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# Women, religion and associativism: the aristocratic origins of the National Council of Italian Women, 1903–1908

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## ABSTRACT


The National Council of Italian Women (CNDI—*Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*), founded in Rome in 1903, was affiliated with the International Council of Women (ICW) which was created in Washington DC in 1888, in order ‘to stimulate the sentiment of internationalism among women throughout the world’ and aimed to bring together the maximum number of women’s associations in each country. This article analyses the origins of the CNDI, highlighting the role played by aristocratic women in its foundation—a social composition that made the Italian case a paradigmatic one compared to other national councils of women in southern Europe. A focus on the aristocratic component of the CNDI provides new insights into this voluntary association which organised its first congress in 1908. This congress is a key moment to explore the discourses of its aristocratic leaders regarding religion and to show their understanding of various issues confronting Italian women. The study of the individual trajectories of these women, and the personal links between them sheds light on their motivations and demonstrates how they succeeded or failed in their various initiatives.

## KEYWORDS

Associativism; *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*; International Council of Women; religion; women

## Introduction

Founded in Rome in 1903, the National Council of Italian Women (CNDI—*Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*) was affiliated with the International Council of Women (ICW), which was created in Washington DC, in 1888, in order ‘to stimulate the sentiment of internationalism among women throughout the world’ and aimed to bring together the maximum number of women’s associations in each country.<sup>1</sup> By 1908, the CNDI was one of the twenty councils affiliated with the ICW and had more than one hundred federated associations with a total membership of around 25, 000. Its aim was to ‘raise women, to ensure their intellectual, moral and material elevation in order that they can better and more effectively contribute towards the harmonious progress of the family and of society’.<sup>2</sup> After highlighting the genesis of the CNDI by focusing on its aristocratic figures and the role played by its first president, Countess

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Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi (1853–1931), this article focuses on a key moment—the 1908 first CNDI congress—in order to explore the discourses of its aristocratic leaders regarding religion. At the Congress, a split occurred between the Council and the Catholic women’s associations. The Italian case is particularly interesting as an example of a federation of women’s associations that declared itself apolitical and neutral and that emerged in a Catholic country within the matrix of the ICW, a largely Protestant international organisation.

## The genesis of the CNDI

Compared with other national councils of women founded in southern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, the CNDI is a paradigmatic case due to the strong presence of aristocratic women with religious backgrounds. Even if the other councils in Southern Europe also had some aristocratic figures, the Italian council had the largest number of the aristocratic women as its head who formed a transnational women’s elite.

This article analyses how religion appeared in their discourses. The Italian council proclaimed itself neutral in accordance with the third article of the ICW statutes, which stated: ‘The ICW is not based on a social, religious or political perspective’.<sup>3</sup> The ICW’s statutes thus served as a model for all national councils of women, thereby limiting their autonomy. Consequently, the purpose of the CNDI was to federate the largest number of associations ‘of any political or religious faith, without assuming any political or confessional position’.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the golden rule of the ICW—‘Do unto others as ye would others should do unto you’, which was translated into Italian by the CNDI and inserted as the third article of its statutes—came from the New Testament.

The apolitical and neutral principles of the ICW and the CNDI were double-edged, however. While claiming to be independent from political parties and the churches could appeal to a greater number of women’s associations, a lack of religious or political support could also be a disadvantage, and the context in each country was fundamental to the foundation of the various councils. Thus, these apolitical and neutral principles were difficult to uphold and, as this article shows, through the subsequent five years after its foundation the CNDI was permeable to political and religious influences. Furthermore, Catholicism was very strong in Italy compared to many other European countries. It should be added that only one-third of the councils affiliated to the ICW before the First World War came from Catholic countries: the remainder were majority Protestant.<sup>5</sup>

This article highlights the role played by some aristocratic women in the establishment of the CNDI. In 1899, the Scottish Marchioness, Ishbel of Aberdeen and Temair (known as Lady Aberdeen, 1857–1939), who was leader of the ICW almost without interruption for more than 30 years (1894–99, 1904–1920, 1922–1936), asked an ICW delegate to travel to Rome to encourage the formation of a national council in Italy. The result was the establishment of a promoting committee (*comitato promotore*) whose members were all aristocrats: Countess Lavinia Taverna, Countess Giacinta Martini Marescotti, Princess Teresa Marescotti of Venosa and Countess Maria Pasolini Ponti.<sup>6</sup> These had all been involved in the foundation of the Roman Federation of Women’s Activity (FROAF—*Federazione Romana delle Opere di Attività Femminile*) which held its first general assembly in Rome on 4 May 1899. FROAF was a prelude to CNDI, which was

created a year before the ICW's third international congress where Aberdeen presented the CNDI's official affiliation application:

The application of the National Council of Italy for affiliation to the International Council was presented through Lady Aberdeen, who moved that the National Council of Italy be received into membership, and that an expression of warm welcome should be sent to the proper officers of the Council of Italy.<sup>7</sup>

ICW congresses were held every five years (the first in Chicago in 1893 and the second in London in 1899) and served as catalysts for the creation of national councils. Therefore, it was in view of the third ICW congress held in Berlin in 1904, that the CNDI was founded.

At the head of the FROAF, which in 1901 incorporated around 40 women's associations—many were philanthropic (similar to the ICW's philanthropic Anglo-Saxon model) and included such Christian associations as the Union of Christian Youth (UCG—*Unione Cristiana delle Giovani*, founded in 1894)—was L. Taverna (1854–1938, born Boncompagni Ludovisi). She was married to a right-wing Milanese senator, Count Rinaldo Taverna (1839–1913), who was president of the Italian Red Cross from 1896 until his death. L. Taverna had been very close to the royal court since 30 October 1882, when at the age of 28 she became a lady-in-waiting to Queen ('*dama di Palazzo di S.M. la Regina*') Margherita Maria Teresa Giovanna di Savoia (1851–1926). Placing great importance on women's education, FROAF opened a library at 35 Piazza Nicosia in Rome, which was also where the organisation was headquartered. L. Taverna spared no effort in ensuring the creation of a National Council of Italian Women. In 1901 she sent a letter which was mentioned to the ICW's executive meeting in the Hague that July. In it she said the idea of 'the Italian council was progressing steadily', recognising that it was a slow but regular process.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, L. Taverna was concerned about the difficulties FROAF faced in increasing its influence, leading in 1902 to establish a new propaganda section to rally support within women's associations for the creation of a national council for Italy. As a federation, FROAF was open to the recruitment of different kinds of women's associations. In November 1902, FROAF organised a sale and exhibition of various women's works in Rome and published a book, *Operosità femminile italiana. Esposizione di arte e di lavori femminili* (Italian female activities. Exhibition of art and women's works).

