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To cite this article: Bruno Walter Renato Toscano (13 Jul 2026): The Italian connection: Donne in Lotta per la Pace, the Women's International Democratic Federation, and transnational pacifism in the 1980s, Women's History Review, DOI: [10.1080/09612025.2026.2702192](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2026.2702192)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2026.2702192>



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Published online: 13 Jul 2026.



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The Italian connection: Donne in Lotta per la Pace, the Women's International Democratic Federation, and transnational pacifism in the 1980s

Bruno Walter Renato Toscano 

Department of Humanities, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy

ABSTRACT

The following article focuses on the history of the connection between the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and Italy in the 1980s, through the history of Donne in lotta per la pace (DLP, Women in Struggle for Peace), a small leftist organisation founded in Florence in 1981 and active until 1992. This article provides the first sustained historical analysis of the connection between the WIDF and Italian activism in the 1980s, on which no previous scholarly analysis has focused. As the piece shows, DLP became a key interlocutor for the WIDF, linking local activism against US nuclear missiles and militarisation to transnational networks for peace. The article traces DLP's formation, its participation in international conferences, and its engagement with WIDF initiatives focused on anti-militarism and peace. It argues that the WIDF supported smaller, locally grounded organisations like DLP to connect national concerns with global struggles. By analysing DLP's demonstrations, delegations, and publications, the article highlights Italy's role in international women's peace activism and underscores the WIDF's central role in fostering transnational solidarity and a culture of women-centred peace.

KEYWORDS

Women's history;
transnational history; Italy;
Women's International
Democratic Federation;
1980s; Cold War studies

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Liberation [...]. We women, who fight for emancipation and peace, will also commemorate this important anniversary [...]. But can we truly call this condition of 'balance of terror' a state of peace, when dozens of 'local' armed conflicts continually threaten to shatter it? [...] No, this was not the peace policy that women demanded from the new state born of the Italian Resistance – and which they sought to guarantee through specific principles and norms enshrined in the republican Constitution [of 1947].¹

Ada Donno, a young schoolteacher and activist in Donne in lotta per la pace (DLP, Women in Struggle for Peace), spoke these words at a national conference organised by the women of the Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia (ANPI, National

CONTACT Bruno Walter Renato Toscano brunowalter.toscano@gmail.com  Department of Humanities, Ca'Foscari University of Venice, Malcantòn Marcorà, Dorsoduro 3484/D, Venice 30123, Italy

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Association of Italian Partisans) on 18–19 May 1984, which addressed peace in relation to the US–Italian agreement to install Cruise missiles at the Comiso base in Sicily.² This decision followed the 1977 deployment of Soviet medium-range missiles and aligned with NATO’s 1979 decision to station the so-called Euromissiles in Europe.³ Opposition to the Cruise missile deployment was marked by significant women’s mobilisation, most notably through the *Ragnatela* (Cobweb) movement. This initiative began in December 1982, when around 12,000 Italian, English and Irish women surrounded the US military base in Comiso. They subsequently created a peace camp there in June 1983.⁴ Taking inspiration from other women’s peace camps internationally, including Greenham Common in Britain, Seneca Falls in the United States, Pine Gap in Australia and Kerzets-kamp in the Netherlands, activists in Comiso built a network of transnational relationships that established the *Ragnatela* as a vital node within the global anti-nuclear movement.⁵

At the May 1984 conference, Donno emphasised the dual task of preserving the legacy of Italian women’s participation in the Resistance against Nazi fascism while confronting the international order of the 1980s. She recalled the lesson of the Italian women partisans: peace required eradicating the social, political, and cultural causes of conflict, while dialogue among women across opposing blocs was essential to dismantling the imposed image of the ‘enemy’.⁶ This emphasis on women’s role in the struggle for peace echoed the outlook of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), with which DLP developed close ties. The WIDF is a left-wing, anti-fascist women’s international organisation established in Paris in 1945, that brought together women’s organisations from across the world. By situating women both as heirs to the Italian Resistance against fascism and as active builders of international solidarity networks after the Second World War, DLP positioned itself as the Italian organisation most closely integrated into the WIDF’s anti-imperialist culture of peace.

Over the past decade, the history of the WIDF has attracted increasing scholarly attention worldwide.⁷ While the body of scholarship on the Federation’s history has expanded, research specifically addressing its relationship with Italy remains limited. Existing scholarship has focused primarily on the WIDF’s ties with the *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI, Union of Italian Women), the national association founded in 1945 to promote women’s political mobilisation and emancipation, whose membership came largely from the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI, Italian Communist Party) and the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI, Italian Socialist Party). These studies have focused on the early period – from the 1940s to 1963 – when the UDI formally severed its relations with the WIDF in protest against the Federation’s decision-making procedures.⁸ The subsequent decades, particularly the interactions between the WIDF and Italian groups beyond the UDI, have remained unexplored.

The history of DLP also belongs to a particularly rich body of scholarship that has recently brought to light the role of women’s activism in pacifist and anti-nuclear mobilisation in republican Italy, while revealing both its complexity and its international outlook.⁹ More specifically, this study expands research on women’s pacifism in the 1980s by foregrounding the delicate balance between the structural fragility and resilience of women’s peace-building organisations during a period of profound ideological and global transition in the late Cold War.

This article examines how the WIDF re-established its relationship with Italy in the 1980s, a decade marked by intense international women's activism – both in the wake of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985) and increasing participation of women and feminists in the worldwide peace movement. It demonstrates that ties between the WIDF and Italy persisted even after the UDI's withdrawal from the Federation. The case of DLP further illustrates how the WIDF interacted with smaller organisations whose effectiveness stemmed from their engagement in local contexts and their ability to connect national concerns with international struggles.

DLP was based in Florence but brought together activists from across Italy. It prioritised transnational relationships while maintaining strong links with Italian political organisations committed to peace and to preserving the legacy of the Italian Resistance. The group remained active for more than a decade (1981–1992). From 1985 onwards, DLP published the journal *Iride* to amplify women's dissent against NATO's decisions, situating these critiques within the broader frameworks of pacifism and anti-imperialism that closely aligned with the WIDF's agenda. Two of the group's main leaders were Ada Donno and Carla Francone. Donno was a former UDI member from Puglia, southern Italy, while Francone, from Liguria in northern Italy, was an activist in a Maoist grassroots organisation. After co-founding DLP, they jointly managed international relations with the WIDF until the early 1990s.

This article proceeds by tracing DLP's roots in the pro-Soviet extra-parliamentary left and its opposition to the PCI. It then examines the group's formation, its relationship with the WIDF and the ways in which the symbolism of the Italian Resistance during the Second World War became a crucial tool for DLP in legitimising women's pacifist activism in Italy. Finally, it analyses the group's dissolution in relation to the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences for Marxist transnational solidarity networks. The research draws on a range of sources, including the women's and left-wing press (*Lotta per la pace*, *Iride*, *Noi donne*, *Nuova Unità* and *Women of the Whole World* – the WIDF's main journal), the private papers of Ada Donno (the only known archival DLP collection currently in existence), and oral history interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025 with Ada Donno and Carla Francone.

