

FEMINIST DIGITAL LITERATURE IN ITALY. DELAYS, BREAKTHROUGHS AND EXCEPTIONS

LITERATURA DIGITAL FEMINISTA EN ITALIA. RETRASOS, AVANCES Y EXCEPCIONES

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ABSTRACT

As the digital world has broadened the spectrum of digital and digitised archives, in Italy, digital feminist literature has seen a delayed implementation, alongside some major achievements. It is due to the democratisation of knowledge that sources and accounts, previously the preserve of academics, have become accessible to a broad and diversified readership. The launching of digitisation projects has enabled a reinterpretation of the genesis, evolution and dynamics of the emancipation and feminist movements. The article provides a comparative analysis of digital feminist literature by considering two cases, namely the UDI (Unione Donne in Italia) (1944), the largest Italian women's organisation, and its *Noi Donne* magazine, along with the neo-feminism of the seventies and the *Effe* magazine, representative of the various elements in the transnational movement.

Keywords: feminism, emancipation, digital feminist literature, magazines, archives

RESUMEN

A medida que el mundo digital ha ampliado el espectro de archivos digitales y digitalizados, en Italia la literatura feminista digital ha experimentado un retraso en su implementación, junto con algunos logros relevantes. Debido a la democratización del conocimiento, las fuentes primarias y la documentación que antes eran de dominio exclusivo de la academia, se han vuelto accesibles a un público amplio y diverso. Algunos proyectos de digitalización han permitido reconstruir la génesis, evolución y dinámica de los movimientos emancipadores y feministas del país. Este artículo ofrece un análisis comparativo de la literatura feminista digital, a partir de dos casos concretos: la UDI (Unione Donne in Italia) (1944), la mayor organización de mujeres italiana, con su revista *Noi Donne*, y el neofeminismo de los años setenta con la revista *Effe*, representante de los diversos logros del movimiento a nivel transnacional.

Palabras clave: feminismo, emancipación, literatura digital feminista, revistas, archivos

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1. Introduction

It has been twenty years since literature (Vitali, 2004) researched the accelerating expansion of archival web sources, the subsequent development of digital archives and the emergence of a new interaction between historians and archival sources, that were no longer closed in a box, but available at a click. The web called into question the very methods of standard historical research in its evolution from a mere instrument (in analogical terms, an inventory) to a precious research resource in its own right (from inventory to genuine archive), considering its reach and divulgatory power.

Today's digital world, the so-called web 3.0, while barely recognisable compared to what it was at the beginning of the century, has in fact engendered a further broadening of online digital and digitised archives. This spreads awareness of historical realities beyond a confined circle of historians to a wider and more diverse public.

Italian literary output includes a developing digital feminist literature, promoting the interpretation of archive material from the feminist movements throughout their activity. Broad and varied, this is an environment with distinct individuals who, combined, contribute to the growth of digital documentation in the field. We will become acquainted with them below. Beforehand, it is, however, fundamental to make two key distinctions regarding the uptake of digital documents, distinctions which come into play considering reach and analysis and which are typical of the digital age. To begin with, despite the ever-increasing online resources, archives continue to be prevalently analogical, viewable as always in the original archival source. The building of digital archives is hampered by software problems for the digitisation of such materials, along with funding shortfalls and further difficulties. Despite this, there is an increasing number of research tools such as inventories and guides to the use of the materials at hand. The second consideration regards all literature, whether academic or otherwise, with editorial policy frequently preventing free, easy access to digital documents. The open access model, renowned for encouraging sharing, divulgation and comment exchange, has not been universally adopted by the sector, limiting access as a result.

This article will seek to depict the current state of the development of feminist digital literature in Italy, outlining the work of a selection of academic works from the field, as well as give an idea of the type and variety of material available to a now waxing, now waning public. Specific focus will go to women's and feminist movements, honing in on the activity of the *Unione Donne in Italia* (UDI) and that of the leading participants in the protests of the seventies.

2. UDI's Eighty-Year History

September 2024 will see the 80th anniversary of the UDI, founded on September 15th, 1944. The Union was an offshoot of the female resistance movement, constituted in Milan in October 1943, going under the name of Women's Defence Groups. Despite seeking to represent a broad spectrum of Italian women regardless of political orientation, almost immediately the movement swung towards the reborn parties of the left, in particular towards the Italian Communist Party (PCI), of which numerous UDI members were cardholders. This shift became particularly notable from 1947-48 on (Casmirri, 1978; Gabrielli, 2005a). Formal foundation of the association was only concluded after the Second World War, as democracy slowly raised its head throughout the land after over twenty years of fascist dictatorship.² The first UDI congress was held in Florence, 20-23 October, 1945,³ with the association's first statute being approved on its conclusion. The statute adopted the objective of "the defence of all women's interests in the workplace, in society and in the State, promoting their work in every field" (Unione Donne Italiane, 1946, p. 1).