Reports and letters from Italy were read at the ICW executive meetings in Copenhagen in 1902 and Dresden in 1903. Countess Cora Slocomb Savorgnan di Brazzà (1862–1944) was introduced to the executive in Dresden and becomes later patron of the ICW during its third quinquennium. She was born in New Orleans; her father was a military officer who was involved in the world of finance and insurance, and her mother was a Quaker. Cora spoke several foreign languages (including French and German), travelled through Europe, and studied painting in Monaco. In Rome, she met the Italian Count Detalmo Savorgnan di Brazzà, whom she married when she was 25 (they lived in the Brazzà Palace). In 1893, she wrote the essay, *A guide to old and new lace in Italy, exhibited at Chicago in 1893*, and received a gold medal at the World Fair's Columbian exhibition for the collection of embroidery and lace she and other Italian aristocratic women (like Ponti) had entrusted to Savoia—a collection that was exhibited in the Women's Building at the Chicago exhibition. As historian Manuela Soldi pointed out:

This was the first major exhibition of Italian women's work abroad, and presented their work as of recognized excellence, fit to be used for the benefit of the national image in an international context. An increasingly tight knot was being tied, meanwhile, between the struggle for women's emancipation and the promotion of handicrafts, in both manufacturing and domestic contexts, to allow less well-off women to support themselves.<sup>9</sup>

The World Fairs were important events for the developments of the ICW and its national councils: in 1893, the ICW accepted an invitation from the women's branch of the World Fair to hold its first congress (or rigorously its first quinquennial meeting) in Chicago. The entrepreneurial fibre of Brazzà was very developed: in 1891, after a trip to Germany, she had founded a Toy Workshop in Fagagna, near Brazzà.<sup>10</sup> She counted among her collaborators Countess Antonia Ponti Suardi and Lillah Nathan who would later both become activists of the CNDI.

It is certainly no coincidence that many future CNDI leaders came from the aristocracy, which should be linked to the fact that Aberdeen was an aristocrat and was in contact with others: for example, with Rasponi in Italy and Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg (1857–1913) in Finland. Lady Aberdeen's husband, Count John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon (1847–1934), known as Lord Aberdeen, had been the governor general of Canada since 1893—the same year Lady Aberdeen became the founding president of the National Council of Canadian Women (CNFC—*Conseil National des Femmes du Canada*). The aristocratic presence within the ICW is noticeable during the period being studied. While the ICW was an American initiative and its first leader was the non-aristocratic American, May Wright Sewall (1844–1920),<sup>11</sup> who was *de facto* ICW president from 1890 to 1893 and president from 1899 to 1904, she was succeeded as president during the years discussed here by Lady Aberdeen who along with the president of the CNDI made regular donations to keep the councils going. This was a personal effort that ensured their survival for many years (indeed, both the ICW and the CNDI exist to this day). These prominent women helped associate the councils with their leaders, who belonged to an elite with the financial means and spare time to dedicate to the councils. Another characteristic they shared was their longevity at the head of the ICW and CNDI. The length of their time in office was a subject of discussion, as was the fact that the leaders came from aristocratic backgrounds: but, precisely because of their longevity in office and their class identity, the leaders of both ICW and CNDI enjoyed privileged access to the political sphere.

When the CNDI was founded in Rome on 30 April 1903, it comprised two new federations in addition to FROAF: the Lombard, led by Countess Sabina Parravicino di Revel; and the Piedmontese, led by Giulia Bernocco Fava Parvis, who was director of the Margherita di Savoia de Torino Higher School of Letters. These three federations, established in Italy's main cities—Rome, Milan and Turin—show that initially the CNDI was an urban phenomenon. The federations came together to create the CNDI, with Rasponi becoming its first president. At the beginning, the Roman federation was the most active, with the CNDI's influence spreading from Rome to the north of Italy. In 1908, five years after its foundation, the CNDI was also represented in the south with the creation of the Neapolitan Federation. Before the outbreak of the First World War, the CNDI had six federations: Rome, Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Naples and Emilia. All except the Neapolitan federation were from the central and northern regions. As historian Paul Ginsborg stressed: 'Associationism has always been at its

strongest in the centre-north of the country, building on a centuries-long urban and civic tradition that has few equals in Europe'.<sup>12</sup> The regional divide between the north and the south of the peninsula was strong.

The number of aristocratic women in positions of leadership within the various federations was remarkable. L. Taverna was honorary president of the Roman federation before being replaced by Princess Laetitia de Savoia Napoleone, Duchess d'Aosta, in 1913; Rasponi was president, Countess Giorgia Ponzio Vaglia its secretary and Marchioness Cristina Honorati its adviser. Baroness Carla Lavelli de Capitani Celesia di Vegliasco was president of the Lombardian federation and Marchioness Giuditta Clerici its adviser. Aosta was honorary president of the Piemontese federation. Baroness Giuliana Ricasoli was honorary president of the Tuscany federation, Baroness Elena French Cini was president, Marchioness Cristina Niccolini vice-president, Marchioness Fiammetta Bourbon del Monte treasurer and Princess Adriana Ginori Conti, Baroness Nerina Traxler De Renzis, Baroness Firidolfi Ricasoli, Countess Editta Rucellai and Marchioness Gabriella Incontri were all advisers. Countess Carolina Isolani was vice-president of the Emilian federation. The leader of the Neapolitan federation was Princess Adelaide del Balzo Pignatelli di Strongoli (1843–1932), widow of the Prince and Count Francesco Pignatelli di Strongoli (1837–1906).

A closer analysis of the Tuscan federation, which had a number of standing committees, highlights the prominence of its aristocratic component. The head of the standing committee on emigration was Marchioness Ginevra Niccolini, the committee on juridical standing was led by Marchioness Angelina Alpoviti, while the standing committee on education was headed by Cini, who was president of the federation (illustrating the importance of education to CNDI). A full, undated, list of all members of the Tuscan federation contained the names of 219 women, fifty-two of whom were aristocrats, meaning that around twenty-five percent of the total membership were members of the aristocracy. The aristocratic presence at the head of the executive committee of the CNDI was much higher: among the total of six standing committees four were led by aristocratic women: assistance (Countess Marianna Soderini); hygiene (Marchioness Elena Lucifero); city life (Marco); and emigration (Countess Maria Lisa Danieli Camozzi).