1. Nino Pasti, 'Lotta per la pace', and the roots of Donne in lotta per la pace (1980–1981)

The late 1970s and early 1980s were shaped by a tense and unstable international climate. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to a deeply unpopular war, while, in the United States, President Ronald Reagan abandoned détente in favour of open confrontation with the USSR.¹⁰ In Italy, political instability, mounting public debt, and shifting alliances produced a fragile five-party coalition. At the same time, the country sought to reaffirm its role in international affairs. In this geopolitical framework, the crisis experienced by parts of Italian feminism during the years of the so-called *riflusso* (withdrawal) – a term denoting the retreat from collective political engagement and the waning of the women's grassroots mobilisation that had shaped the 1960s and 1970s – coincided with the growing prominence in Italy of transnational pacifist and feminist activism.¹¹ At the international level, by contrast, the United Nations Decade for Women opened new

spaces for transnational debate on women's rights, development, and related political concerns.

DLP emerged at the intersection of these national and international dynamics, but it was also rooted in the history of the Italian National Coordination Committee for Peace. Established on 16 November 1980 as a coalition of grassroots organisations, the Committee sought to advance the Charter of the World People's Parliament for Peace, adopted that same year by the World Peace Council (WPC), formerly known as the World Congress of Partisans for Peace.¹² The central figure and spokesperson of the Italian National Coordination Committee for Peace was Nino Pasti, who also founded *Lotta per la Pace* (Struggle for Peace), an organisation within the Committee that published a periodical bearing the same name.¹³ A former NATO Deputy Commander in Europe for Nuclear Affairs, Pasti served as an independent left-wing senator, initially affiliated with the PCI. He subsequently broke with the party over its stance towards the Soviet Union. From the 1950s onwards, the complex relationship between the PCI and the USSR, and the Italian party's alignment with Soviet policy, became one of the principal reasons behind the departure of some of its activists. Such departures had occurred in November 1956, when the party secretary, Palmiro Togliatti, defended the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution, and again in August 1968, when the party leadership, by contrast, condemned the USSR's invasion of Czechoslovakia to suppress dissent during the Prague Spring.¹⁴

From the 1970s onwards, particularly under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, the PCI increasingly distanced itself from the USSR, defining a more autonomous political strategy through closer relations with countries in the Global South and with other European communist and socialist parties, while elaborating a 'third way' between Soviet politics and social democracy. Despite the PCI's attempts during these years to maintain the cohesion of the Left – particularly in response to the proliferation of extra-parliamentary organisations born of the long 1968 – this project had largely unravelled by the end of the 1970s.¹⁵ Nino Pasti – a figure who has not yet been the subject of historical research – was among the most forceful opponents of Berlinguer's positions, especially his support for NATO's collective defence policy, which entailed the stationing of US nuclear weapons in Italy.¹⁶

The former general criticised the installation of Cruise missiles in Europe, arguing that NATO's military strength far exceeded that of the USSR. He interpreted the US refusal to ratify the 1979 SALT II Treaty – which was intended to establish equal limits on strategic nuclear weapons and reduce their number – as a deliberate act of belligerence.¹⁷ While the PCI had gradually softened its critique of US foreign policy, Pasti distinguished himself by continuing to support the Soviet Union and by maintaining a distinctly anti-American stance. His positions drew on interwar Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, framing pacifism as a weapon against imperialism – a view supported by the World Committee of Partisans for Peace, with which he maintained direct ties.¹⁸

To legitimise their stance, Pasti and his supporters invoked the legacy of the anti-fascist Resistance, presenting the partisan struggle as one waged 'with arms, but aimed at conquering peace'.¹⁹ This framing fostered a close relationship between *Lotta per la Pace* and the ANPI.²⁰ From the late 1970s, several provincial sections of ANPI showed considerable openness to the activism of Pasti and his group. While ANPI invited *Lotta per la Pace* to its congresses to discuss disarmament, Pasti's group, for its

part, placed strong emphasis on this connection. In doing so, it reinforced the idea that the struggle against the deployment of Euromissiles belonged within the legacy of the Italian and European anti-fascist and anti-Nazi resistance – a legacy that, in their view, had been betrayed by the PCI's political choices and its distancing from the USSR.²¹

Women activists within Pasti's group critically reinterpreted these dynamics by establishing close ties with Italian women partisans active in ANPI's local sections, who had created a Women's Commission in 1976. The Commission subsequently promoted several public events on peace, in which DLP activists later took part.²² More broadly, the 1970s were marked by a revival of the memory of the Italian Resistance, which fostered a growing body of historiographical research on women partisans, many of whom became especially active in organising meetings with new generations of activists.²³ Among them were the women active in *Lotta per la Pace*, whose political stances diverged from much of 1970s Italian second-wave feminism through their sustained engagement with the malleable legacy of the Resistance. By foregrounding the activism of women partisans, they framed pacifism as a political field of particular concern to women.²⁴

This view was articulated by Olivia Giordano, editor of *Lotta per la pace*, who reported on the 1981 conference 'Women of Europe in Action for Peace', convened in Amsterdam by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF):

Women are the ones who, in any case, bear the greater and harsher consequences of war, also as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters. Let us remember how the various governments that relegate women to subordinate and secondary roles in peacetime, and burden them with unemployment, suddenly rediscover women in times of war and exalt their role, placing the weight of the national economy on their shoulders, forcing them into factories and fields in place of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers sent to the slaughter to defend interests that are not their own, but those of bosses, governments and multinational corporations.²⁵

Giordano underlined the importance of involving women in the peace movement, since they had historically borne the brunt of war's consequences. She proposed explicitly reaching out to feminist organisations as well as to women's groups that did not necessarily identify as feminist. This outreach targeted those already 'sensitive [...] to peace issues' and sought to mobilise those less attuned to such concerns, while carefully avoiding the 'splintering of the movement' by maintaining a unified focus on peace.²⁶

The tension between prioritising pacifism and openly adopting feminist positions became a central fault line in the political discourse surrounding *Lotta per la Pace*, producing, as the following section shows, conflicts with other women's groups. According to Ada Donno, the general secretaries of both the WIDF and WILPF encouraged Giordano to establish an all-women's organisation within Pasti's movement.²⁷ The outcome was the creation of DLP, which soon gained international recognition from figures such as Janet Bruin, editor of the WILPF journal *Pax et Libertas*, and Mirjam Vire-Tuominen, the Finnish General Secretary of the WIDF.²⁸ Carla Francone also attended the Amsterdam Conference. She decided to join DLP, convinced that women's activism was crucial in the fight for pacifism. As Francone later recalled, DLP did not consider itself a feminist organisation. From its inception, it regarded the feminist movement as primarily concerned with patriarchy and as treating peace as a secondary issue.²⁹

Ada Donno's experience followed a similar trajectory, despite her engagement with feminist groups. Between 1978 and 1979, she participated in the UDI section in Lecce,

then left the group and joined a left-wing women's collective, Collettivo Otto Marzo (8 March collective), which openly sought to combine class and gender analysis.³⁰ These perspectives reflected a broader international tradition of Marxist feminism.³¹ While left-wing women's groups often shared a commitment to integrating class and gender analysis, this common ground did not prevent the ideological conflicts that shaped DLP from its inception.