Active to this day, the history of the UDI overlaps with Italian social and political history and stands out for its continuous drive for female emancipation and the defence of women's rights (Gabrielli, 2005b). The Union's dedication, from 1945 to the present day, can be seen in the countless battles fought in support of the right to work, equal pay, child support, and maternity support; as well as in the backing for education, for a reappraisal of the family and for the measures for tackling violence against women (Rodano, 2010; Tola, 2016).

The 11th National Congress, Rome, 20-23 May, 1982,⁴ was a turning point for the association. Thereafter, the UDI dropped its hierarchical model of over thirty years old and axed middle and senior management structures, opting for a local and voluntary footing, ushering in new forms of political meeting among members, such as self-convened assemblies (Unione Donne Italiane, 1986). Further, the Congress marked a clear political break, with the association distancing itself from the party mechanisms of the left, with which

² The UDI was not the sole women's association to come into being after the war. We should not overlook the Centro Italiano Femminile, that was closer to Christian Democrat and Catholic positions. See Dau Novelli Cecilia (Ed.) (1995), *Donne del nostro tempo. Il centro italiano femminile 1945-1995*, Studium.

³ The event was named *Le donne nella partecipazione alla vita pubblica, nella lotta, nella ricostruzione* ('Women's participation in society, in combat and in reconstruction'). UDI Digital Archive, First National UDI Congress programme: <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/1-congresso-nazionale-udi/> [All links provided herein were last consulted 2024 May 25th].

⁴ The event was named *Noi donne che ci ribelliamo, trasgrediamo, usciamo dalle case, parliamo tra noi, ci organizziamo, la nostra politica è la liberazione* ('Us women who rebel, transgress, leave the house, talk together, organise our lives, our politics is liberation'). UDI Digital Archive, 11th UDI National Congress programme: <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/donne-la-nostra-politica-la-liberazione/>

it had historically held close bonds. This was above all due to the question of “dual militancy” of members, that had been under consideration since the 9th National Congress,⁵ gaining momentum throughout the seventies (Michetti, Repetto, & Luciani, 1998; Unione Donne Italiane, 1986). The decade is fundamental in the history of the battle for women’s emancipation in Italy, seeing the coming together/clash between traditional associations and the new feminist movements emerging at the time. The criticism from the feminist movement was addressed in the 9th, 10th and 11th UDI National Congresses (which took place respectively 1-3 November, 1973; 19-22 January, 1978; 20-23 May, 1982) and it oriented the successive development of the association, starting with the positions adopted by the 11th Congress. These were based

[...] predominantly on two questions. The first was the accusation of excessive loyalty, if not outright identification with institutional powers, in the eyes of feminist groups, worsened by the far more serious failure of the UDI and its identification of and support for a vision of emancipation based on the desire to make women equal to men. Ultimately, the UDI approach to emancipation is seen by the new feminism to preclude diversity as a value per se and as the bedrock of liberation dynamics. (Michetti, Repetto, & Luciani, 1998, p. 413. Author’s translation)

Furthermore, the discussions taking place at the 11th National Congress saw internal debate on the identity of the Union, hence on its historical value. Throughout the organisation, the need was felt to reformulate and promote the association’s history, starting with archive material, where present, along with the establishment of new archives.

3. UDI Archives Between Traditions and Digitisation Projects

In February 1983, the existing statute was replaced by the *Carta degli Intenti* (‘Charter of Intentions’), under preparation since the 11th Congress. The Charter fully adopted the association’s renewed objectives, establishing that they should be reached by means of projects, i.e. by independently organised groups running throughout the land, in its various offices. These included the Archive Group, with the remit to manage and conserve documents generated by the UDI. The group operated in full accordance with the aims set out by the Charter of Intentions, of which article 7 explicitly underlined the importance of the archive as a testament of the association’s activity and as an instrument to uncover

⁵ The 9th National UDI Congress was held in Rome, 1-3 November, 1973, and named *Dimensione donna: nuovi valori, nuove strutture nella società* (‘Women’s world: new values, new structures in society’). UDI Digital Archive, 9th UDI National Congress programme: <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/dimensione-donna/>

and understand its own roots and identity. The significance of the latter had begun to emerge in the previous assemblies (Betti & Ciarrocchi, 2022; Ombra, 2002; Pesenti, 2017). The first collection to undergo archival cataloguing was the UDI Central Archive, conserved in Rome, at the association's national head office. As important as it was wide-ranging, in 1987, this collection⁶ was accredited by the Latium Archive Superintendency⁷ with the status of intellectual goods of significant historical value. Further steps were taken elsewhere and, given the historical value of the documentary material held, numerous archives were declared of interest by the relevant authorities. Nowadays, there are more than forty UDI archives throughout Italy, with a greater concentration in the centre-north, as evidenced by a 2012 census. The census highlights the documentary heritage held by numerous local groups (Centro Documentazione Donna), united since 2001 in the UDI National Archive Association.⁸ This body works on the enhancement of women's trajectories via the conservation and promotion of documentary heritage (Betti & Ciarrocchi, 2022). This, however, is not the sole association that is active in the field. 2017 saw the Emilia-Romagna regional UDI archive network formally constitute as an association. The network had originally come into existence in 2001, as an heir to the UDI Regional Archive Nucleus (1989), founded by local committees.⁹ These had been involved, since the closure of the Congress, in the establishment of archives in their individual offices, with the formation of dedicated archive groups (Argelli, 2022; Betti & Cosentino, 2022; Betti & Polimeni, 2022; Liotti, 2022).