The report of activities delivered to the 1904 ICW congress in Berlin noted that 'The seventy ladies' societies which form the Council [CNDI] have worked chiefly in three directions: educational, social, philanthropical'.<sup>13</sup> The most important areas of the Council's work were: 'educational purposes; women's work; promotion of our own interests; women's legal position; organization of charity; assistance in need'.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, not all women's associations wanted to join the CNDI. For example, the Women's Union (*Unione Femminile*) was a federation of several associations (and which in 1905 became the National Women's Union, UFN—*Unione Femminile Nazionale*), founded in Milan, in 1899, by, among others, Ersilia Majno Bronzini (1859–1933)—whose husband was a socialist MP, and who created the *Asilo Mariuccia* in 1901 which she directed until her death—chose not to affiliate with the CNDI.<sup>15</sup> The significant presence of aristocratic women in positions of leadership was viewed with suspicion by feminist associations like the *Unione Femminile*, as it was by associations linked to left-wing political parties, which pejoratively labelled CNDI members as 'bourgeois feminists'. In 1907, at the congress of the Second International held in Stuttgart, during the conference of Socialist women, it was stated that Socialist women should not ally

themselves with 'bourgeois feminists'. As the historian Michela De Giorgio convincingly argues that 'the accusation of being bourgeois that weighed on feminism at the beginning of the century (this opinion was shared by socialists, communists and fascists) certainly contributed to weakening the historical memory of liberal Italy's feminism'.<sup>16</sup> 'Bourgeois' here is understood in a broad sense and refers to people from a privileged background that also includes the upper class. Historian Marilyn J. Boxer has shown that so-called 'bourgeois feminism' is 'a slippery term that relies on a notion of «class »' [...] 'that needs reassessment' by scholars in order to overcome the dichotomy between 'bourgeois feminism' and the working class women's movement.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the *Unione Femminile* was founded in Milan and the CNDI in Rome exacerbated the conflicts between these two federations that emerged in Italy's two rival cities. Moreover, the process of Italian unification took many years to achieve: the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, but the process was not completed until the annexation of Rome, capital of the Papal States, in 1870. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the CNDI was founded, the particularism of each Italian region remained very strong, and the creation within the Italian council of various federations from different regions served to highlight this tendency. Over the years, the CNDI asked the ICW to take its peculiarities into account when comparing it to the other national councils, leading to some tensions among CNDI members themselves and with the ICW.

In the promoting committee (*comitato promotore*) that led to the foundation of the CNDI, L. Taverna was a practising Catholic with a right-wing background, while G. Marescotti (1844–1912) was a socialist and anti-clerical president of the National Committee for Women's Suffrage (CNPSF—*Comitato Nazionale Pro Suffragio Femminile*) affiliated to the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), which went on to develop separately from the ICW and focused its efforts on winning the vote for women. This shows that an aristocratic background was no bar to becoming a left-wing anti-clerical activist, although this was clearly not the case for most of the leaders of the CNDI. G. Marescotti with her sister T. Marescotti (1848–1928), who in 1868 had married Ignazio Boncompagni Ludovisi (1845–1913), Prince of Venosa and senator to become Princess of Venosa, hosted a salon that was attended by the writer Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863–1938), Prince of Montenevoso. It should also be noted that the family links between L. Taverna and T. Marescotti, her sister-in-law, highlight the fact that these aristocratic women were often related and came from the same social elite. Like L. Taverna, T. Marescotti was also a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of Savoia. In 1866, G. Marescotti married the Tuscan aristocrat, Count Ferdinando Martini (1841–1928), who was a member of parliament and minister of public instruction (1892–1893) in Giovanni Giolitti's first government and minister of the colonies from 1914 to 1916. Martini was also governor of Italian Eritrea from 1897 to 1907. Nevertheless, in 1896, G. Marescotti signed a petition protesting the colonial mobilisation, clearly separating herself from the positions taken by her husband. This example illustrates the complexities and non-linearity of each trajectory and the importance of analysing the differences of opinion that may have existed between couples and could also change over time. Martini, for example, had the following non-linear trajectory: he was a Freemason in favour of secularisation and in 1909 joined the left-wing *Partito Democratico Parlamentare* (Parliamentary Democratic Party); in 1917, he attempted to unite the left and right into the *Fascio Interventista*; he became a senator in 1923 then, two

years later, signed Giovanni Gentile's «Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals» before being appointed a minister of state in the fascist government in 1927.

Another member of the CNDI promoting committee, M. Ponti (1856–1938), married Count Pietro Desiderio Pasolini (1844–1920) in 1874, with whom in 1883 she founded a lacemaking school in Coccolia (Ravenna). That same year the couple also moved to Rome when Pasolini became first a right-wing MP (1883–1886), and then a senator in 1889. He was also in contact with D'Annunzio. In 1896, the Pasolinis opened the Charity Information Bureau (*Ufficio Informazioni di Beneficenza*) office in Rome, which provided advice to the poor. Focusing on the importance of women's education, Pasolini collaborated with Sofia Bisi Albini (1856–1919), a CNDI activist and director of the Roman journal *Vita Femminile Italiana* (Italian Women's Life), and the *Rivista per le Signorine* (Magazine for Young Ladies). With her sister, Antonia, in 1897, M. Ponti created a library in Ravenna and named it after their father, Andrea Ponti (1821–1853), who was a textile entrepreneur. What was unique about this library was that it was intended for women, which should be no surprise considering that Ponti's sisters went on to join the CNDI, where they played an important role in the development of organisation's library (when FROAF's library became the CNDI library, its director was M. Ponti). That same year, the Ponti sisters established similar libraries in Imola and Bergamo in the north of the country. In 1908, M. Ponti published an essay *Per la formazione di una cultura sociale e civile* (For the formation of a social and civic culture), in which she expressed her social concerns. In 1907, while the leader of the CNDI's standing committee on legal reform, M. Ponti put her name to the petition begun by Anna Maria Mozzoni (1837–1920) founder in 1881 of the League for the Promotion of Women's Interests (LPIF—*Lega per la Promozione degli Interessi Femminili*) calling for women's suffrage. This petition, which was dated March 1906, was also signed by the following aristocratic CNDI women: Marchioness Etta De Viti de Marco, G. Marescotti, T. Marescotti, Soderini and L. Taverna, and was debated in the Chamber of Deputies in February 1907.