2. The first steps of Donne in Lotta per la Pace (1982–1984)

As part of Nino Pasti's wider mixed organisation, DLP's first major initiative was to collaborate with other left-wing activists in Rome to coordinate an international conference that would bring together Italian women interested in peace with activists engaged in similar struggles abroad.³² From the preparatory phase onwards, this effort was marked by numerous challenges, which Giordano outlined in a lengthy article for *Lotta per la pace*. Criticism came, on one side, from women affiliated with the major left-wing parties; on the other, according to Giordano, 'provocations, slander and sectarianism' emerged from members of the feminist movement.³³ Nevertheless, the Committee succeeded in organising the conference, titled 'Women's Strategies for Disarmament and Peace', which was held in Rome from 5 to 7 March 1982.³⁴

The ideological tensions that had shaped the preparatory phase also marked the conference itself. The Italian journalist and feminist Roberta Tatafiore described the event in *Noi donne* – a magazine formerly affiliated with the UDI but independent since 1969 – offering one of the few detailed accounts available to historians since, apart from the organisers' official report, the event received no coverage in the Italian press.³⁵ The meeting drew hundreds of participants from around the world, including WIDF spokeswomen, representatives from El Salvador and Nicaragua, prominent figures from Italian civil society, and representatives of the UDI.³⁶ According to Tatafiore, however, many second-wave feminists from Rome were absent, probably as a result of the tensions that had emerged during the preparatory phase.³⁷ Representatives of women's peace collectives from several Italian cities, ranging from Padua to Syracuse, took part, as did women involved in the Comiso *Ragnatela*. The international presence, however, was especially prominent.³⁸

The discussions centred on the risk of military escalation between the USSR and the United States, which could transform Europe into a theatre of war. This concern was emphasised in the opening address, delivered on behalf of the Soviet Women's Committee (SWC), one of the central groups within the WIDF. Unable to attend in person, the SWC sent an appeal to European and American women, urging them to oppose the installation of Euromissiles.³⁹ Although there was broad agreement on the need for a firm critique of the stationing of US missiles on Italian territory, the conference was marked by several conflicts that revealed the fragile balance DLP sought to maintain among feminists active in the peace and disarmament movement. One point of contention arose when the Coordinating Committee invited speakers aligned with the Soviet Union. According to Tatafiore, although the organisers had sought to include 'all women committed to peace throughout the world', in the belief that a common basis for cooperation existed, the presence of delegates from Soviet-aligned European countries – representing 'officially permitted' organisations that had not been censured

for criticising the status of women in socialist states – provoked unease among some participants.

Interviews with Ada Donno and Tatafiore's article confirm that UDI representatives in Rome clashed with participants who supported the WIDF's position. As Victor Strazzeri has noted, the UDI's post-1968 efforts sought to reconcile communism and feminism through 'double militancy'. By contrast, DLP and the WIDF's emphasis on women's activism, rather than explicitly feminist activism, positioned the anti-patriarchal struggle as secondary to peace activism.⁴⁰ Moreover, the UDI's opposition resulted from a longer process of transformation that the historic association had been undergoing and that, in 1982, reached a point of no return. At its Eleventh Congress in May that year, the UDI resolved to dismantle its national hierarchical structure and adopt an explicitly feminist standpoint, as well as a more horizontal and decentred model, to avoid the top-down logic that continued to characterise federations such as the WIDF, from which the UDI had distanced itself in the 1960s.⁴¹ While DLP sought to reclaim a legacy that the UDI had relinquished – a firm relationship with the WIDF – the transformations undergone by the association founded in Italy in the 1940s had made it fundamentally incompatible with any course of action that might undermine its autonomy.

A further source of tension emerged between DLP, the WIDF and the peace collectives represented at the conference. DLP shared a particular attachment to the cult of motherhood, framing women as natural mothers and protectors of life, and interpreting pacifism through this lens. This position also resonated in the activism of the WIDF, which, since its foundation, had drawn on this essentialised imagery as a political tool to advance specific objectives, including opposition to war.⁴² As Maud A. Bracke has shown, Italian women's activism – from the UDI to the small feminist organisations that emerged in the 1960s – rarely challenged a certain essentialism. Instead, it displayed a marked continuity in grounding women's political subjectivity in biological difference and motherhood.⁴³ However, as Margherita Bonomo's study has shown, from the 1980s onwards, feminist movements centred on pacifism and anti-nuclear activism overturned the figure of woman as naturally pacifist in the name of 'maternal instinct'. In this new phase, the idea that there was a biological or natural connection between womanhood and peace was challenged, particularly by the feminists who mobilised against the Comiso base. The defence of life and practices of care were no longer treated as natural attributes or prescribed duties; rather, they were recast as conscious political choices. Similarly, the refusal of violence was no longer understood as a biological destiny, but as a practice of rupture and conflict through which patriarchal and militarist systems of domination could be dismantled.⁴⁴ As Tatafiore notes, on the final day, a 'violent protest broke out' in response to the organisers' proposal that the participants draft a collective statement. UDI representatives denounced the proceedings as 'bureaucratic' and 'non-feminist'. The peace collectives at the conference also rejected the maternalist positions advanced by DLP and the WIDF, distancing themselves from formulations that, in Tatafiore's words, 'lumped together the word woman with the word peace, as if, given the times, it were "natural"'. The objection raised by the protesters concerned the impossibility of concluding the event with a single unified statement, which, they argued, could not adequately represent the diversity of the women's movement. The confrontations culminated in protesters booing both DLP and WIDF delegates, whom

they accused of being ‘barely feminist’. In response, the organisers sang *Bella ciao*, the symbolic anthem of the Italian Resistance.⁴⁵

Despite these disagreements, a joint document was published outlining two principal aims: first, opposition to the installation of Euromissiles, which would escalate military expenditure and erode the Italian welfare state; second, the promotion of dialogue between women from the Eastern and Western blocs.⁴⁶ With a clear anti-imperialist stance against US foreign policy, DLP focused on two goals: fostering dialogue among peace activists from different countries and publishing its own journal. The group’s preference for building international rather than purely national networks is reflected in the numerous articles on DLP that appeared in international publications, often based on interviews with Carla Francone.⁴⁷

The relationship between DLP and the international federation soon solidified around shared political objectives, as underscored by the visit of WIDF General Secretary Mirjam Vire-Tuominen to the Lotta per la Pace headquarters in Florence from 18 to 21 May 1983, followed by a short tour of several Italian cities.⁴⁸ According to Donno, Vire-Tuominen used the tour to assess the condition of DLP and other women’s organisations in Italy, such as the UDI. Donno recalled that Vire-Tuominen ‘always hoped that the UDI would rejoin the Federation – or at least that was my perception’. The WIDF leadership, she noted, ‘maintained this attitude, keeping its distance but hoping for the UDI’s return’, a sentiment rooted in the UDI’s historical ties with the Federation as one of its founding members at the 1945 Paris Congress.⁴⁹ Ultimately, Donno acknowledged that size was also a factor: ‘The UDI was a rooted national organisation; we [at Donne in Lotta per la Pace] were just a local group.’⁵⁰ By contrast, in her interview, Francone emphasised the WIDF’s strong interest in engaging with Italy’s emerging women’s movements. This interest was particularly evident in Comiso, the final stop of Vire-Tuominen’s tour, which DLP organised in May 1983 across Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Lazio and Sicily.⁵¹ An extensive article by Vire-Tuominen on her visit to Comiso later appeared in *Women of the Whole World*, where she stressed that ‘the resources badly needed for the social and economic security of the population are swallowed up by armament (Figure 1).’⁵²



Figure 1. One of the banners from the demonstration in Comiso, also attended by Vire-Tuominen. The banner reads: ‘We Generate Life, We Reject Death.’

Source: *Women of the Whole World*, no. 4 (1983), 11.

