

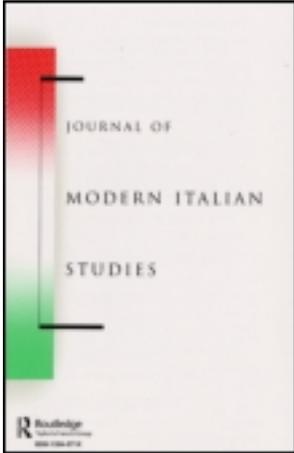
This article was downloaded by: [Matthew Evangelista]

On: 19 November 2013, At: 07:28

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Modern Italian Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmis20>

### Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944-1968

Matthew Evangelista

Published online: 18 Nov 2013.

To cite this article: Matthew Evangelista (2013) Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944-1968, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18:5, 672-673, DOI: [10.1080/1354571X.2013.839555](https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2013.839555)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2013.839555>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly

forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Wendy Pojmann (2013) *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968* (New York: Fordham University Press), 234 pp., ISBN 9780823245604, \$35.00, soft cover

*Bipolarismo* is the word Italians use to characterize the political system that emerged in the wake of World War II, with Catholics on the centre-right supporting the United States, and communists and socialists on the left, aligned with the Soviet Union. This Cold War divide affected nearly everything in Italian life, including gender and the status of women.

Although this is the common characterization of *bipolarismo*, it simplifies a more nuanced situation, which Wendy Pojmann describes in her clearly written and well-researched book. At first glance her focus seems rather narrow: two women's organizations, 'the left-leaning Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) and the lay Catholic Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF)' during the period 1944–68 (p. 1). But the years she has chosen already reveal that this is not a straightforward story of communists versus anti-communists in Cold War Europe. The last years of World War II witnessed a degree of cooperation within the Italian Resistance between communists and Catholics (including priests), working together against the Nazi occupation which was reflected in the women's movement as well. At the other end of Pojmann's chronology, the turmoil of the mid-1960s and the events of 1968 produced some strange bedfellows that defy the stereotype of *bipolarismo*: both the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats reacted with skepticism at best to the young student activists of the new left, many of them women.

Pojmann locates the origins of post-war women's activism in the Resistance – 'a movement of all social classes, political viewpoints, and both sexes', in which some 55,000 women (out of a total of 125,000) served as armed partisan fighters (p. 23). Experience in the Women's Defence Groups (*Gruppi di difesa della donna*) offered the possibility of cooperation across the political spectrum – especially as the Italian Communist Party, led by Palmiro Togliatti, sought continuation of the Popular Front policy, endorsed by Moscow. Yet, political differences soon emerged and took organizational form. In September 1944 the UDI sought to become the main representative of anti-fascist women by incorporating the Women's Defence Groups. But a month later, the Catholic women's organizations chose not to join the UDI but to form their own federation – the CIF – instead. 'Nonetheless,' Pojmann writes,

the women who formed the CIF, like those who created the UDI, recognized a need for an association whose main focus was women's issues [...] like the UDI, it emphasized the need to elevate women's moral and cultural status and ensure their representation throughout all political and social sectors. (pp. 27–28)

There seemed room for cooperation – on women's suffrage and benefits for working mothers, for example – yet the encroaching Cold War atmosphere made it difficult. The fact that the two organizations were closely tied to rival political parties, UDI with the Communist Party and CIF with the Christian Democrats, was not an insuperable barrier at first. In fact, Togliatti was willing to neglect issues important to women activists – their concern about Catholicism's status as the state religion and their support for legalization of divorce, for example – in order not to offend the Christian Democrats with whom communists served in a coalition government. By April 1948, however, US President

Harry Truman – influenced in part by the communist coup in Czechoslovakia earlier that year – convinced Alcide De Gasperi, the Christian Democratic prime minister, to cease cooperating with the communists and to run for election on an anti-communist platform. He won with 48.4 per cent of the vote; the communists and their allies garnered 31 per cent. The battle lines were drawn, with each women's organization – for the most part – adopting the policies of its affiliated party and their international supporters on the major issues of the day: the Marshall Plan, the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the atomic bomb, the Korean War.

Pojmann deftly incorporates the domestic and international politics of the era into her narrative. She does so by generously citing the work of other scholars and recounting the findings of her own archival research. She conveys the main dimensions of the Cold War context and its implications for Italy, and she gives a close account of the transnational activities of the two main Italian women's organizations, UDI and CIF, and the international women's associations with which they were affiliated – the Women's International Democratic Federation and the World Movement of Mothers, respectively. She convincingly articulates the main differences between the organizations on matters affecting the status of women and appropriate gender roles. The left-wing organizations favoured equal rights and opportunities for women in the workplace, whereas the traditional groups limited women's roles to housewife and mother. Yet even here there was room for cooperation, because the CIF recognized that economic necessity forced some women to work outside the home. Thus, the rival organizations could agree, for example, on the demand for enforcement of the equal-pay-for-equal-work provision of the Italian Constitution (Art. 37), and both came to a similar critique (of Italian men) concerning Italian women's predicament of *doppio lavoro* – full responsibility for household chores in addition to their paid job.

*Bipolarismo* was not a straightforward capitalist–communist split at home or one that exclusively pitted pro-Soviet peace activists against US militarism abroad. Catholic social teaching and concern for the poor led to a skepticism of US-sponsored free-market policies. Thus, both UDI and CIF could agree, for example, on the deleterious effects on Italian youth of Hollywood's violence and consumerism. In the wake of Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* (1963), Catholics could feel more confident in joining the left's critique of the nuclear arms race or the US war in Vietnam. Disillusion with the USSR led to re-evaluation of UDI's rose-coloured understandings of gender under Soviet-style socialism (as when a visiting Czechoslovak delegation, post-Prague Spring, revealed the *doppio lavoro* that faced women under socialism). The history of post-war Italian women's activism exhibits a number of such unusual features, and Wendy Pojmann tells it well in this engaging book.

Matthew Evangelista  
Cornell University

© 2013 Matthew Evangelista

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2013.839555>