While she declared herself to be a devout Catholic, M. Ponti opposed the mandatory teaching of religion in public schools. This demonstrates the importance of distinguishing each individual's personal convictions from her general understanding of how the CNDI ought to act in terms of religion—that is, in accordance with the neutrality declared in its statutes. CNDI statements were often the result of compromise between members' convictions and organisational policy, and the president tended to seek middle-ground solutions. Indeed, Rasponi always presented herself as a practising Catholic, but at CNDI's 1908 congress, she voted against religious education in primary schools. This topic was the subject of an extensive debate in the first CNDI congress, where Antonia, the younger sister of M. Ponti, was a member of the organising committee. In 1885, Antonia (1860–1938) married the Count Gianforte Suardi (1854–1931), who was mayor of Bergamo from 1883 to 1890 before going on to be a right-wing deputy, senator, then undersecretary of the ministry of agriculture in 1896. A. Suardi was involved in various local and national initiatives in the field of social action. At the local level, she was perpetual honorary member of the Bergamo Women Workers Mutual Aid Society (*Società di Mutuo Soccorso fra le Operaie di Bergamo*) and founded the Bergamo subcommittee of the Italian Women's Industries Cooperative Society (IFI—*Società Cooperativa delle Industrie Femminili Italiane*). She

later became president of the IFI at national level while L. Taverna was its vice-president and Aosta its honorary president. Thus, as historian Perry Willson stressed: 'Many Italian feminist activists were middle or upper class, although they did campaign for the rights of working-class women'.<sup>18</sup>

With the creation of the CNDI, the Pasolinis' lacemaking school led to the CNDI's standing committee on women's work and the aristocrats C. Brazzà, Marco, M. Ponti and L. Taverna established the IFI in Rome, May 22, 1903. Two of these women, C. Brazzà and Marco, were Americans who had married into Italian nobility. The IFI sought to remove the intermediaries who exploited the work of women as well as to internationalise Italian arts and crafts. The IFI received financial support from Savoia and Aosta and grew rapidly, establishing a network of personal relationships in the US through contacts provided by its president, C. Brazzà, and her husband, D. Brazzà, who became its secretary. Both had a great deal of expertise in lacemaking school and were the founders of the Brazzà Cooperative Lacemaking School. Another American woman, Marco (born Harriet Lathrop Dunham in New York, 1869–1939), who was a member of the IFI's board of directors, was appointed because of her expertise in the lace business. Along with her sister-in-law, Carolina de Viti de Marco, in 1901 she founded a lacemaking school. Its headquarters were located at the Orsini Palace in Rome, where Marco lived with her husband, the Marquis Antonio de Viti de Marco, who was an MP, member of the Radical Party. After her marriage in 1895, Marco had been a staunch supporter of her husband's twenty-year political career as a deputy championing free trade and anti-protectionist measures. Starting in 1904, she was leader of the CNDI's information and assistance office (*Ufficio indicazioni ed assistenza*) which coordinated social action initiatives in Rome and provided information to the poor. She demonstrated her extensive knowledge of all the voluntary associations created in Rome in an essay entitled *Guida romana della beneficenza, assistenza, istruzione, prevenzione, mutualità* (Roman guide to charity, assistance, education, prevention, mutuality), that was cited in the *New York Times* on 24 July 1910. In 1906, Marco 'and Florence Colgate, the daughter of the founder of the Colgate Company, [...] opened a lacemaking school in New York for young Italian women immigrants' showing the internationalisation of this initiative.<sup>19</sup> Marco also wrote articles for the *Giornale degli Economisti* (Economist Journal), whose editor was her husband and on which M. Ponti was a collaborator. Another aristocratic figure who published articles in the press was Rasponi, the CNDI's founding president.

### **Countess Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi and women's voluntary associations**

President of the CNDI from 1903 to 1931, Rasponi belonged to the same generation as Aberdeen and L. Taverna, who were all born during the 1850s, raised in aristocratic families, and received a religious education. The Countesses Rasponi and Taverna were fifty and forty-nine years old, respectively, when they get involved in the CNDI. Moreover, Rasponi was a widow (as was A. Strongoli), so had more time on her hands to dedicate to the CNDI. Her longevity at the head of the CNDI was remarkable—twenty-eight years from the creation of the CNDI until her death.

Gabriella was born in Ravenna on April 10, 1853, the eldest daughter of Count Cesare Rasponi Bonanzi (1822–1886), a deputy and senator, and Letizia Rasponi Murat (1832–

1906), the daughter of Joachim-Napoléon Murat and Caroline Bonaparte, youngest sister of the Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte. Politically, Gabriella's father was a moderate with liberal principles who often agreed with the right-wing party. Gabriella had two brothers, Luciano (1855–1931) and Carlo (1858–1920) who followed his father in becoming deputy and senator. Gabriella, who studied at home with private tutors, was from an early age immersed in the political environment of a well-known Emilia-Romagna aristocratic family associated with the liberal moderate right-wing. In 1870, at the age of 17, she married the liberal-conservative politician Count Venceslao Spalletti Trivelli (1837–1899), with whom she had five children (three of whom survived). The family moved to Rome, where she became a member of the board of the Italian Red Cross. Her involvement in social action was consistent throughout her life and she founded a number of organisations, including Maternal Assistance for Mothers in Need (*Aiuto Materno per le Madri Bisognose*); Queen Margherita Religious Charity for Trasteverine Girls (*Opera Pia Regina Margherita per le Fanciulle Trasteverine*); Queen Elena Association for the Orphans of the Messina Earthquake (*Patronato Regina Elena per gli Orfani del Terremoto di Messina*) and the Roman Lyceum (*Lyceum Romano*). After the earthquake that occurred in Messina, in December 1908, the CNDI launched a subscription and sent some nurses of the Red Cross (the husband of L. Taverna personally led the rescue operations). *Patronato Regina Elena per gli Orfani del Terremoto di Messina* became an 'ente morale' (moral entity)—a status that recognised its achievements. Indeed, it assisted approximately 4000 orphans. This social engagement was also shared by Rasponi's husband, and together in 1897 they opened an embroidery school in Quarrata (Tuscany). The importance of lacemaking and embroidery schools among the CNDI's activists should be underlined, and they taught a wide variety of courses ('*puericultura*', '*economia domestica*', typing, etc). In a text dated April 1, 1920, titled *Che cosa è il Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane* (What is the National Council of Italian Women), signed by Rasponi, she gave the following list of social initiatives advanced by the Italian council:

Circulating library for teachers; Italian Women's Industries; the Charity Information and Indicator Office; the Secretariat for the Protection of Migrant Women and Children; the Maternity Fund; the National Alliance for the Protection of Maternity and Early Childhood; Home Visiting Nurses and School Assistance.<sup>20</sup>

Rasponi's husband was elected a right-wing deputy in 1874, becoming a senator ten years later. In Rome, the couple would receive intellectuals and politicians at their Spalletti Trivelli villa, which was opposite the Quirinale Palace, the residence of the Italian monarch. This salon became renowned. Rasponi also attended another salon hosted by the Italian-Swiss Dora Melegari (1849–1924), the daughter of Luigi Amedeo Melegari (1805–1881) who was a friend of Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), a central figure in the process of Italian unification. D. Melegari travelled between Rome and Paris and became a CNDI activist. At this salon in D. Melegari's home that other future activists of the CNDI, such as Antonietta Giacomelli (1857–1949), attended, there were meetings of the Union for Good (*Unione per il Bene*), which engaged in social initiatives.<sup>21</sup> D. Melegari also invited the French professor and journalist Paul Desjardins (1859–1940) who founded the Union for Moral Action (*Union pour l'Action Morale*) in 1892 and, in 1910, the Pontigny Decades (*Décades de Pontigny*)—a meeting of intellectuals, to her salon in Rome.