Following Vire-Tuominen's tour, DLP became an associate member of the WIDF, a status that allowed participation but conferred no voting or leadership rights. A significant change occurred in early 1985, when some DLP women decided to become independent of the wider mixed organisation Lotta per la Pace. Not all members supported this choice. Key activists such as Giordano expressed concern that it might fragment Pasti's broader organisation and therefore chose not to align with Donno, Francone and others in founding the autonomous group. The result of this separation was DLP's publication of a new journal, *Iride* (Iris), first issued in February 1985. Its stated goal was 'to unite women in the construction of what is called a "culture of peace": a culture born of struggle and realised through changes in life, society and, therefore, in politics'.⁵³

3. 'Non à la guerre des étoiles!': *Iride*, star wars, and transnational activism (1985–1986)

Based in Florence, DLP operated as a non-hierarchical organisation. Meetings were held intermittently, depending largely on the work commitments of its activists, who were spread from Milan to Sicily. *Iride* became the most tangible expression of DLP's effort to connect women in Italy engaged in the peace movement and to push them 'beyond geopolitical borders'.⁵⁴ This international orientation did not mean that the group ceased participating in domestic peace campaigns. The *Ragnatela* protest in Comiso remained a focal point of DLP's activism, and former Lotta per la Pace members actively took part in demonstrations. Moreover, DLP maintained its close ties with ANPI, as reflected in Donno's 1985 statement quoted at the beginning of this article. Nonetheless, DLP's overriding aim was to contribute to an international movement against war and the militarisation of Europe. The interplay between national and global activism consistently shaped its initiatives and publications.⁵⁵

From its first issue, *Iride* emphasised the significance of the World Conference in Nairobi in July 1985, which concluded the United Nations Decade for Women. DLP viewed the conference as an opportunity to engage with women involved in peace activism worldwide and to discuss international developments collectively. By this point, tensions between the USSR and the United States had intensified, including in the Middle East. In 1983, President Reagan had launched the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a programme funding scientific research to construct a 'space shield' designed to protect the United States and Europe from potential Soviet nuclear attacks. That same year, Euromissiles were stationed across Europe, including Comiso, where the missile base was officially inaugurated on 30 June 1983.⁵⁶

DLP attended the Nairobi Conference independently, as did other Italian women's groups seeking to establish connections with international networks.⁵⁷ At the Nairobi Conference, DLP representatives promoted their organisation among the hundreds of delegations and NGOs in attendance by distributing leaflets and publications opposing the installation of Cruise missiles in Comiso. Their participation, however, centred above all on introducing the WIDF's strong opposition to the Strategic defense initiative into the Italian debate. Within this framework, the WIDF's General Secretary sent a letter to Ada Donno requesting updates on Italian activities against the SDI:

Dear Ada,

As you already know, the WIDF Council meeting declared March and April 1986 as a month of women's action, under the slogan 'No to Star Wars! Yes to peace on Earth and in cosmic space.' Many national organisations affiliated with the WIDF have carried out actions to this effect and, particularly on March 8, International Women's Day, have called for the peaceful use of outer space. We know that in your country there is also a strong movement against the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and the participation of Italian companies in this deadly project, and we are convinced that Donne in Lotta per la Pace is taking an active part in this movement. We would like to learn more details about your activities against the SDI. We are prepared to offer our support for such activities as much as we can and have asked our friend Nino Pasti to assist you in preparing and carrying out relevant actions. We kindly ask you to inform us of what you have already done.⁵⁸

The WIDF prioritised international opposition to the SDI, articulating its position through the Women's International Peace Schools, in which DLP began to participate regularly from 1986. These schools aimed to mobilise women across the Federation's network around pacifism. In the second half of the 1980s, their focus increasingly turned to the SDI, which the WIDF viewed as jeopardising détente between the US and Soviet governments.⁵⁹ During the Peace School held in Leningrad from 12 to 17 May 1986, Vire-Tuominen asked Ada Donno to undertake two tasks: first, to organise a series of events in Italy centred on peace; and second, to coordinate the Italian delegation to the World Congress of Women, scheduled for June 1987 in Moscow. For the first initiative, Vire-Tuominen proposed hosting both a US and a Soviet delegate in Italy.⁶⁰ A similar event had been organised in Rome in May 1985, when women from the *Ragnatela*, grassroots associations and PCI parliamentarians met delegates from East Germany and Czechoslovakia to discuss Euromissiles.⁶¹

This new proposal, however, carried even greater symbolic weight, as it involved representatives from the two opposing Cold War blocs. The WIDF selected Elena Kamenetskaya, a Soviet expert in space law, and Dorothy Burnham, an African American member of Women for Racial and Economic Equality (WREE), to undertake the tour.⁶² WREE had served as the WIDF's official affiliate in the United States since 1975, following the dismantling of the Congress of American Women during the McCarthy era.⁶³ Founded in 1973, WREE grew in prominence within the Federation, and one of the organisation's leading figures, Vinnie Burrows, later became the WIDF's permanent representative to the United Nations.⁶⁴

DLP organised the Italian tour meticulously, with the support of the WIDF, arranging five meetings between Milan and Lecce.⁶⁵ Throughout the tour, participants invoked Italy's struggle for liberation from fascism, situating the concept of peace within a broader historical legacy that included women's contributions to the Italian Resistance. It was no coincidence that the first stop, in Milan, was hosted by former partisans Gisella Floreanini and Giuliana Gadola. Floreanini had long been active in pacifist initiatives and had maintained close ties with the WIDF since its founding.⁶⁶ Gadola, meanwhile, contributed significantly to integrating women's wartime experiences into wider public debates on the legacy of the Italian Resistance.⁶⁷

The delegation then visited Sant'Anna di Stazzema where, on 12 August 1944, Nazi troops and Italian fascists murdered around 560 inhabitants, including children.⁶⁸ DLP chose to stop there not only to foreground the destructive legacy of war, but also

to claim a place within the 'generative tradition' that had shaped the history of Italian antifascism since the post-war period. In his recent analysis, Andrea Rapini highlights the remarkable adaptability of the Italian antifascist paradigm: over the decades, new political actors have been able to reclaim this legacy and provide it with different meanings, broadening the struggle for liberation by applying it to other political demands.⁶⁹ As Nino Pasti previously did, DLP reappropriated that legacy by incorporating opposition to the deployment of Euromissiles and to US military power into a renewed struggle for liberation, framing both as forms of foreign invasion (Figure 2).

The point was made even more explicit when DLP routed its tour to include a stop at Camp Darby, the US military base located between Pisa and Livorno. The choice underscored the extent to which the American military presence was perceived as posing potential dangers to Italy and Europe in the event of a conflict between the superpowers. After a third meeting in Livorno, on 25 October 1986 DLP joined the March for Peace and Disarmament in Rome, organised by the Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana (FGCI, Italian Federation of Communist Youth), the youth wing of the PCI, which was active from 1921 to 1990 and promoted socialist ideals among young Italians.⁷⁰ Although all five meetings were well attended, the events received no coverage in the Italian press, underscoring DLP's marginal position in national public discourse (Figure 3).⁷¹

Nevertheless, DLP considered the tour a success. It strengthened the organisation's connection with the WIDF, which published two articles on the initiative in *Women of the Whole World*.⁷² Through exchanges with activists across Italy, from Milan to Lecce, DLP successfully prepared a large Italian delegation for the World Congress of Women, held in Moscow from 23 to 27 June 1987, and the 9th WIDF Congress, which followed in the Soviet capital from 28 to 29 June.⁷³



Figure 2. Delegation at the monument to the massacre in Sant'Anna di Stazzema (Lucca), inaugurated by Emilio Colombo in 1971. From left to right: Elena Kamenetskaya, a representative of the ANPI of Viareggio, Dorothy Burnham, and the interpreter.