Considering the literature and the digital material, the UDI Central Archive has carried out valuable digitisation work and online publication, setting up its own digital library, as seen in the title of its home page.¹⁰ The digitisation includes posters, photographs and photo albums and newsletters. Metadata has been provided for each document and documents may be found either via an open research bar or in a drop-down menu with various options for each type of selected document.

⁶ The inventory can be consulted online at the Archive site and additionally at the Unified Data System for Archive Superintendencies (SIUSA): <https://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/siusa/pagina.pl>

⁷ Introduction to the Archive: <http://site9087455.90.webydo.com/introduzioneallarchivio.html>

⁸ UDI National Archive Association : www.assarchiviudi.com

⁹ The Emilia-Romagna regional UDI archive network comprises today the archives from Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì, Imola, Modena, Ravenna and Reggio Emilia, along with that of the Centro Documentazione Donna in Modena. To date, the following archives have been declared of historical interest: Bologna (1991), Modena (1992), Reggio Emilia (2003), Ferrara (2006), Ravenna (2007) and the Centro Documentazione Donna di Modena (2008) (Ariotti, 2022).

¹⁰ UDI Digital Archive: <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/>

From its onset, the project for the digitisation and metadating of posters (1944-2018) had two clear aims: conservation and enhancement of historical memory. The work was carried out in accordance with various archive procedural norms (ISAD, ISAAR, EAD-XML) and the ICCU (Central Institute for the Combined Italian Library and Bibliographic Data Catalogue) guidelines for the digitisation of notices, posters and flyers (Leo, 2018). Running over two phases, with the second drawing to a close in 2019, the project completed the digitisation of the trove of posters, over 1.500, subsequently making them available online on the project website.¹¹

The UDI Central Photo Archive (postwar — nineties) was similarly digitised and metadata tagged, which involved handling some 5.000 photographs, 12 albums and a container of slides. The work was carried out in accordance with the Scheda FF (Photographic Collection) cataloguing standards, as formulated by the ICCD (Central Cataloguing and Documentation Institute), which provides a subject index aiding the indexing of photographs.¹²

To complete the digital archive, there is a collection of documents (1943-2023, with some stretching back to before 1920) featuring flyers, sketches, wall posters, reproductions of the banned edition of *Noi Donne* and papers of the Women's Defence Groups, along with browsable reproductions of the *Bollettino d'Informazioni* edited by the UDI National Committee (1947-1950), thereafter the *Bollettino dell'Unione Donne Italiane* (1950-1953), successively, *La Voce della Donna* (1953-1956).¹³

The digital historical documentation available on open access basis at the UDI Central Archive provides a broad view of the material conserved by the organisation, testimony to the association's activity over its first eighty years, in defence of women's rights. The commitment to the digitisation of archival heritage is not limited to the documents made available online, as can be seen from the project run on the extensive documentation regarding sexual abuse, with material saved on external hard drives (Tola & Scalmani, 2011). Further, this commitment extends to making its heritage a vast and varied selection of

¹¹ UDI Digital Archive, "The Projects": <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/i-progetti/>; Posters, https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/?fwp_ricerca_manifesti=manifesto

¹² UDI Digital Archive, "Photo Collection": <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/fototeca/>; Albums, <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/album-fotografici/>

¹³ Archivio Digitale UDI, "Bollettini": <https://archiviodigitale.udinazionale.org/bollettini/>

material, available to a broader public of women in Italy, including those wishing to conduct in-depth studies on the history of the UDI.¹⁴

4. *Noi Donne*, from print to the web

The UDI has played a fundamental educational role in the history of the Italian republic, both in the formation of women citizens and in its work on the establishment of a collective memory of Italian women. A fundamental instrument of this drive was the *Noi Donne* periodical, a magazine that accompanied Italian women on the long and tortuous road towards modernity. Columns on fashion, health and the upbringing of children were found alongside political news, next to tales of agricultural workers, factory workers, housewives and professionals, all with a focus on the need to reformulate a collective memory via the re-evocation of the actors in the emancipation movement along with the heroines of antifascism and the Resistance.

Noi Donne saw the light of day as an underground publication in 1944 (with French roots going back to 1937) and was the organ of women resistance fighters. The magazine grew in the post-Second World War period and, for decades to come, was a fundamental mouthpiece for women in Italian publishing. Despite irregular publication over the years, the magazine survives to this day.¹⁵ Its pages illustrate the key moments in the history of women and of the female condition in Italy, as well as their input in social, cultural and political life. The printed edition ceased in 2016, with the periodical continuing online under the title *Noidonne Week*, viewable at <https://www.noidonne.org/>.