Four years after her husband's death in 1899, Rasponi became even more deeply involved in women's social action by assuming the presidency of the CNDI continuously until her death in Rome on 29 September 1931. She also played an important role in the ICW and was its second vice-president, from 1910 to 1914. At that time, the ICW had three vice-presidents from different countries: Ogilvie Gordon (1864–1939) from Scotland was also president of the standing committee on Education of the ICW and Marianne Hainisch (1839–1936) was president of 'the *Bund österreichischer Frauenvereine* (BÖFV, Union of Austrian Women's Associations) in 1902 [...] [which] became the ICW's official representative for Austria in 1903'.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Rasponi was the only vice-president in the ICW from southern Europe. Nevertheless, another Italian aristocrat and member of the CNDI who played a major role in the ICW during the same period was Camozzi, the convener of its international Emigration and Immigration standing committee, which was concerned with the conditions in which migrants travelled. Camozzi was also at the head of the standing committee of the Roman federation on the same topic, which was created thanks to Rasponi, who asked Camozzi to lead it. In the CNDI, there was a Secretariat for Women and Child Emigrants (SFTDFE—*Segretariato Femminile per la Tutela delle Donne e dei Fanciulli Emigranti*) which was established in 1908 and also headed by Camozzi.

These committees highlighted the special importance given to the phenomenon of migration in Italy. For example, since 1901, Italians had been the first group to migrate in large numbers to France: in 1921, Italian immigrants represented 30% of the foreign population in France. The SFTDFE operated until Camozzi retired due to ill health in 1917. Camozzi's father was Gabriele Camozzi (1823–1869), a deputy from Bergamo, and her mother was Alba Coralli (1818–1886), who was born in Pavia. They married in 1859 and Maria Lisa was born in 1860. Maria Lisa also married a deputy, Count Gualtiero Danieli, with whom she had four children. They moved to Rome in 1882. Camozzi was very active in social action. She was one of the founders of the IFI; she was an inspector at the Queen Margherita Religious Charity School (*Opera Pia Scuola Regina Margherita*); a patron of the Santa Catarina Workhouses (*Casa Operaie di Santa Catarina*) in Rome; one of the founder and, from 1907, president of the Maternity Assistance and Prevention Fund (*Cassa di Assistenza e Previdenza per la Maternità*). This *Cassa* received financial support from the government and from the Queen Elena di Savoia (1873–1952). Another Italian aristocrat who played a role in the ICW's finance standing committee was Vegliasco, from Milan, who headed the Lombardy federation. The presence of Italian aristocratic women from the CNDI—Camozi, Rasponi and Vegliasco—in the governing bodies of the ICW until the outbreak of the First World War had a noteworthy effect on the group's policies. They had in common not only their aristocratic background but also the way they approached women's issues.

Throughout her years as president of the CNDI, Rasponi tried to be a mediator and conciliate all points of views inside and outside the Italian council. In 1907, when a congress was organised by the Catholic women's movements in Milan (25–28 April), the CNDI participated alongside some socialists and the UFN. This congress agreed to work for the reform of the Italian Civil Code, and particularly for the abolition of marital authorisation that was needed for married women regarding all administrative requests. Other demands were for the right to bring paternity suits and women's right to vote in local elections (*voto amministrativo*). But this collaboration with the Catholic

women's movements did not last very long. It was compromised by Pius X's encyclical denouncing modernism and 'Catholic laity', *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which was published on 8 September 1907. The relationship between the CNDI and the Catholic women's movements turned out to be difficult, although possible, at the time of the Milan congress, particularly when at its end Revel announced the 1908 CNDI forthcoming congress. Nevertheless, the Catholic women's movement made their involvement in the 1908 congress subject to discussions on full women's suffrage and divorce being removed from the agenda. As historian Daniela Saresella pointed out,

[...] in Italy every time the issue of divorce was raised, a show of opposition by bishops, priests, and Catholic militants took place, inciting public opinion, in particular women, to react against it and accusing the «prodivorce» faction of being the enemies of religion and destroying the family and the values on which Italian society was based.<sup>23</sup>

To achieve reforms, the CNDI operated through standing committees along the lines of those within the ICW. The CNDI standing committees were dedicated to such issues as the protection of maternity, the trafficking of women, divorce, the right to vote, the investigation of paternity and the revision of the civil code. The influence of the 1804 Napoleonic civil code, which was the source of many of the feminists' complaints, was not restricted to France, since it was also the inspiration for the Italian Pisanelli code of 1865. The CNDI constantly demanded that women be granted rights in return for fulfilling their duties. The dialectic of rights and duties was apparent in almost all of its demands. The structure of the CNDI followed that of the ICW: it was hierarchical and consisted of a *comitato direttivo* (steering committee), which included the president, two or three vice-presidents, two secretaries, one treasurer and six advisers, all elected at the general assembly. The CNDI followed a pragmatic and gradualist strategy, seeking support from politicians without concerning itself with their political affiliation. The goal was to influence legislation in the knowledge that the margin for manoeuvre was limited, given that women could neither vote nor be elected. This reformist strategy encompassed demands for a number of legal reforms, such as the paternity suit, which was a constant demand of the Italian council down the years.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the female illiteracy rate in Italy was very high: fifty percent of women could neither read nor write. The focus on education was already apparent at the CNDI's first congress in Rome in 1908, which was attended by the minister for public education, Luigi Rava (1860–1938), who was a left-wing Freemason. The CNDI was always searching for political support from across the ideological spectrum as a form of recognition and as a means of advancing its demands. The CNDI often invited politicians to be part of the honour committees at its congresses and to get involved in its inaugural sessions. Indeed, the CNDI was a well-positioned interlocutor for various governments that were present at its congresses. Some Jewish personalities<sup>24</sup> like the mayor of Rome, Ernesto Nathan, also supported the CNDI, and his wife and daughter were activists in the Italian Council.

