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**Molly Tambor. "Red Saints: Gendering the Cold War, Italy 1943-1953." *Cold War History* 10:3 (August 2010): 429-456. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2010.494299.**

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Review by **Penelope Morris**, University of Glasgow

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**M**olly Tambor's article argues that, for a brief period following the Second World War and until 1953, women from both Left and Right in Italy held on to the antifascist unity of the war period and to a "vision for a fully participatory democracy to be guaranteed by a newly activist women's citizenship," and thus subverting and critiquing the divisions of the Cold War (430). For Tambor, this cooperation across ideological camps was symbolised by the image of the "Red Saint", or Santa rossa, "an ideal image of womanhood" that was presented to the public as endorsing "both a Christian inspiration and a progressive militancy," and who served as a model for both communist and catholic women activists (429). It is argued that, although short-lived, this is a phenomenon that deserves more attention: firstly, study of it gives the lie to generally-held assumptions that the Cold War had the effect of normalising patriarchy and of defining women's new rights as citizens only in terms of the home and motherhood, indicating instead that despite a desire to return to peace and normality, during these years "women found substantial space for contestation and redefinition of their role in the public sphere" (431); secondly, it is asserted that "the success of the Republic and the continued path of European political cultures towards a unified and indigenous style of Christian social democracy relied on a 'feminisation' of democracy," at a time when "both communist and Catholic leaders chose to link women's emergence into the public sphere with the antifascist guarantee of democracy in the new Italy," making it a "central characteristic of their Cold War rhetoric" (432). As Tambor elaborates:

both groups cooperated in celebrating an image of the female Resistance partisan who, in her shouldering of the responsibility to sacrifice and shed blood in order to birth a new future for her people, was radically transgressive in her physicality and political claims yet completely resonant with more easily accepted feminine qualities

and Catholic values such as maternal sacrifice, reconstruction of home life, and a civil society marked by volunteerism, social work, and a discourse of responsibility rather than privilege. In 1948 and 1953 these activists, in the name of that feminine ideal, intervened in decisive ways to avert extremism on the Left and the Right and to force the actualisation of rhetorical calls to democracy and the constitutional rule by their parties' centrist leaders (432-433)

A particular strength of this article is to highlight the insights that can be gained from a gendered approach to the Cold War. It brings to light an important episode in the history of the women's movement prior to neofeminism that has tended to be obscured both as Tambor says, "by the abrupt decline in mainstream attention to women's politics after 1953" (441), but also by the tendency either to dismiss the postwar period as one of stasis for women (once the vote had been granted) or to study communist and Catholic women separately. In terms of Cold War history, the article correctly identifies an area in which the very marked split in Italian politics did not apply. It argues equally strongly that women were central to political discourse – seen as politically naive, they were judged susceptible to a political education that would have been humiliating for Italian men – but they were also protagonists. Tambor suggests that "rather than ask only what impact the Cold War may have had on women, we should seek to discover how women had an impact on the Cold War" (431) and indeed she convincingly argues that they played an important role in the reconstruction and acceptance of Italian society as a democracy and in the efforts by the leaders of both the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats (DC) to keep party factionalism in check.

The article is well-researched, is argued cogently and shows an excellent knowledge and use of other relevant studies. It is a fascinating extension of Tambor's previous work on constitutional rights feminism. It is also a timely piece of work; the period under discussion has tended to be neglected or subsumed within other discussions, but is now beginning to be analysed in greater detail. The only substantial study missing from the bibliography, and which may have appeared too late for inclusion, is Perry Willson's recent history of women in twentieth-century Italy, which deals quite extensively with the period under discussion here. It should be noted, nevertheless, that Tambor's work complements Willson's study.

There is a problem, however, with the central image of the "Red Saint" as a combination of Christian inspiration and progressive militancy. In the specific example quoted, the term appears in the magazine *Noi donne* which was effectively a communist publication, but which, particularly in its early years, aimed to be as inclusive as possible. The use of such a term is not at all surprising in this context, either as a suggestion that Catholics do not have a monopoly on saintly behaviour and self-sacrifice, or as an indication of the extent to which such 'Catholic' notions were embedded even in left-wing psyches in Italy. However, the response of the vast majority of Catholic woman to the term "red" would undoubtedly have been negative

as it simply connoted communist. We are told that the first appearance of the “Red Saint” was in the Catholic women’s magazine, *Azione femminile*, in the form of portraits of women who had lost their lives in the Resistance. This seems to be conflating Resistance and “red,” and yet, of course, despite the predominance of the communist party, participation in the Resistance did not automatically suggest a left-wing militancy as there were partisan bands of all political colours. To suggest, as the abstract does, that in “the average Italian voter’s own identity [...] Catholicism and communism were both thoroughly hybridised in local culture,” (429) is not sustainable; it glosses over the very substantial split between Catholic and communist sub-cultures in Italy and, I would suggest, overstates the influence of communists on Catholics. There is also oversimplification in the reference to the celebration of the female partisan. This was certainly an image used by both Left and Right, but it must also be remembered that it was also the source of considerable unease, with many female partisans encouraged to forget their transgressive past and not permitted, for example, to take part in commemorative parades in the postwar years. There is a further simplification when it is suggested that for both parties women were seen as the bulwark against “American-style modernity” (437). This is true, but, as prime consumers, women also promoted change and the “Americanisation” of Italian society. None of this detracts from the importance of the central argument, however. Whilst the image of the Red Saint is only partially appropriate, the collaboration between women on the Left and Right in the immediate postwar period was real, effective and, as Tambor demonstrates, far more significant than has generally been recognised.

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