Today, held by the Associazione Archivia-Archivi, Biblioteche, Centri di Documentazione delle Donne, on the premises of the Casa Internazionale delle Donne ('International House of Women'), the periodical's archive constitutes one of the major collections on the history and socio-cultural condition of women in Italy.¹⁶ The Libera Stampa publishing cooperative, publisher of the periodical since 1969, began its work on the

¹⁴ The UDI is not an isolated case. The *Digital Archive* project of the Centro Italiano Femminile (CIF) got underway in 2017. The CIF Archive (1944-2004) had been declared of significant historical interest in 1996 by the Latium Archive Superintendency: <https://www.cifnazionale.it/il-progetto-archivio-digitale/>. The Archive can be found at the following link <http://cif.progettosinapsi.it/>

¹⁵ *Noi Donne* saw uninterrupted publication from 1944 to 1999, when it took a financial hit and went out of business (Ombra, 2002, p. 27). Activity was resumed in the early 2000s.

¹⁶ By dint of its historical significance, the *Noi Donne* archive has been declared of outstanding historical interest by the Latium Archive Superintendency (2000, February 28th). "SIUSA", Fondo *Noi Donne*: <https://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/siusa/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=413969>. "Archivia", Fondo *Noi Donne*: <https://www.archiviaabcd.it/cataloghi-e-inventari/noi-donne/>

digitisation of its own documentary stock in 2017. This has led to the establishment of an entirely open-access and florid digital archive, where issues of the magazine may be viewed.¹⁷

The portal was first presented in February 2018, displaying underground and official issues of the magazine from the two-year period 1944-45 (Serci, 2018). The digitisation project continued during the following years and, in 2018, saw the signing of an agreement with the Department of Humanities at the Roma Tre University. Still valid today, this agreement covers the digitisation of the collection from 1952 onwards, with the stated mission to enhance the value of this sizeable documentary heritage by enabling its consultation online (Fortini, 2019). Nowadays, we can browse and read stories of women in Italy in issues of *Noi Donne* from 1944 to the seventies, complete digitisation of which is underway. The same for the decade from 2006 to 2016. The contents are images and expressions providing precious insights into the world of Italian women from the post-war period to the present day.

5. Genesis and Evolution of Neo-Feminism in the Seventies

In considerations on feminism and the handing down of memory, it is fundamental to investigate the origins of the feminist movement, in particular, shedding light on the confluence/clash that characterised the seventies, a time when UDI initiatives were interlinked with those of the feminist groups. As seen above, distinctions and sticking points first come to light during several UDI national congresses (1973-1982). The friction can be attributed to the reciprocal criticism the two movements levelled at each other and is eloquently detailed in studies from the second half of the seventies to the nineties. These studies reveal both the complexity and the hollows in relations between female emancipation associations and neo-feminism.

The genesis and evolution of feminism in Italy is characterised, at least initially, by the phenomenon of dual militancy, i.e. party membership along with group membership and/or belonging to the feminist movement. Following the Paris May 1968 uprising, when revolution seemed imminent, students forged new alliances with workers, giving rise to novel, extreme left political groupings (Rossanda, 2018).¹⁸

¹⁷ *Noi Donne* digital archive: <https://www.noidonnearchivistorico.org/archivio-storico.php>

¹⁸ Rossana Rossanda, journalist, writer and antifascist, joined the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and was rapidly put in charge of party cultural policy, given her intellectual depth. She was elected to the Chamber of Deputies first in 1963. In 1969 she was expelled from the PCI due to being a member of the critical left. She founded the monthly magazine, later daily, *Il Manifesto*. Her book, *L'anno degli studenti* (1968), offers the first definition of this new figure in society, bursting on to the political landscape, altering its meaning and highlighting the backwardness and splintering of working-class hegemony.

Many young women took part in this change, convinced that the shared objective was to overthrow capitalism and that the liberation of women and that of the proletariat marched side by side. However, once women realised their marginal status in the movement, with their low-ranking positions and inferiority to male comrades, the door was thrown open to separatism and to the affirmation of specificity in the light of society's consideration of gender and man-woman relations. Indeed, it was true that the class struggle no longer embraced the struggle between the sexes (Fraire, 2005).

Many feminist groups were born from the new political formations and the student movement; however, there were further independent collectives such as the Demau (Demystification of Patriarchal Authoritarianism), a Milanese group, launched by women, that saw the participation of a handful of men. The group was aligned with the standpoint of the Frankfurt School and elaborated a position based on the centrality of “the demystification of authoritarianism, in its guise as theory and mythology of moral, cultural and ideological values, on which the current division of roles and entire society is based”, (*Manifesto Programmatico del Gruppo Demau*, in Spagnoletti, 1977, p. 38, author's translation).¹⁹

In the early seventies, strongly echoing the positions of American and Anglo-Saxon feminists such as Betty Friedan, Juliet Mitchell, Evelyn Reed and Kate Millet, two mainstays of Italian feminism were published, written by Carla Lonzi, *Il Manifesto di Rivolta femminile* and *Sputiamo su Hegel*, (Boccia, 1990; Conte, Fiorino, & Martini, 2011; Iamurri, 2016; Restaino, 2003). This author captures the attention of feminist studies to this day (Libera Università delle Donne, 2018; Lonzi, 2023; Valentini, 2018; Ventrella & Zapperi, 2020).