### 1908: The CNDI's first congress

Held in Palace of Justice in Rome, decorated for the occasion by A. Suardi, during the week of 23–30 April 1908, the CNDI's first congress had as its patrons Queen Elena di

Savoia and Aosta (honorary president of the congress and of the Piedmont federation of the CNDI), both of whom attended the inaugural session. As an article in a newspaper underlined: ‘All that Rome possesses of the noblest and most elect in the female world is gathered in this vast hall of the *Campidoglio*’.<sup>25</sup> The inaugural session was also attended by two ministers: the minister for public education, Rava, and the minister of the post office, Carlo Schanzer (1865–1953), as well as by the mayor and prefect of Rome, Ernesto Nathan and Angelo Anarratone, respectively. This congress confirmed the increasing recognition of the CNDI as a valuable interlocutor that played an important role in establishing a link between civil society and the state. For the ICW, Aberdeen was represented by Lady Egerton, and for the National Council of French Women (CNFF—*Conseil National des Femmes Françaises*) which had been founded in Paris in 1901 were present Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix (1855–1939)—secretary general (1901–1922) of the CNFF—and Gabrielle Alphen-Salvador (1856–1920), president of the standing committee on education of the CNFF.

Nathan (1845–1921), who was a Freemason born in London, gave the first speech, which he began by stating that his wife would have been better in his place, as she fully understood the purposes of such a congress. Virginia Nathan and their daughter Lilia Nathan Ascoli (1868–1930) were both activists of the CNDI. In her opening speech, Rasponi offered the following conciliatory definition of the Italian council’s feminism: ‘Our feminism does not sound like a struggle, as many believe; but it works for union between classes’, while insisting on the social responsibility of those who held a high social position and on the balance between rights and duties: ‘If we claim certain rights for woman, it is because we believe she is able to support the new duties that modern civilisation imposes on her’.<sup>26</sup> She recalled that the ICW represented seven million women across twenty-four countries. Following Rasponi, A. Strongoli said a few words about the CNDI’s new Neapolitan federation.

The invitations to the 1908 congress noted that the CNDI had been involved in ‘tireless and conscientious social work’ for a number of years (five), which highlighted its proclaimed social concern.<sup>27</sup> The congress managed to bring together 1,000–1,500 participants from 60 associations. However, the UFN did not take part, instead organising its own congress a month later (23–28 May 1908). The first circular announcing the CNDI’s 1908 congress stated that the intention was ‘to discuss and study some problems that are increasingly imposed upon those who feel the duty to take part in social work’, and was signed by Beatrice Betts, Maria Grassi Koenen, Melegari, Rasponi, L. Taverna, Berta Turin and Vaglia.<sup>28</sup> The CNDI formed a *comitato permanente* (permanent committee): six of its eleven members were aristocratic women (Cini, L. Laverna, Rasponi, president, Baroness Giuliana Ricasoli, Revel and Vaglia), and the remaining five were Betts, Koenen, Melegari, Parvis and Turin. Cini (1844–1922) had led the CNDI’s Tuscan federation since 1907 (Baroness Giuliana Ricasoli was its honorary president) and Revel was at the head of the Lombard federation, once again demonstrating the importance of the central-northern federations. Other aristocratic women within the CNDI played active roles at the congress: Marco was president of the standing committee on ‘*assistenza e previdenza*’ (assistance and prevention) that discussed ‘*associazione di mutuo soccorso*’ (mutual aid associations) and ‘*Cassa di Assicurazioni per la Maternità*’ (Maternity Insurance Fund). Camozzi and M. Ponti were also members of this standing committee, illustrating the fact that the same CNDI aristocrats were involved in

organising social action in its various forms.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, M. Ponti was president of the standing committee on education and instruction, where she spoke on libraries, while its secretary, Camozzi, was also head of the standing committee on emigration.

As had been previously agreed with the Catholic women's movement, the question of divorce was not on the agenda (in 1903, a bill in favour of divorce was approved by the Chamber of Deputies but was withdrawn), although a professor who was a member of the Standing Committee on Law affirmed that the Church of Rome did not condemn divorce; Soderini protested energetically against such a false statement. On the abolition of the marital authorisation, Lucifero gave the floor to the right-wing former president of the council of ministers, Baron Sidney Costantino Sonnino. Lucifero also took part in the Standing Committee on Hygiene's debate on tuberculosis, which voted for the creation of an *Ufficio antitubercolare* (anti-tuberculosis office) along the lines of the one in Paris, and called on the women of the Red Cross to offer courses to describe their work against tuberculosis. During the plenary sessions, the French feminist Alphen-Salvador talked on *Les écoles d'infirmières* (the nursing schools), which Aosta appreciated very much. The other CNFF representative, Avril de Sainte-Croix, spoke about the traffic in white women to the standing committee on morality chaired by Marchioness Bianca Agnese Paolucci (Countess Maria Contri Jonni and Marchioness Clelia Pellicano also participated in the discussion). Avril de Sainte-Croix assessed the moral aspects of this topic and was 'applauded for a long time.' She herself appeared 'deeply moved'.<sup>30</sup> The issue on morality was present throughout the congress, with Pellicano presenting her conclusions on what she considered to be the immoral press.

The presence in the audience of some of the husbands of the CNDI's aristocratic women illustrated their social action militancy as couples, with G. Danieli and Alfonso Lucifero being two such examples. Other male politicians were also present, including Sonnino, Alessandro Fortis (Sonnino's predecessor as right-wing president of the council of ministers, who, like his successor, was Jewish), the socialist deputy Vittorio Lollini and former left-wing senator the jurist and professor Augusto Pierantoni. Among the associations with aristocratic representatives taking part were: Kindergarten (*Asilo Materno*) with Princess di Sonnino and Marchioness di Bagno; Library for the Blind (*Biblioteca per i Ciechi*) with Princess Doria and Marchioness Guiccioli; Ponti Historical Library (*Biblioteca Storica Ponti*) with A. Suardi; Charity and Work (*Carità e Lavoro*) with Princess Pallavicini; *Emilia Arts* with Countess Cavazza; Women's Industries (*Industrie Femminili*) with A. Suardi and Marchioness Alessandra Torelli; Women's Higher Education Institute (*Istituto Superiore di Magistero Femminile*) with A. Strongoli and the Santa Caterina Laboratory (*Laboratorio di Santa Caterina*) with Soderini. On April 24, 28, 29 and 30 and May 1, 1908, the Roman daily newspaper, *Il Giornale D'Italia*, dedicated all six columns of its front page to the congress, with thirteen of thirty-one illustrations (photographs or drawings) being of aristocrats: Aosta, Baroness de Bonnis, Camozzi, Lucifero, Marco, M. Ponti, Pellicano, Rasponi (twice), Soderini, A. Suardi, L. Taverna and Marchioness Vivaldi-Bossmier.

The many other topics addressed at the 1908 congress included: the paternity suit, the abolition of the marital authorisation, sexual education, tuberculosis (with the Emilio-Romagna federation being particularly active on this issue) and assistance to migrants. As for the vote, it was not scheduled initially as part of the agreement with the Catholic women's associations; however, thanks to G. Marescotti it was discussed in a plenary

session over which she presided. The importance of legal reforms designed to change articles of the Civil Code was also a constant demand at CNDI congresses, and an essay, *La Donna nella legislazione italiana* (Woman in Italian Law), was reprinted especially for the congress in 1908—its first edition, written by Valeria Benetti Brunelli, had been published by the Woman's Association (*Associazione per la Donna*) in 1904.