Source: The WREE-View of Women, no. 6 (November–December 1986), 7.



Figure 3. The international delegation in Lecce. From left to right: Elena Kamenetskaya, the interpreter, Dorothy Burnham, and Ada Donno.

Source: Ada Donno Private Archive.

4. From Moscow to the Mediterranean Sea: the final years of Donne in *Lotta per la Pace* (1987–1992)

The second half of the 1980s inevitably shaped DLP's trajectory, forcing the organisation to confront a rapidly intensifying crisis on several fronts. This crisis extended beyond DLP itself, reflecting a wider transformation of the global and national order that exposed the structural fragility of smaller political organisations and compelled those that endured to redefine their aims, alliances, and forms of action. At the international level, the most significant element of this crisis was the growing instability of the Soviet Union and the collapse of state socialism, which, in turn, affected the WIDF and the organisations connected to it. Despite growing interest in the history of the WIDF, one of the least explored aspects remains the Federation's response to the crisis of the bipolar world order in the late 1980s.⁷⁴ Even less explored is the fate of the more fragile organisations associated with the WIDF as they confronted the crisis that would, from the early 1990s onwards, drastically alter the Federation's structure, political orientation and international role. The case of DLP opens a line of enquiry that can help, albeit within limits, to shed light on these two points.

At the national level, the Italian left and Italian feminism had to contend with the growing fragility of the movement-based politics that had emerged during the 1970s. Meanwhile, the major parties of the Left found themselves caught in a slow accumulation of long-standing uncertainties that erupted after the collapse of the USSR in 1991.⁷⁵ DLP, whose identity had rested on its close relationship with the WIDF and, by extension, the USSR, as well as on its criticism of the mass parties of the Left, emerged from this convergence of crises in a position of severe weakness.

An early indication of this crisis can be traced in the participation of DLP delegates at the Ninth Women's Congress organised by the WIDF, entitled 'Towards the Year 2000 Without Nuclear Weapons! For Peace, Equality, and Development'. The Congress took place only a few weeks after the first bilateral US–Soviet agreement on the 'double zero option'. Ratified in December 1987 as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the agreement separated the issue of nuclear weapons stationing from SDI funding, setting a medium-term goal of eliminating European ground-based nuclear missiles such as those installed in Comiso. Reagan's apparent openness to the new Soviet policies was met with cautious optimism, as were the widespread responses to Mikhail Gorbachev's domestic reforms – *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring).⁷⁶

Gorbachev's policies, alongside the reconstitution of Women's Councils in the Soviet Union aimed at politicising women workers, were praised in Moscow by Zoya Pukhova, president of the Soviet women's committee, who opened the Congress.⁷⁷ The Italian delegation to the Congress, coordinated by DLP, comprised forty-seven women from various cities and groups.⁷⁸ DLP members met SWC representatives, who interviewed them on Radio Moscow, and Carla Francone addressed the Commission on the Role and Cooperation of NGOs in Implementing the Forward-Looking Strategies adopted in Nairobi. In her speech, she described the Comiso peace camp as 'a symbol of women's struggle against military bases, missiles and militarisation', and emphasised Italian women's commitment to opposing the SDI and NATO bases in Italy.⁷⁹

The Italian delegation also became acutely aware of the growing political tensions within the Soviet Union. Dissident movements in Eastern Europe had already begun to challenge Soviet influence, while divisions were also emerging within the WIDF itself.⁸⁰ As Ada Donno recalled:

We [in Moscow] had noticed [this crisis]. There was also a discussion within the [WIDF]. For example, the English women [of the National Assembly of Women] were very critical of *perestroika*. The WIDF president herself, Freda Brown ... looked on with great concern at what was happening.⁸¹

More broadly, while the organisations affiliated with the WIDF responded to *perestroika* in markedly different ways – ranging from clear opposition to open support, as in the case of the SWC – reactions to Gorbachev's reforms at the global level were far more polarised. With the exception of the PCI, communist parties across the world opposed *perestroika*, especially in the Global South, where Cuba emerged as one of the most critical voices against the future envisaged by the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.⁸² DLP, by contrast, greeted Gorbachev's policies with caution, shifting its position only a few years later.

Despite this internal unease, the WIDF continued to support disarmament and peace initiatives, and DLP maintained its collaboration. Between 1987 and 1989, DLP representatives participated in WIDF events in Sofia, Athens, Prague, Cyprus and Warsaw. They also organised meetings in Italy with representatives of the Soviet women's committee. By the late 1980s, however, the model of socialism associated with the Soviet Union – long upheld by the WIDF as a political reference point – had lost much of its appeal within left-wing circles worldwide. Even DLP, which had previously supported strongly pro-USSR positions, began openly criticising Gorbachev's policies. In a late-1989 issue

of *Iride*, Donno wrote that ‘the more time passed, the more *perestroika* came to resemble that famous blanket that is too short, with everyone pulling it to their own side’. Faced with mounting opposition to the USSR, it was becoming clear that the reform process introduced by Gorbachev was colliding with a Soviet system unable to sustain it.⁸³

For Donno and other DLP activists, Gorbachev’s reforms failed to fulfil their promises regarding the advancement of women or the strengthening of international socialism. As the historian Maxine Molyneux observed some years later, the reforms had exposed women to the precariousness of the market and to conservative pressures towards a return to domesticity. These developments were not offset by the emergence, encouraged by *glasnost*, of new openly feminist organisations, which were themselves constrained by the rise of religious and nationalist conservatism.⁸⁴

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 marked a turning point, compelling many left-wing organisations to reassess their ideological foundations. DLP reflected on this shift in a 1990 issue of *Iride*, identifying the collapse of the Wall as one manifestation of the fall of the Soviet Union and, consequently, of the end of a global counterweight to the United States. This left activists with ‘the terrible doubt that, rather than walls being torn down, new fortifications were being erected to the detriment of the weakest’.⁸⁵

Despite such pessimism, some developments offered hope to pacifist activists, including the gradual withdrawal of Cruise missiles from Italy and the United Kingdom between 1988 and 1991. In response to these geopolitical shifts, the WIDF convened its Tenth Congress in Sheffield, England, from 30 March to 1 April 1991. As reported by Ada Donno in *Iride*, which published several of the Congress’s speeches, one of the most pressing concerns was the Federation’s heavy financial dependence on the Soviet government. The loss of Soviet funding, exacerbated by turmoil in Eastern Europe, had sharply curtailed WIDF activities in 1990–1991. At Sheffield, former WIDF General Secretary Fanny Edelman delivered a candid assessment of the organisation’s weaknesses, summarised by Donno:

A lack of flexibility in combining general and specific demands; theoretical rigidity that led to a refusal, for too long, to engage with feminist practice and thought, thereby undermining the rich experience of the popular women’s movement; a tendency to generalise and to overlook the particularities of concrete realities; organisational immobility [...] and a certain propensity to act as a mouthpiece for governments rather than for women themselves.⁸⁶

At the Sheffield Congress, the future of the WIDF appeared uncertain. However, delegates from Africa, Asia and Latin America, particularly Cuba, played a decisive role in reorienting the organisation’s priorities. They advocated regionalisation, decentralisation and a greater focus on women’s activism outside Europe. To reach a new generation of activists, the WIDF also recognised the need to engage more constructively with second-wave feminism.

