of Obstetrics. In the early years of her career, she served as a medical officer at the General Office for Epidemic Prevention and Control in the Three Northeastern Provinces 东三省防疫事务总处 (*Dong sansheng fangyi shiwu zongchu*), as well as in Daheihe, Heilongjiang Province, where she also worked as a police medical officer. She later became a physician and director at Songjiang Hospital in Harbin and served concurrently as principal of the Songjiang Obstetrics School. After the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, she took part in wartime childcare relief efforts, serving as a director of the Hankou Wartime Children's Care Association 汉口战时儿童保育会 (*Hankou zhanshi ertong baoyu hui*) and as head of the transportation station of the Yichang Wartime Children's Care Association 宜昌战时儿童保育会 (*Yichang zhanshi ertong baoyu hui*), coordinating the relocation and sheltering

of displaced war orphans. Following the war, she was active in national reconstruction and politics. In 1946, Yu was elected as a vocational representative from Harbin to the National Constituent Assembly 制宪国民大会 (*Zhixian Guomin Dahui*). In 1947, she was appointed a member of the National Political Council. She passed away on March 18, 1988, at the age of 87. For more information about Yu Ruzhou see Liu (2005).

Zanti, Carmen (1923 - 1979)

Carmen Zanti was born in Cavriago in 1923. Her father Angelo Zanti had been a communist since 1921 and, due to his political views, which collided with those of fascism, moved in 1923 in France, leaving his pregnant wife, who reached him with the new born Carmen the same year. The family moved back to Italy in 1925, but had to go back to France five years later and remained there until 1939. In France Carmen Zanti and her six years younger brother lived in a progressive environment compared to their peers in Italy. As a matter of fact, when she was just 12 years old, Carmen Zanti became part of the *Young Girls from France* (*Jeunes filles de France*), an organization dedicated to girls created by the French Communist Party. In 1940 France was invaded by German troops, so the Zanti family had to move back to Italy, in Reggio Emilia, where they lived until 1943. In this same year, Miss. Zanti, her father and her brother decided to take part in the fight for national liberation and 1944, for a short period of time, she was arrested as a hostage for her father. Between 1950 and 1953, Carmen Zanti covered an important role inside the WIDF, where she entered as the spokesperson of the UDI and represented at first Italy in the role of sec-

retary and later she became general secretary. In this context, her transnational character will be clearly shown. The reason which brought to choose her in the role of general secretary was not only her perfect knowledge of the French language (official language of the WIDF), but also for her experience abroad, which made her aware of the reality of other countries. When in 1951 the WIDF was expelled from France, Carmen Zanti moved to East Berlin, where the federation had its new headquarters and kept her role until 1953. She then returned to the Federation in the role of general secretary from 1957 to 1964. In this environment, Carmen Zanti will find herself in a difficult position, as she had to mediate between the UDI and the WIDF, where the first asked the Federation to unite different political groups of women and give more space to the women question. For further details see Ledda (2018).

Zhang Yun 章蕴 (1905-1995)

Born Du Runzhang, Zhang Yun came from Hunan province. In 1925, she joined the CCP in Hankou, where she studied. Zhang held a leading position coordinating the local Women's department within the KMT and the CCP during the First United Front 联俄容共 (*Lian E Rong Gong*). She married Li Yunsheng 李耘生, (1905-1932), a victim of the KMT purges. In the late 1930s, after a period of distance from the underground party, we find Zhang as county secretary to the CCP Xiangtan Committee and as leading cadre of the Southeastern Branch Office's Women's Committee 东南分局妇女委员会 (*Dongnan fenju funü weiyuanhui*), as well as secretary to the local area's Central Jiangsu Committee. From 1945, she served as a CCP Central China branch committee member. She held the position of head of the Women's Department (中共中央华中局委员妇女部长 *Zhonggong Huazhongju Weiyuan*

Funübuzhang) and head of the East China Division Women's Department 华东局妇女部长 (*Huadongju Funübuzhang*). She also had an educator for the women's cadre. After the PRC foundation, in 1949, Zhang Yun served on the CCP East China Bureau's Women's Committee 中共中央华东局妇女委员会 (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Huadong ju funü weiyuanhui*), among other roles, as director of Shanghai Municipal Women's Federation 上海市妇女联合会 (*Shanghai shi funü lianhehui*). In the 1950s and early 60s, she also held leading roles at the national level. Zhang was the third secretary to the CCP Women's Committee (1952), secretary-general (1952), and vice-chair (1953) of the ACWF. She was also elected to NPCs and CPPCC, of whose Standing Committee she was a member. During the Cultural Revolution, she was persecuted but later rehabilitated in 1975, becoming among the Central Committee Discipline and Inspection members supervising matters arising from the Cultural Revolution «with extraordinary courage, insight, and boldness» (Lee, Stafanowska 2003, 700). Her work organizing the party, particularly women's work, is collected in an autobiographical book (Zhang 1986; Hu, Guo 1986). After her death, the ACWF remembered her through publishing a biographical account (1996a) and a collection of her essays (1996b).