When the Rivolta Femminile group posted their *Manifesto* on walls in Rome and Milan in July 1970, it was an intended indication of the birth of the Italian feminist movement (Guerra, 2005).

As the first separatist group to emerge, Rivolta's significance stems initially from the writing of its founder, Carla Lonzi, with her work standing tall in the history of Italian feminism. The positions elaborated by this group of women, some young, some less so and with a weaker connection to 1968, are a significant indicator of just how complex and multiform relations were between feminism and the other political movements of the sixties and seventies. It was the first group to elaborate and adhere to “self-consciousness”,

¹⁹ The group was formed between 1965 and 1966 under the impetus of Daniela Pellegrini and drew up the *Manifesto*, followed by *Alcuni problemi sulla questione femminile* (1967) (“Some problems with the women question”) and *Il Maschile come valore dominante* (1967) (“The male as a dominant value”). On her life, see interview in Calabrò, Grasso (2004), pp. 143-158.

taking a step forward from “awakening” to a thorough re-evaluation of women’s subjectivity. The literature has focused on the ambiguity of the term “revolt”, or rather the nexus between individual agency (the subjectivity bestowed on a female body with no place in the world — the clitoral woman), and how this can be squared with the need for recognition of other group members and with the practice of “self-awareness” (Boccia, 1990).

In Carla Lonzi’s *Manifesto*, the founding document of Italian feminism, there are several considerations worthy of mention. The work opens with a quotation from Olympe de Gouges (1791), in which she wonders, “Whether women will always be divided one from another? Will they never coalesce into a single body?” (Lonzi, 1974, p. 11, author’s translation). This opening seems to hint at a story reaching further back, while remaining invisible to women. Above all, it highlights the question of women being divided, with the split between those who have swallowed the male edifice of culture and women, who, by their refusal to do so, have remained in the “mystery” and are “lost in their authenticities”, with the plural that Carla Lonzi used when referring to herself (Lonzi, 1978, p. 13). A further consideration that is raised is the awareness of female diversity, the refusal of any conceivable form of homologation with or mimicry of the other, along with a concomitant radical critique of equality:

Woman is distinct from man. Man is distinct from woman. Equality is an ideological attempt to subjugate women to those at the top of the ladder. [...] For a woman, liberation does not mean accepting man’s life, as it is simply unliveable, it means a woman expressing her own sense of existence. (Ibid., author’s translation)

This feeling of diversity, which crops up in much feminist history, has led to talk of a broad movement, in consideration of its divulgatory impact involving women from different backgrounds. These women, participating in events and meetings, shared a culture that encouraged analysis of the self and of others, of sexual relations and sexuality, of options for maternity and of the sore and complex issue of underground abortion (Rossi-Doria, 2005).

Documents and images from the time, magazines, imposing national congresses, graphics, photographs of demonstrations — all bear witness to a complex, atomised context comprising a myriad of groups. In their capacity as political actors, women burst into public life, create meeting grounds, start theatre groups, free radios, publishers, self-run family planning clinics and create innovative means of socialisation.

It is the first of these questions, that of the distinctions and contrasts between groups and movements, that heralds the key issues that will come to typify an awkward period for feminism, from 1975 to 1977. Starting its activity in Rome, in 1976, one of the main Italian feminist magazines adopted the emblematic title “differences”. The magazine worked on an issue-to-issue basis, with each conceived, written and edited by different groups and with the proceeds of one going to fund the next, all the while struggling to find backing to keep premises open and boost output and readership.

These were the years of greatest public visibility and simultaneously of the first difficulties for the self-consciousness groups, of the emergence of friction and clashes between women, of leaving things behind and heading for new beginnings. In 1977, with the growing interest of the public eye, Rivolta published its second Manifesto, *Lo dico io*. It contained a harsh, explicit critique of women who appeared to have found their new “cause” in feminism, an alien ideology that questioned, or better, openly clashed with the laborious path towards self-awakening (Dominijanni, 1997).²⁰

In the published interpretations of Italian feminism in the seventies, the period is considered both the peak of popularity and the beginning of a downhill parabola that grew in the friction arising from the arrival of second-generation feminists from the grassroots left. Their arrival pushed a dissimilar political culture with diverse origins towards political and social activity and public mass demonstrations (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004).

In the same period, the UDI, the largest women’s organisation, as amply discussed above, was racked by internal debate, culminating at the 11th congress in the irreversible adoption of political and economic independence from political parties and the courageous break with traditional models of organisation.

The feminist experience embraces novel models of cultural research, seen in the birth of new magazines such as *DWF Magazine* (Setti, 2022), the first issue of which came out in 1975 and which, despite periods of difficulty and evolution, is still active today. Another example is *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne* (Zancarini-Fournel, 2022), the first Italian magazine to feature women’s history, with the first issue dating back to 1981²¹ (Groppi, 2004).

²⁰ “Who said that ideology is the right adventure for me? Adventure and ideology are incompatible, my adventure is myself”, Rivolta Femminile manifesto *Lo dico io* (‘I say so’), in Lonzi, Jaquinta, & Lonzi (1978, p. 7. Author’s translation).