Significantly, the WIDF elected Fatima Ibrahim of Sudan as its new president – the first woman from the Global South to hold this position.⁸⁷ Following the Sheffield Congress, Donno stressed in *Iride* the importance of amplifying the voices of women from formerly marginalised regions. She urged DLP and other member organisations to strengthen political relations with activists in the Mediterranean and beyond, in order to ‘represent one’s own South and connect with other Souths, recognising one another through similarities and differences’.⁸⁸ Since its formation, DLP has developed solidarity

initiatives with women in Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt. Donno's appeal to build a 'Mediterranean space for women' became central to DLP's final phase, reflecting the organisation's longer internationalist history.⁸⁹

The concept of Mediterraneanness used by DLP – understood as a shared political and cultural space defined by both interconnection and marginalisation vis-à-vis the Global North – provided a framework for new peace dialogues, particularly amid the instability of the early 1990s, including the First Gulf War (August 1990–February 1991) and the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars (March 1991–November 1999).⁹⁰

The attempt to establish connections between the two shores of the Mediterranean and to build a dialogue among women centred on pacifism was not an entirely new project. Between 1987 and 1992, feminist activists involved in the women's documentation centres of Turin and Bologna – established in the 1980s to document the history of women's activism worldwide – launched the initiative *Visitare luoghi difficili* (Visiting difficult places). It aimed to open a dialogue between Italian, Israeli, and Palestinian feminists on the conflict in the Middle East.⁹¹ DLP's choice reflected an attempt to take up the ideas that had emerged from the Sheffield Congress and to apply them on a smaller scale through the connections the group had maintained in the Mediterranean. At the same time, it sought to address the new challenges that were becoming increasingly visible at the turn of the 1990s.

From 28 to 30 August 1991, DLP and allied groups organised the Seminar of Mediterranean Women in Lecce, bringing together participants from southern Italy, Albania, and France. This event marked the beginning of a sustained effort that culminated in September 1992 with the establishment of the Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region during an international conference in Malta. The association promoted pacifist, environmental, and women's cooperation goals and, in 2007, became an affiliate of the reconstituted – though markedly weakened – WIDF, which remains active today.⁹² However, DLP's efforts were constrained by its own internal fragility and, more decisively, by the collapse of the international political order that had sustained communist parties and socialist grassroots organisations for decades. As that world disintegrated, tensions within the organisation became increasingly difficult to contain. Nor was this experience unique to DLP: the international reverberations of the crisis of communism forced even far more established organisations, such as the PCI, to confront a long-running crisis that culminated in the party's dissolution in February 1991.⁹³ In the new political landscape, Italy was caught between political formations with uncertain futures and a feminist activism that, although still insufficiently studied, had lost its mass reach.⁹⁴ Under these conditions, organisations such as DLP simply no longer had a place. DLP formally dissolved at the end of 1992, publishing the final issue of *Iride* in October. Ada Donno has since continued her activism through the Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region and has served as the European Vice-President of the WIDF since 2016. Carla Francone and other DLP activists, however, followed different paths after the organisation's dissolution, without re-establishing formal ties with the Federation.

5. Conclusion

The history of DLP represents one of the most distinctive expressions of left-wing women's activism in Italy during the 1980s. Emerging from the grassroots Marxist

milieu and the peace campaigns surrounding Nino Pasti's Lotta per la Pace, DLP redefined pacifism as an active political project grounded in the legacy of the anti-fascist Resistance and anti-imperialism. By linking gender, class, and anti-imperialist struggle, the organisation articulated a militant and transnational understanding of peace that sought to transcend Cold War divisions through dialogue among women. The partnership between DLP and the WIDF proved mutually beneficial. For the WIDF, DLP offered a conduit for re-establishing its presence in Italy after the withdrawal of the UDI; for DLP, the Federation provided international legitimacy and access to a global network of women's activism. The case of DLP shows that the WIDF did not disappear from the Italian context after 1963, but continued to operate through smaller, ideologically aligned organisations. It also reveals how left-wing women's peace activism in the 1980s was shaped by enduring ideological and political schisms within the Italian women's movement – particularly the tension between pro-Soviet, anti-imperialist women's activism and second-wave feminism. Finally, DLP's dissolution, read alongside the collapse of the Soviet Union and the WIDF's Sheffield Congress of 1991, exposes the difficulties of reconfiguring a Marxist transnational solidarity network in the post-bipolar world order of the 1990s. Its trajectory, therefore, illustrates both the fragility and the persistence of women's peace networks during a period of ideological realignment and global transition.

List of key publications

- 'Too little land, too many people: Italy, Clarence Gamble, and the global population control movement (1950s–1970s)', *Journal of Global History* (2026). [Doi:10.1017/S174002282610045X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002282610045X)
- 'Work locally but think globally': The Alliance Against Women's Oppression and transnational multiracial grassroots activism in the 1980s, *Gender & History* 38, n. 1 (2026), 390–405. [DOI: 10.1111/1468-0424.12779](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12779)
- Monograph: *Pantere nere, America bianca. Storia e politica del Black Panther Party* [Black Panthers, white America: History and Politics of the Black Panther Party], Ombre Corte, Verona, 2023, pp. 293, [Italian].

Research interests

- US history in the twentieth Century
- Global history of family planning
- History of political movements in the US and Europe
- Black history
- Gender history
- History of the Global Cold War

Notes

1. Donne in lotta per la pace, '40 anni di resistenza', *Iride: foglio di informazione, opinione, collegamento delle donne in lotta per la pace* (hereafter *Iride*), no. 1 (February 1985), 3.
2. Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani, ed., *Memoria, paura, volontà, speranza. Nella resistenza e nella società, le donne protagoniste per una nuova cultura della pace* (Milan,