As for teaching religion at school, there were many different opinions that generated tumultuous debates. The morning session on 28 of April was suspended and the vote postponed later in the afternoon. Among the aristocratic women, M. Ponti said: 'The religious problem at school must remain an issue left to the each person's individual conscience', while Princess Cassano Zunica was in favour of religious education at school. Baroness Irene de Bonis de Nobili (from a noble family from Mezzogiorno, Catanzaro) stated: 'If religious sentiment prevails in the female soul, it must not be confused with bigotry and fanaticism to the detriment of the fatherland, the family, the children'.<sup>31</sup> The religious controversy led to a rupture between the CNDI and Catholic women's associations. The vote on a motion by the socialist Linda Malnati (1855–1921) to remove the requirement of Catholic religious education in primary schools generated powerful opposition among Catholic women, led by Rome's Princess Maria Cristina Giustiniani Bandini (1866–1959), despite Rasponi's attempt to reconcile all points of view. The Vatican's official newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, criticised Rasponi, stating that she should not have intervened. In trying to be a mediator between Catholic women's associations and the CNDI, Rasponi failed, and the landmark event of that congress was the rupture between them. Malnati was very active in the congress—despite the Italian Socialist Party's hostility towards the feminists—showing once more the need to dissociate individual positions taken from the sympathy towards a political party. Malnati's motion affirmed that primary schools should be absolutely '*aconfessionale*' (neutral) and that the teaching of the history and science of religion should be established at schools. A letter from Rasponi to the director of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, Alberto Bergamini, was reproduced in the issue of 30 April, 1908. The letter explained her reasons for voting with Malnati, stating that she was 'deeply religious and convinced of the need to teach religion to children at an early age', but that she was nevertheless

equally convinced that religious teaching, given badly, or taught badly by atheist teachers as unfortunately happens in our country, is hugely damaging for society, to an extent we are unable to measure [...] It is painful to make religion a political issue.<sup>32</sup>

The same issue of *Il Giornale d'Italia* reproduced a declaration signed by several of those who took part in the congress, including such aristocrats as Countess Maria Corniani, Nobili, Marchioness Pallavicino, Princess Doria Pamphili, Pellicano, Targiani, Countess de la Tour and Countess di Villafalletto, which asserted that the vote on '*aconfessionalità*' (neutrality) was approved by a majority and not unanimously. After the 1908 congress, Bandini stated that no more cooperation was possible between the Catholic women and the feminist movement. As a matter of fact, Bandini founded in 1909 the Union of Italian Catholic Women (UDCI—*Unione fra le Donne Cattoliche d'Italia*),<sup>33</sup> a Church-sponsored conservative women's organisation directly under the Pope's supervision which marked the separation for the subsequent years between the CNDI and catholic women's associations such as the UDCI.

## Conclusion

The origins of the CNDI demonstrated that it did not emerge from a vacuum, but that rather it was constituted on the basis of the numerous women's associations that were already federated in FROAF, and that it was led by a number of aristocratic women—some of whom had their own salons, and all of whom shared the same social commitments. These aristocratic women often grew up within a politicised environment. Rasponi and Camozzi had fathers who were involved in politics, and others were married to politicians who were also active in the social field. Either as couples or separately, they founded several voluntary associations, with the eventually independent IFI being the most famous in terms of the CNDI. They formed an elite that was very well aware of the importance of education for women and placed a great emphasis on libraries such as the FROAF library, which became the CNDI's library, and the three Ponti sisters libraries in Bergamo, Imola and Ravenna. After its formal foundation in Rome in 1903, fifteen years after the ICW's creation, the CNDI spreaded across mainly central and northern Italy in what was initially an urban phenomenon (Rome, Milan, Florence, Turin and then, five year after the CNDI's foundation, Naples in the south). To educate and also provide information to the less fortunate was another aim shared by the aristocratic women of the CNDI (*Ufficio informazioni di beneficenza*). Their social concern was also visible in the books they published (*A Guide to Old and New Lace in Italy, Exhibited at Chicago in 1893; Guida Romana della Beneficenza, Assistenza, Istruzione, Previdenza, Mutualità; Operosità femminile italiana. Esposizione di arte e di lavori femminili; Per la formazione di una coltura sociale e civile*) and in their participation in other organisations operating in the social field, such as: *Aiuto Materno per le Madri Bisognose; Cassa di Assistenza e Previdenza per la Maternità; Case Operaie di Santa Catarina; Opera Pia Regina Margherita per le Fanciulle Trasteverine; Patronato Regina Elena per gli Orfani del Terremoto di Messina; Roman Lyceum; Società di Mutuo Soccorso fra le Operaie di Bergamo*; and the *Società Cooperativa delle IFI*. As a matter of fact, the aristocratic women of the CNDI were active in many associations which demonstrate their social conscience. Their proximity to the royal court gave them access to financial resources through Queen Margherita Maria Teresa Giovanna di Savoia—L. Taverna and T. Marescotti were both her ladies-in-waiting. Queen Margherita lent her name to two organisations, *Opera Pia Regina Margherita per le Fanciulle Trasteverine* and *Opera Pia Scuola Regina Margherita*. Queen Elena di Savoia likewise patronised *Patronato Regina Elena per gli Orfani del Terremoto di Messina* and the first CNDI Congress in 1908. She also provided financial support to the *Cassa di Assistenza e Previdenza per la Maternità* and to the *Società Cooperativa delle IFI*. The leaders of the CNDI succeeded in supporting various kinds of associations, in creating new ones, and in coordinating some of them. They contributed significantly to women's associativism not only by claiming rights for women but also by putting their ideas into practice by founding associations in the field of social assistance. Each of these associations deserves a deep study in order to analyse the role played by its founders as well as their beneficiaries. Did the concrete practice of these associations take into account the «double day» of working women? The founders used the women's skills (like lacemaking techniques)—taking advantage of their knowledge but also offering courses that provided training—in order to make a profit, at the same time intending to emancipate women

through their work. To which extent was this possible? Regarding their motivations, these are difficult to evaluate, varied in different contexts, and often changed over time. Thus, a biographical approach illuminates their links and the networks they formed as well as their accomplishments and failures. It shows also how some of them combined entrepreneurial ambitions with their desire to help less fortunate women. This was not an easy task to achieve and they faced many kinds of opposition but were also supported by numerous politicians from the left and the right coming from different backgrounds (namely Catholic, Freemason and Jewish). Their struggle to try to change laws also showed an awareness of the problems of women of different social classes even if they did not manage to obtain women's suffrage (which would occur only in 1945 in Italy and Italian women voted for the first time in 1946). The suffrage campaigns faced opposition across the political spectrum: generally speaking the right wing was against giving all women the vote and the left wing feared the conservative vote of women. Furthermore, the CNDI's leaders were also divided on the question of women's suffrage. When the vote was finally approved by the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate always reluctant, blocked it.