²¹ *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne* was founded in 1981 by women with a shared background in feminist politics.

Lastly, there was a jump in the number of women's spaces, areas with different functions that leave a different mark on the public landscape with political debate, cultural initiatives, circularity and attention to women's knowhow, support and inclusion.²²

In its various denominations, the feminism facing up to the eighties, after the close of the protest season, must necessarily be distinguished from the movements of the seventies. This is not only a question of the times, but also because it is a feminism that embraces different models of co-existence, distinct political and cultural positions from those of the movements, which themselves constitute an intriguing galaxy, still relatively unresearched.

At the beginning of the new millennium, seventies feminism was still a marginal historical research field in Italy, a historical void lacking evaluation (Guerra, 2004; Bertilotti & Scattigno, 2005). Now, over twenty years later, the world of seventies' studies appears broad and deep. Italian and international historical research has begun to show greater interest in the structural political, economic, and social change, as well as in the question of political violence (Balestracci & Papa, 2019). Numerous additional studies consider women's political activism in a decade to be characterised by exceptional legislative reformism (abortion, divorce, family law reform), with women being both the agents of social change and the tireless campaigners for the genuine implementation of constitutional principles (Bertilotti, 2004; Rossi-Doria, 2007).

The historical interpretation of the seventies appears more extensive than mere fragmented accounts and stereotyped offerings of timelines, incidents and extraordinary life stories. Increasingly, the history of feminism provides details of the context into which it erupted and with which it interacted. Conversely, there is shrinking plausibility for interpretations that fail to consider the extent to which feminist practices and demands contributed directly or indirectly to shaping the political landscape, the collective imagination, the images and the self-images of an era (Stelliferi & Voli, 2023).

These new studies are helped along by the archives of the feminists and the movements, which are introducing digitisation projects, employing professional staff and welcoming Italian and international scholars.²³

²² The Siena conference of women's centres, in 1985, is illustrative and spawned the work *Le donne al centro. Politica e cultura dei Centri delle donne negli anni '80* ('Women first and foremost. Politics and culture of the Women's Centres in the 80s'), Rome, Utopia, 1988.

²³ To give some examples, the Genova based Association for an Archive of the Movements, the Padua based Lotta femminista Archive on Paid Housework, and the Carla Lonzi Archive at the National Modern Art Gallery in Rome.

Alongside publishers, Italian universities are gradually latching on to the scientific and political interest in women's and gender history. Research has begun to investigate new fields and novel features such as cultural output (publishers, women's bookshops), specific battles ranging from the decriminalisation of abortion (Gissi & Stelliferi, 2023; Garbellotti & Nubola, 2022) to that against sexual abuse (Feci & Schettini, 2019; Filippini, 2022), the links between movements (Musiani, 2023, pp. 681-709; Stelliferi & Strazzeri, 2023) and the debate with and within the political parties, above all the Communist Party²⁴ (Turco, 2022; Paolozzi & Leiss, 2023).

In the light of these developments, at the end of 2019, the Italian Society of Women Historians held a conference in celebration of the event signalling the birth of Italian feminism, entitled *Cinquant'anni di Rivolta. I movimenti femministi dal lungo '68 a oggi*.²⁵

The consultation of digital feminist literature shows that the link between history and memory is unavoidable when mapping out the history of Italian feminism, reinterpreting its foundations, victories and weaknesses. Looking back to the earlier movements for female emancipation, and focusing on the post-war women's association movement, against which feminism had to measure itself before adopting a separatist and anti-institutional position, enables the redrawing of genealogies, alliances and political activity.

6. Digital Difficulty for Feminist Publishing. The Exception of *Effe*

Italian feminist publishing became particularly prolific starting at the end of the sixties. *Scritti di rivolta femminile*, founded in 1970 by Carla Lonzi, amongst others, was the first feminist publisher and printed the works of the Rivolta Femminile women's collective. In 1968, in Milan, Rossana Rossanda, the writer, journalist and member of the PCI party, founded the quarterly *La via femminile*, that continued publication until 1976.

From the seventies, the feminist movement made a different use of the magazines: no longer mere tools for communication and theoretical construction, they became a forum for militancy, for the realignment of inter-woman relationships and the experimentation of new political practices (Dominijanni, 1995). Nowadays, more than any other archive material, the magazine provides a privileged viewpoint for re-examining the phase changes of Italian

²⁴ A conference held at Grenoble (2024, January 30) in commemoration of Rossana Rossanda, who passed in 2020, investigated the political culture of the PCI and its encounter with feminism.