Zhu Hanzhu 朱涵珠 (? - ?)

Zhu Hanzhu, a prominent Chinese revolutionary and activist, was born in Jiang'an County, Sichuan Province, into a patriotic family. Her father, Zhu Shan 朱山, was a martyr of the 1911 Revolution, an early and formative loss that framed her later devotion to national service and revolutionary ideals. Zhu studied law at Beiping University, where she was a classmate of Zhu Zongbin 朱宗斌. The two were involved

in underground Communist Party activities, and later married. Tragedy struck when Zhu Zongbin was killed while engaged in party work, leaving Zhu Hanzhu widowed with a four-month-old son, Zhu Lei 朱磊. Carrying her infant in swaddling clothes, she fled and searched for renewed organizational contact, continuing her clandestine service to the revolution. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, Zhu came under the leadership of Deng Yingchao and played a vital role in laying the groundwork for the China Wartime Childcare Association 战时儿童保育会 (*Zhanshi ertong baoyu hui*). She served as dean of the Wuhan Orphanage, which doubled as a contact point for the underground Communist Party. Under the cover of childcare work, she engaged in covert operations, including the rescue of arrested underground Party members. Her son Zhu Lei, still a child at the time, was often overlooked by authorities and acted as a messenger, similar to the children depicted in the patriotic film *Chicken Feather Letter* 鸡毛信 (*Jimao xin*). In 1938, Zhu Hanzhu was appointed a preparatory committee member of the China Wartime Childcare Association 战时儿童保育会 (*Zhanshi ertong baoyu hui*), a major civil initiative to rescue and care for children displaced by war. When the organization was formally established on March 10, 1938, she was named to its Board of Directors, and subsequently served on the Childcare Committee, which oversaw the setup and supervision of relief institutions. In 1951, amid the Korean War, Zhu was selected as a delegate in the First Chinese People's Delegation to Korea. She was part of the Fourth Subgroup, representing the Wuhan Democratic Women's Federation 武汉市民主妇女联合会 (*Wu-han shi minzhu funü lianhehui*). The delegation, composed of over 500 people, crossed into Korea to deliver supplies, perform cultural outreach, and boost the morale of Chinese and North Korean troops and civilians. Zhu's inclusion in this high-profile mission attests to her recognized stature in women's mobilization and her

unwavering dedication to the national cause. After returning from Korea, Zhu Hanzhu would have participated in post-delegation domestic outreach, which included delivering public reports and presentations about the front-line experiences to Chinese citizens across the country, helping to strengthen national support for the war effort. Throughout her life, Zhu Hanzhu remained deeply embedded in networks of women's activism, underground resistance, and patriotic relief work. For more about Zhu Hanzhu see Chen (2020), Fu (2006), Liu (2021), Lu (2017), Tong (2016).

Zou Dexin 邹德馨 (? - ?)

Zou Dexin was a Communist Party member active in the resistance against Japanese occupation and later in the struggle to liberate southern China during the Chinese Civil War. Originating from Hunan Province, she emerged as a Party cadre through organizational and political work in several pivotal cities. In late 1938, Zou Dexin was assigned to the Hankou Christian YWCA Wartime Service Corps 汉口基督教女青年会战时服务团 (*Hankou Jidujiao nü qingnianhui zhanshi fuwu tuan*), which relocated to Hengyang following the fall of Wuhan. Under the direction of the Eighth Route Army Hengyang Office 八路军驻衡阳办事处 (*Balujun zhu Hengyang banshichu*), led by Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying, Zou participated in building a Communist Party cell within the Service Corps alongside fellow Party member Huang Meidi. Their work centered on ideological education, political coordination, and united front activities under Kuomintang rule. In 1940, the Service Corps relocated to Guilin. Zou Dexin served as deputy head of the Corps and helped direct its operations under the leadership of the South Bureau's Guilin Office. There, the group,