- 1984). The National Association of Italian Partisans, founded in 1944, represented former Resistance fighters and their supporters, and upheld the principles of anti-fascism and the Italian Constitution.
3. Antonio Baglio and Vincenzo Schirripa, 'Tutti a Comiso. La lotta contro gli euromissili in Italia 1981–1983', *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 276 (December 2014): 448–75, esp. 450–1; Renato Moro, 'Against Euromissiles: Anti-nuclear Movements in 1980s Italy (1979–1984)', in *Nuclear Italy: An International History of Italian Nuclear Policies during the Cold War*, ed. Elisabetta Bini and Igor Londero (Trieste: EUT, 2017), 199–211, esp. 208–9; Antonio Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino: Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2022), 433–4.
 4. Elisabetta Vezzosi, 'Per una storia dei movimenti antinucleari delle donne in Italia: origini, obiettivi, trasformazioni', *Genesis*, no. 2 (2021): 173–95, esp. 188.
 5. Laura Branciforte, 'The Women's Peace Camp at Comiso, 1983: Transnational Feminism and the Anti-Nuclear Movement', *Women's History Review* 31, no. 2 (2022): 316–43.
 6. Ada Donno, 'Parità e soprattutto dignità', in ANPI, *Memoria, paura, volontà, speranza*, 177–9.
 7. Francisca de Haan, 'Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)', *Women's History Review*, no. 4 (2010): 547–73; Elisabeth B. Armstrong, *Bury the Corpse of Colonialism: The Revolutionary Feminist Conference of 1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023); Kirsten Ghodsee, 'Rethinking State Socialist Mass Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985', *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 49–73; Katharine E. McGregor, 'Indonesian Women, the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Struggle for Women's Rights, 1946–1965', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (2012): 193–208.
 8. Wendy Pojmann, *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Molly Tambor, *The Lost Wave: Women and Postwar Italy* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Chiara Bonfiglioli, 'L'ondata di mezzo: movimenti delle donne, femminismi e guerra fredda', *Storica* 21, no. 61–62 (2015): 191–206; Giulia Cioci, 'Percorsi sul globo': *Donne, associazionismo transnazionale, Guerra fredda* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2023); Eloisa Betti, 'Women's Activism, Vocational Training, and Cultural Exchanges between East and West: The Case of Cold War Italy (1948–1962)', in *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Selin Çağatay et al. (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2024), 231–58.
 9. Among the various studies, see Patrizia Gabrielli, *La pace e la mimosa. L'Unione donne italiane e la costruzione politica della memoria, 1944–1955* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005); Branciforte, 'The Women's Peace Camp at Comiso'; Matteo Ermacora and Rachele Ledda, eds., *Donne e impegno pacifista nell'Italia repubblicana, Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, no. 46, special issue (2021); Elisabetta Vezzosi and Federico Chiaricati, *I laboratori e le piazze. Scienziate e attiviste tra contrasto al nucleare, pace e giustizia ambientale* (Rome: Viella, 2025); Virginia Salerno, 'Meno radioattività. Più affettività. Riflessioni sull'antinuclearismo femminista a Roma tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta', *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 65, no. 1 (2026): 44–69.
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 11. Maud A. Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983* (New York–London: Routledge, 2014), 188; Elda Guerra, "'Visitare luoghi difficili". Pensiero e pratiche nel femminismo italiano per la soluzione non violenta dei conflitti', *Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, no. 46 (2021): 72–94.
 12. Editorial, 'Lotta per la pace', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 1 (January 1981), 3.

13. Ada Donno, interview by author, 2 February 2024 and 23 May 2025.
14. Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri. Visioni e legami internazionali nel mondo del Novecento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021), 140–8 and 201–11.
15. Valentina Casini, 'Tra continuità e rinnovamento. Il Sessantotto', in *Il comunismo italiano nella storia del Novecento*, ed. Silvio Pons (Rome: Viella, 2021), 447–63.
16. Vittorfranco S. Pisano, *The Dynamics of Subversion and Violence in Contemporary Italy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 124.
17. Gino Frosini, 'Non si può mettere USA e URSS sullo stesso piano', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 7 (October 1981), 10–11; Kerry M. Kartchner, *Negotiating START: The Quest for Stability and the Making of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty* (London–New York: Routledge, 1992), 75–76.
18. Andrea Guiso, *La colomba e la spada. "Lotta per la pace" e antiamericanismo nella politica del Partito comunista italiano (1949–1954)* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2006), XI–XIII.
19. Gino Frosini, 'Intervento del Comitato ai congressi dell'ANPI', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 2 (April 1981), 8.
20. Donno, interview; Ruggero Giacomini, 'La marcia per la pace del 1981 dimostra il grande sviluppo del movimento', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 6 (September 1981), 16–17.
21. Several articles published in *Lotta per la pace* reported on the participation of Pasti and other activists in ANPI public events. See, for example, 'Intervento del Comitato ai congressi dell'ANPI', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 2 (April 1981), 8.
22. On the Florence congress, see ANPI, *Antifascismo negli ideali della RESISTENZA forza morale che unisce per rinnovare la società. Atti, Firenze 4–8 novembre 1976* (Rome: Comitato nazionale dell'ANPI, 1977). On DLP and the events organised by ANPI, see Donno, 'Parità e soprattutto dignità'.
23. Among the principal works, see Bianca Guidetti Serra, *Compagne. Testimonianze di partecipazione politica femminile*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi, 1977); Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina, eds., *La Resistenza taciuta. Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi* (Milan: La Pietra, 1976). On the role of women partisans in cultural meetings and initiatives, see Lydia Franceschi et al., *L'altra metà della resistenza* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1978). On the historiographical revival of the Italian Resistance, see Philip Cook, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (Rome: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 113–25.
24. On the political rupture between Italian second-wave feminism and the previous generation, see Tambor, *The Lost Wave*; Chiara Bonfiglioli, 'Red Girls' Revolutionary Tales: Antifascist Women's Autobiographies in Italy', *Feminist Review*, no. 106 (2014): 60–77.
25. The conference was held on 27–29 November 1981 and aimed to connect women active in peace across Europe; see Olivia Giordano, 'Donne di 25 paesi riunite ad Amsterdam', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 9 (December 1981), 10–11.
26. Olivia Giordano, 'Il nostro impegno', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 9 (December 1981), 11.
27. Donno, interview.
28. 'Saluti internazionali', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 2 (February 1982), 15.
29. Carla Francone, interview by author, 15 February 2024.
30. Donno, interview.
31. Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 1983); Nancy Holmstrom, ed., *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002); Francisca de Haan, ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activism around the World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).
32. Donne in lotta per la pace, 'La Conferenza internazionale delle donne per la pace. I risultati di questa importante assise e le prospettive', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 3 (March 1982), 16–18.
33. Olivia Giordano, 'L'impegno per l'8 marzo', *Lotta per la pace*, no. 2 (February 1982), 14.
34. Coordinamento Donne contro gli Armamenti per la Pace, 'Programma del coordinamento donne per la pace' (Pamphlet), n.d., 15.
35. Roberta Tatafiore, 'La pace difficile', *Noi donne: settimana*, 26 March 1982, 1–2.