²⁵ The conference ('Fifty years of Rivolta. The feminist movements of the enduring '68 to the present day', 2020, November 13-14 and 19) touched on numerous topics: the relationship between politics, art and feminist aesthetics; transnational connections; politics; self-representations; memory, and the links between past and present. The first session was organized in collaboration with Archivia — Archives Libraries Women's Documentation Centres (Rome).

feminism. Without claiming to be exhaustive, in this section the article proposes recognition of the polyhedric feminist editorial output via analysis of the magazine *Effe*, a publication that today boasts an entirely digital archive.²⁶

The beginning of the decade saw the founding of *L'Erba voglio* (1971-1977), which, despite its brief lifetime, navigated through lengthy processes which initially emerged in the first half of the seventies, but extended well beyond the decade. These changes were to leave a mark on the lives of those behind its conception and distribution. Its pages tell the growth and breakdown of the grassroots left groups, relate the dynamics of conflict and of worker autonomy, talk of the liberation of bodily subjectivities and feminist contestation, describe the transformation of industrial society and technology, consider youth unemployment and the refusal to work, and give coverage to the explosion of terrorist and state violence. The magazine is an open door on the wishes, attempted experiments and delusions of women and men in the dynamic, clashing, violent urban context of the Milan of the time (Pacini, 2022).

Sottosopra magazine first appeared in 1973, launched by a number of Milanese feminist groups. It sought to collect and publish lived experiences and to establish a broad, articulated feminist movement. Key themes that were covered include sexuality, prostitution, the link between feminism and class struggle, the critique of the PCI, women's conditions at work and in the family, and finally, sexual liberation and planned pregnancy (being contraceptives and abortion still illegal at the time). Initially a study group and tool for divulgation about the first Italian feminist groups, the magazine then became a focus group for the Milanese women's bookshop that opened in 1975. We should not overlook the magazine's stance on the abortion demonstrations, which proved divisive within the movement. One area of feminism opted not to demonstrate, other women took part reluctantly, and for others still it was the occasion to join the movement.

"Noi sull'aborto facciamo un lavoro politico" diverso runs the title of a piece published in *Sottosopra*. The article explains the decision not to join the pro-abortion marches in light of the blatant contradiction between the exploration of women's sexuality as lived in the self-awareness groups and a demand that totally fails to grasp this level of complexity.²⁷

²⁶ Effe feminist magazine : <https://efferivistafemminista.it/>

²⁷ The article ("Our politics of abortion is different") was signed "a group of women from the Milanese feminist collective [via Cherubini 8]" and appeared in a special issue "Sessualità, procreazione, maternità e aborto" ("Sexuality, procreation, maternity and abortion") (1975), *Sottosopra*.

The assorted souls of Italian feminism in the seventies can be seen in a magazine that we have already mentioned, with the eloquent title of *Differenze*. Founded in Rome in 1976, by a collection of women from different areas of the feminist universe, constituting somewhat of a “fixed term collective”, the magazine sought to establish an open space for the movement and a new tool for communication (Paoli, 2022). The venture’s political standpoint, significance and objectives are laid out in a lengthy, transparent editorial that highlights the need to distinguish the feminist movement from other groups offering generic support to the struggle for women’s emancipation. The three pillars of feminism are separatism, autonomy and the practice of self-consciousness, with militancy added as a fourth. Simply being a woman is not enough, a meeting ground for encountering others is called for, a space in which to gain awareness of one’s own condition: “In our view, there are no objectives which, per se, define feminism given that abortion, contraception, even the reappropriation of one’s own body are all objectives, which when divorced from a feminist awareness, may be used against women”.²⁸

In its investigation of digital feminist literature and the impediments hindering study and awareness of a phenomenon that had to wait for historical attention, this article considers the digital version of *Effe* magazine a depository for the various fragments contributing to the complexity of Italian feminism and an archive of everyday feminism (Panighel, 2023).

In the hub of Roman feminism, yet distributed nationwide, between 1973 and 1982, *Effe* covered various issues of utmost importance in feminist debate at the time. These ranged from abortion to divorce, from housework to family planning clinics, from self-awareness to lesbianism. *Effe* has rightly been called a “singular experiment” (Stelliferi, 2015). Despite a context of quantities of bulletins, hand duplicated sheets and periodicals published locally and irregularly, the magazine was the first monthly conceived “for a nationwide readership and with lofty ambitions for distribution and sales figures” (Paoli, 2008, p. 249).

Starting life as “a weekly of female counter-information”, evolving successively into “independent feminist monthly”, the print run hovered around 30.000 copies from 1973 to 1979 and was distributed to newsagents nationwide. Growing and changing “together with the women’s movement” (Paoli, 2022, p. 251), the magazine’s editorial parabola in part replicates the phases of seventies’ feminism.²⁹

²⁸ “Secondo noi” (1976, author’s translation), *Differenze*, (1), p. 3.

²⁹ Anna Rossi-Doria plausibly distinguishes four phases: birth of the first groups (1968-1972), the establishment of collectives (1972-1974), the mass movement (1974-1976) and the splintering (1977-1979). *Dare forma al silenzio. Scritti di storia politica delle donne*, 2007, p. 260.

The attempts to formalise shifting standpoints and the fund-raising appeals hoping to tap into reader solidarity in the struggle to maintain financial independence failed to pilot the magazine through the crisis that feminism itself was facing. Between 1980 and 1981, there was a dip in the number of issues and in the print run, which was slashed to 6.000, with an uneven distribution to a small number of newsagents. The magazine was eventually wound up at the end of 1982.