composed of over 70 League members including more than 20 Party members, engaged in relief, medical aid, and anti-Japanese propaganda under the cover of religious work. After the Southern Anhui Incident in 1941, Zou Dexin and other members were ordered to disperse and conceal themselves to avoid arrest. Later in 1949, as the People's Liberation Army prepared to enter Hunan, Zou Dexin was appointed to the leadership team of the newly formed Changsha Municipal Committee of the Communist Party. Under the direction of the Hunan Provincial Work Committee, she worked with cadres like Liu Qingbo and Shen Liren to oversee urban protection, intelligence gathering, propaganda, and coordination of underground resistance ahead of the peaceful liberation of Changsha. Her responsibilities also included unifying previously separate underground branches and supervising the reception and transition to Party control after liberation. For more information about Zou Dexin see HDPHP (2019), AJWMN (2020), AJWMN (2014), Hong (2009).

List of Literature

Archive Materials

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, General CIA Records

ACS MI: Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Milano, Gabinetto, Archivio generale, Fascicoli correnti (1953-1956)

ACUDI: Union of Italian Women Central Archive. Thematic Collection “Women in the World”.

FG: Fondazione Gramsci Archive. Italian Communist Party Archive; Maria Antonietta Macciocchi Fond.

Lelio e Lisli Basso Foundation in Rome. Ada Alessandrini Fond.

Piero Gobetti Foundation Archive. Ada Prospero Gobetti Fond.

UDI Siena Archive. Ilia Bocci Fond.

UDI Pesaro Archive. Sparta Trivella Fond.

UFN: Unione Femminile Nazionale Archive. Tullia Carrettoni Romagnoli Fond.

Newspapers

Avanti! 1954-1960

People's Daily [人民日报 Renmin Ribao] 1949-1966

Il Messaggero 1956

Il Paese 1954-1955

Il Paese Sera 1954

Il Tempo 1954-1956

L'Unità 1949-1966

Rinascita 1954

Periodicals

ZGFN = Xin Zhongguo Funü 新中国妇女 (Women of New China), 1953–1955 and

Zhongguo Funü 中国妇女 (Women of China), 1956–1965.

ND = Noi Donne, 1948–1966.

Other periodicals have been consulted inconsistently, and the corresponding references are provided in the footnotes.

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List of Abbreviations

AAPSO	Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization
ACWDF	All-China Women's Democratic Federation, Zhonghua Quanguo Funü Lianhehui 中华全国民主妇女联合会 (1949-1957; later ACWF)
ACSW	Antifascist Committee of Soviet Women (1941-1956; later CSW)
ACWF	All-China Women's Federation, Zhonghua Quanguo Funü Lianhehui 中华全国妇女联合会 (1957-; before ACWDF)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party 中国共产党 Zhongguo Gongchandang
CCWMC	Central Committee's Women's Movement Committee, Zhonggong Zhongyang Funü Yundong Weiyuanhui 中共中央妇女运动委员会
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference 中国人民政治协商会议 Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CGIL	Italian General Confederation of Labour (Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CSW	Committee of Soviet Women (1956-; before ACSW)
CWLA	Chinese Women of the Liberated Areas
DC	Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana)

DEDAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FDIF	Fédération démocratique internationale des femmes (see also WIDF)
FGCI	Italian Communist Youth Federation (Federazione giovanile comunista italiana)
FUDANREN	Federation of Japanese Women's Organizations
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GSF	Global Socialist Feminism
IADL	International Association of Democratic Lawyers
IAW	International Alliance of Women
ICD	International Children's Day
ICW	International Council of Women
IFFPP	International Federation of Former Political Prisoners
IFTU	International Federation of Teachers' Unions
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOJ	International Organization of Journalists
IUS	International Union of Students
IWD	International Women's Day
KCP	Korean Communist Party
KDWU	Korean Democratic Women's Union
KMT	Chinese Nationalist party 国民党 Kuomintang
KNPC	Korean National Peace Committee
KWP	Korean Workers Party

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PCI	Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano)
PRC	People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国 Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo
PSI	Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano)
ROC	Republic of China 中華民國 Zhonghua Minguo
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
UDI	Union of Italian Women (Unione Donne Italiane)
UFF	Union of French Women (Union des Femmes Françaises)
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UNCURK	United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation (see also FDIF)
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WFDY	World Federation of Democratic Youth
WFTU	World federation of Trade Unions
WPC	World Peace Council