Despite their privileged backgrounds, the aristocratic women of the CNDI were willing to confront issues that affected more ordinary women. Nevertheless, due precisely to their education and environments it could also limited their understandings of the needs of the working class women. A deep analysis of each of their social initiatives is required to show if they took a patronising attitude towards working women. It should go beyond such dichotomies as private *versus* public initiatives and examine the interactions between women's organisations and the state.

This article demonstrates the necessity of studying the various networks that formed the CNDI to fully grasp their extent, and obviously not only its aristocratic component, though it was prominent at its founding. The CNDI also included women of foreign origin (especially Americans in the IFI), partly because the Italian Council was the national section of the ICW founded in Washington DC. The 1908 CNDI first congress marked a rupture between the Italian council and the Catholic women's associations and showed that the relationships between them turned out to be conflictual and only possible on specific topics and under special circumstances such as during the First World War when the demands of the majority of women's associations, whether feminist or Catholic, were greatly diminished as they focused their attentions on supporting the war. The aristocratic women of the CNDI contributed by their reformist feminism, social commitments—that took various forms and vary depending on the different contexts—and their numerous initiatives (which were acknowledged in the world's exhibitions and in the congresses they organised) to the expansion of the field of social protection, and thus prepared the ground for the emergence of welfare policies. Their significant activism paved the way for the achievement of some women's rights—a process that was by no means linear and always subjects to setbacks. Thus, it is fundamental to focus on the importance of the contexts in their trajectories and on the paradoxes that may be embodied in a single individual. Finally, this article argues for a nuanced approach<sup>34</sup> to the CNDI, in order to better understand its complexity and to show how it circulated both in politics and in civil society, establishing a link between these two areas and also highlighting their interdependency.

## Notes

1. Anne Cova, 'The National Councils of Women in France, Italy and Portugal. Comparisons and Entanglements 1888–1939', in *Gender History in a Transnational Perspective: Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders*, ed. Oliver Janz and Daniel Schönpflug (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 47. See also: Anne Cova, 'International Feminisms in Historical Comparative Perspective: France, Italy and Portugal, 1880s–1930s', in 'International Feminisms', eds., Ann Taylor Allen, Anne Cova, and June Purvis, special issue, *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 595–612. On the ICW see Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Eliane Gubin and Leen Van Molle, eds., *Women Changing the World: A History of the International Council of Women, 1888–1988* (Brussels: Éditions Racine, 2005); Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
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3. Anne Cova, 'The National Councils of Women', 57 (see note 1).
4. *Ibid.*, 58.
5. *Ibid.*, 52.
6. Fiorenza Taricone, *Teoria*, 92 (see note 2).
7. ICW, *Report of Transactions During the Third Quinquennial Term Terminating With the Third Quinquennial Meeting Held in Berlin, June, 1904 With an Introduction by May Wright Sewall Retiring President* (Boston: May Wright Sewall, 1910, vol. 1), 27.
8. *Ibid.*, 46.
9. Manuela Soldi, 'Before Italian Fashion: Textile Craftsmanship in Italy (1861–1911)', in *Fashion Through History: Costumes, Symbols, Communication*, ed. Giovanna Motta and Antonello Biagini, vol. II (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 27–8.
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  14. *Ibid.*
  15. Gisela Bock, *Women in European History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, eds., *Maternity & Gender Policies. Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991); Annarita Buttafuoco, *Le Mariuccine. Storia di un'istituzione laica: L'Asilo Mariuccia* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985); Graziella Gaballo, *Il nostro dovere. L'Unione Femminile tra impegno sociale, guerra e fascismo (1899–1939)* (Novi Ligure: Joker, 2015); Stefania Bartoloni, ed., *Attraversando il tempo. Centoventi anni dell'Unione femminile nazionale, 1899–2019* (Roma: Viella, 2019).
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  17. Marilyn J. Boxer, 'Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept "Bourgeois Feminism"', *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 131–58. For the need to challenge dichotomies in Women's History, see Gisela Bock, 'Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women's History', in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, ed. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 1–23.
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  19. Idanna Pucci, 'Cora Slocomb' (see note 10), 109.
  20. 'la Biblioteca circolante per le maestre, le Industrie femminili Italiane, l'Ufficio di informazione e indicatore della beneficenza, il Segretariato per la tutela delle donne e dei fanciulli emigranti, la Cassa di maternità, l'Alleanza nazionale per la tutela della maternità e prima infanzia, le Infermiere visitatrici a domicilio e l'Assistenza scolastica', Archivio centrale dello Stato, Archives CNDI, Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi, *Che cosa è il Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane* (Santarcangelo: Tipografia Giorgetti, 1 April 1920).
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  23. Daniela Saresella, 'The Battle for Divorce in Italy and Opposition from the Catholic World (1861–1974)', *Journal of Family History* 42, no. 4 (2017): 402.
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  27. *Archivio centrale dello Stato*, Archives CNDI, Congresso nazionale delle donne italiane, 'Gentilissima Signora', undated.

28. Fiorenza Taricone, *Teoria* (see note 2), 105. Maria Grassi Koenen was born in 1857 in Cologne and studied at the University of Heidelberg where she met in 1879 her husband, the physician, future senator G. Battista Grassi. They had one children, Isabella, who was born in Heidelberg and then the family moved to Italy. When the CNDI was founded Maria Grassi Koenen became its treasurer and did also represented it in the ICW.
29. Roberta Nunin and Elisabetta Vezzosi, eds., *Donne e famiglie nei sistemi di welfare. Esperienze nazionali e regionali a confronto* (Rome: Carocci, 2007). See also Elisabetta Vezzosi, 'La maternità: dall'assistenza al welfare', in *Storia delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Silvia Salvatici (Rome: Carocci, 2022).
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31. Fiorenza Taricone, *Teoria* (see note 2), 323; Fiorenza Taricone, 'L'associazionismo femminile italiano: Il Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane', *Bollettino della Domus Mazziniana*, Anno XXXVII, no. 2 (1991), 203.
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34. See the comments made by Michelle Perrot at *Les Rendez-vous de l'Histoire*, Blois, 9 October 2021, on the book written by Jean Birbaum, *Le Courage de la nuance*, Paris, Seuil, 2021.

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