Despite being targeted by many feminists, who considered it was “not a magazine of the movement but on the movement”, *Effe*, with the themes it covered and the language it used, symbolised “the untiring quest for mediation” (Paoli, 2010, p. 32) between the inside and the outside of the movement, between the more radical collectives in the major cities and the isolation of women in the provinces. By managing to keep track of events throughout the country, *Effe* heralded the nature of the so-called everyday feminism (Calabrò & Grasso, 2004).

While it is obvious that *Effe* cannot represent the full panorama of the feminist movement, its lifespan and periodicity do give, nevertheless, a cross view of the zeitgeist, of the issues animating Italian feminism in the seventies and eighties and of the language used to debate them. Similarly, according to a historical methodological approach based on the comparison of plural sources, *Effe* is a composite magazine, brimming with variety of materials and points of view: editorials, translations from the foreign press, political announcements from collectives, and letters from individual women

The magazine’s covers, photography and graphics merit attention for their structural interplay with the texts. The “impact of the image”, with professional graphics and photography, was exploited by the editorial panel to channel effective communication (Severalli, 2013; Iamurri, 2017).

Reflecting the transnational nature of the feminist voice from its origins, (Baritono, 2009; Ellena, 2011), 42 of the 84 issues of the magazine deal with non-Italian feminism. Thematically divided content throws light on the inconsistencies in the apparent North-South divide.

Despite coming under fire for seeking to impose its own line on the movement, a scan of the magazine’s articles reveals a rich variety of standpoints. This can be seen in the clashing understandings and expectations regarding international conferences. Some women saw the UN decision to proclaim 1975 International Women’s Year as “recognition”, albeit late,³⁰

³⁰ Greer, Germaine (1975), “1975: anno della donna? Dall’Onu solo chiacchiere”, *Effe*, (5).

“an indication of the reach and significance” gained by feminism worldwide;³¹ while others considered such events pointless, or worse, were apprehensive of the appropriation “of feminist thought, to be returned completely distorted to the public at large after manipulation”.³²

It was precisely because many considered the UN decision a “masquerade” that certain commentators suggested attending the conference to prevent anti-feminist groups influencing the UN declaration and adopting rigid positions (Donato, 2005).

In the reporting from the 1975 Mexico Conference, the presence of “Third World countries” was described as “enhanced”;³³ there were indeed numerous delegates and women from the “liberation movements” of the global south in attendance at Mexico City, both in the official delegations and in the civil society forum (Pomeranzi, 2008; Salvatici, 2009).

The magazine gives careful consideration to development issues and encourages readers to shed the judgementalism regarding third world women, which tendentially relegates them to positions of inferiority and backwardness. The covering of the question of female genital mutilation constitutes a good example. At the same time, numerous *Effe* articles reveal the tendency to apply the term “feminist” exclusively to western women, whereas, in the global south, they are merely women. In this way a distinction is made between subjects with agency and those without, fuelling the idea of the global south as territory beyond the realm of history (Panighel, 2023).

Things change in the eighties, with the final issue of the magazine carrying an extensive article on the standpoint of a number of black women, stating “by now there is pressure from several positions to restructure and reinterpret the overall nature of the American feminist movement”.³⁴

Despite the inconsistencies mentioned above, *Effe* constitutes a precious digital archive, a composite and plural space where we can find voices and materials that become sources enabling us to contemplate the workings of Italian feminism from a broader research horizon. The archive holds the entire contents of the 84 issues, grouped thematically. It was conceived not only to maintain the heritage of feminist ideas and battles for women’s rights, providing highly topical material for women and men working in the media, but also to hold new work on the movement and review books, sites and articles.

³¹ Colombo, Daniela (1975), “1975: anno della donna? Un alibi programmato”, *Effe*, (8).

³² Francescato, Grazia (1975), “1975: anno della donna? Il femminismo governativo”, *Effe*, (8).

³³ Francescato, Grazia (1974), “Demografia e femminismo. Non basta dire alt alle nascite”, *Effe*, (9).

³⁴ Ciardullo, Rosolina (1982), “Inchiesta Usa. Donna nera te ne vai”, *Effe*, (9-10).

7. Conclusion

As we have seen, there is no shortage in Italy of good examples of digital feminist literature. The open access publication of magazines such as *Noi Donne* and *Effe*, or the publication of graphic content from the central UDI archive do not by themselves give the full picture of the situation in Italy. We should not overlook the important work of the Biblioteca Italiana delle Donne di Bologna (Mazzocchi, 2005; Melis & Gubellini, 2020; Pramstrahler, 2021; Tagliavini, 2009; 2011), with a site hosting a well-stocked digital library that includes books, magazines and posters regarding women's history and their movements, from the 1800s to recent times.³⁵ The latter, along with the archives mentioned above, contributes, on the one hand, to the preservation and divulgation of output from the female and feminist movements, on the other, to stimulate research on this output in a virtuous cycle, enabling the valorisation of women's history and memory in their position today on the threshold of finally becoming worthy subjects of history.

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³⁵ Women's digital library: <https://bibliotecadelledonne.women.it/biblioteca-digitale-delle-donne/>

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