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37. On feminist peace activism in Rome, see Salerno, 'Meno radioattività. Più affettività'.
38. Tatafiore, 'La pace difficile', 1.
39. 'Appello delle Donne Sovietiche', in *Donne in lotta per la pace*, ed., *Impegnarsi per la pace*, 15. According to DLP, the Soviet women's delegation was denied a visa to enter Italy. The conference assembly subsequently sent a telegram to President Pertini and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting clarification, *ibid.*, 12.
40. Victor Strazzeri, 'Beyond the Double Blind Spot: Relocating Communist Women as Transgressive Subjects in Contemporary Historiography', *Gender & History* 36, no. 2 (2024): 755–74.
41. On UDI's XI Congress, see Chiara Ferrari, 'Contested Foundations: Postmodern Feminism and the Case of the Union of Italian Women', *Signs* 33, no. 3 (2008): 569–94.
42. Jadwiga Mooney, 'Fighting Fascism and Forging New Political Activism: The Women's International Democratic Federation in the Cold War', in *Decentering Cold War History*, ed. Jadwiga Pieper Mooney and Fabio Lanza (London: Routledge, 2013), 52–73; Linda Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The International League for Peace and Freedom before World War I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 19; Maria Susanna Garroni, 'Tra movimento e potere: donne e pacifismo nel mondo anglosassone', *Contemporanea*, no. 8 (2005): 385–95.
43. Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political*, 20.
44. Margherita Bonomo, 'Fili di lana colorata ad imbrigliare missili. Comiso-Greenham Common: le donne per il disarmo', *Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, no. 46 (2021): 39–63.
45. Tatafiore, 'La pace difficile', 2.
46. 'La Conferenza internazionale delle donne per la pace', in *Donne in lotta per la pace*, ed., *Impegnarsi per la pace*, 9–10.
47. Carla Francone, interview, *The Daily Review*, no. 29 (1983), 15; Carla Francone, interview, *Peace Courier*, interview, no. 14 (1983), 14; Carla Francone, 'Italy: Women and Youth in the Struggle for a Job', *Women of the Whole World*, no. 3 (1984), 22.
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50. Donno, interview.
51. Francone, interview.
52. Mirjam Vire-Tuominen, 'The Message of the Women of Comiso', *Women of the Whole World*, no. 4 (1983), 10–11.
53. Donne in lotta per la pace, 'Perché. Uno strumento per produrre politica e cultura di pace', *Iride*, no. 1 (February 1985), 1–2, esp. 1.
54. Donne in lotta per la pace, 'Proposta. Per un secondo convegno internazionale delle donne sulle strategie per la pace e il disarmo a Roma, nella prossima primavera', *Iride*, no. 1 (February 1985), 1–2, esp. 1.
55. Unlike *Lotta per la pace*, *Iride* specifies which women were part of the group. In addition to Ada Donno and Carla Francone, members of the National Coordination included Lia Amato (Factory Council, Bologna Tobacco Manufacturing). Other activists who participated in national coordination and international initiatives included Paola Anfosso (UDI, Livorno), Mirella Fontanive (SIP, Milan), Menalda Damato, Nives Morgante (ANPI, Voghera), Maria Cristina Molinaroli (Active Birth Study Centre, Piacenza), Maria Teresa Messidoro (International Association Against Torture), Mariella Barbacci, Angela Falcone, Marina Marino, Anna Vacchelli, Maria Grazia Donno, Mila Spini and Loredana Dolci. Without formal membership registration, the full number of activists cannot be known.

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57. Elda Guerra and Elena Musiani, *Il movimento politico delle donne: una storia internazionale, XIX–XX secolo* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2025), 264–5.
58. Letter from Mirjam Vire-Tuominen to Ada Donno, Berlin, 2 April 1986, Ada Donno private archive.
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60. Interview with Ada Donno; Donne in lotta per la pace, ‘A Leningrado. Le donne alla scuola della pace’, *Iride*, no. 2 (May–June 1986), 4.
61. ‘Vivace manifestazione di donne. Piazza Navona: “Disarma il cielo, lancia un aquilone”’, *L’Unità*, 26 May 1985, 5.
62. Ada Donno to Mirjam Vire-Tuominen, Florence, 21 July 1986, Ada Donno Private Archive; Loretta Ross and Linda Burnham, interview, *Voices of Feminism Oral Project*, Sophia Smith Collection, 18 March 2005, 4.
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64. Harvey Klehr, *Far Left of Center: The American Radical Left Today* (New Brunswick–London: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 47.
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66. Marisa Rodano, ‘L’impegno all’UDI e alla Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta’, in *Una storia nella Storia: Gisella Floreanini e l’antifascismo italiano dalla clandestinità al dopoguerra*, ed. Fiamma Lussana (Rome: Res Cogitans, 1999), 137–62; Tiziana Noce, *Nella città degli uomini: Donne e pratica della politica a Livorno fra guerra e ricostruzione* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2004), 291.
67. Giuliana Gadola Beltrami, ‘Intervento’, in Franceschi et al., *L’altra metà della resistenza*, 15–32.
68. Toni Rovatti, *Sant’Anna di Stazzema: Strage e memoria della strage dell’agosto 1944* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2004).
69. Andrea Rapini, *L’antifascismo. Una tradizione generativa, 1945–2025* (Rome: Donzelli, 2023).
70. Franco Di Mare, ‘La Giornata del popolo della pace’, *L’Unità*, 26 October 1986, 3; Dorothy Burnham, ‘WREE Sister Tours Italy Speaking for Peace’, *The WREE-View of Women*, no. 6 (November–December 1986), 7.
71. See Carla Francone, ‘Contrapporre la “pace stellare” alle “guerre stellari”’, *Nuova Unità*, October 1986, 2. Except for a letter of support by Ada Donno to a PCI-organised demonstration in 1985, published in *L’Unità*, there are no references in the Socialist *Avanti!* or the Christian Democrat *Il Popolo*. Other newspapers such as *La Stampa* and *Il Sole 24 Ore* – which were fully consulted for the period 1981–1992 – also lacked coverage; see Ada Donno, ‘Ci sarà anche Iride’, *L’Unità*, 30 November 1985, 4.
72. Elena Kamenetskaya and Dorothy Burnham, ‘Dialogue for Peace’, *Women of the Whole World*, no. 2 (1987), 7–8.
73. Donne in lotta per la pace, ‘Prepariamo il Congresso Mondiale delle Donne’, *Iride*, no. 1 (January–February 1987), 2.
74. An exception is Kristen Ghodsee’s study, which, albeit briefly, addresses the declining phase of the WIDF. See Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women’s Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 229–31.
75. Maud A. Bracke, ‘Una rivoluzione incompiuta: la sfida del femminismo negli anni Settanta e Ottanta’, in Pons, ed., *Il comunismo italiano*, 517–37, esp. 536.
76. Odd A. Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 541–6.

77. Marina Vladimirova, 'Unione Sovietica. I consigli delle donne: una realtà che rinasce', *Iride*, no. 3 (May–June 1987), 4.
78. Donne in lotta per la pace, 'Tutte le italiane al Congresso', *Iride*, no. 3 (May–June 1987), 3. Despite the diverse composition of the Italian delegation, the lack of interest from the Italian press regarding the Moscow Conference was notable and criticised by *L'Unità* readers; see Lettere dagli iscritti, *L'Unità*, 17 July 1987, 10; 'Raissa chiude il Congresso mondiale delle donne', *La Stampa*, 28 June 1987, 5.
79. Ada Donno, 'Chiediamo chiari atti di pace', *Iride*, no. 4 (July–November 1987), 1; Carla Francone, 'Our Main Concern—Peace', *Women of the Whole World*, no. 4 (1987), 22–3.
80. Westad, *The Cold War*, 519–26.
81. Donno, interview.
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88. Ada Donno, 'Progetto Mediterraneo', *Iride*, no. 3 (September–December 1991), 2.
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91. Guerra, "'Visitare luoghi difficili'"; see also Giancarla Codrignani, *La diplomazia delle donne* (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2020).
92. Ada Donno, 'Sotto gli occhi della grande madre', *Iride*, no. 2 (March–October 1992), 5.
93. On the collapse of communism and its effects on the PCI, see Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, 291–300.
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ada Donno and Carla Francone for granting me access to their personal papers and for agreeing to be interviewed. I am also grateful to Francisca de Haan for her insightful suggestions and generous guidance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by ERC grant WO-NAM, Project Number 101088489. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do

not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Notes on contributor

Bruno Walter Renato Toscano is a Research Fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and is a member of the ERC project 'Women and Non-Alignment in the Cold War Era: Biographical and Intersectional Perspectives' (Principal Investigator: Chiara Bonfiglioli). He holds a PhD in US History from the University of Pisa, where he defended a thesis on the transnational activism of African American women. He is currently exploring the global history of family planning, with a particular focus on the influence of US foundations in the Global South and in Italy.

ORCID

Bruno Walter Renato Toscano  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5459-4404>