

# Making working women visible in the 1950s Italian labour conflict. The case of the Ducati factory

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## Introduction

This article investigates the role played by women workers in the bitter social conflicts over unfair dismissals in Italy during the 1950s. The case of the Bolognese Ducati factory (a motorbike manufacturer today) is framed within the more general context of Cold War Bologna. Indeed, the urban dimension of the Cold War played a crucial role both in shaping the intensity of the social conflict within the factory and in involving the whole city in the industrial dispute that suddenly became a national issue.

On the methodological level, this article will question the highly masculine narratives of the events put forward over the last three decades both by historiography and collective memory. Those social conflicts have been portrayed mainly as “male affairs” and women’s engagement, when and if it has actually been addressed, has chiefly been related to their role as the wives or daughters of male workers.

By analysing women’s role in the conflicts, it has emerged that the female presence was significant even though it was always under-represented in written contemporary sources such as press and trade union documents.<sup>1</sup> As Italian uses the masculine linguistic gender (i.e. *lavoratore*) as the default

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<sup>1</sup> Ann-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan, edit. *Re-presenting the past: women’s history*, (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

third person singular, the language of the sources, especially that of the press, almost always represented workers as male.<sup>2</sup> This concealed women's presence both as workers in the factories and as activists in the labour struggles.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, 1950s gender models, such as the "male breadwinner"<sup>4</sup> and "housewives," certainly influenced the (under-) representation of women in contemporary sources. In 1950s Bologna, at least among left-wing working class people, the model of the "working mother" seems to prevail, although the contemporary left-wing press clearly reflected the existence of two conflicting models of womanhood.<sup>5</sup> While women's activism in class conflict, and in the fight against unfair dismissals, was often emphasized as an example to be followed, the image of women's domesticity prevailed in photographs and articles representing women workers as mothers with children.<sup>6</sup> The mixture of public and private in the representation of women workers' activism clearly emerged from the various images of women portrayed during demonstrations and picketing with their children.<sup>7</sup>

The biographical data and photographs taken into account here are important in revealing women's presence in 1950s industrial conflicts and, in particular, in that of Ducati. While texts often report only male workers' involvement in the struggles, the photographs reveal the often substantial presence of women workers as well.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the oral sources, diaries, correspondence and autobiographical texts analysed provide a more subjective take on women's involvement in the struggles

<sup>2</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York 1999. Patricia Hudson, "The historical construction of gender: reflections on gender and economic history", in *Frontiers in the economics of gender*, ed. Francesca Bettio, Alina Verashchagina, London and New York 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, Chicago 2007; Eileen Boris, Angelique Janssens, "Complicating Categories: An Introduction", *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Angelique Janssens, "The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family? An Overview of the Debate", *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997), Supplement 5.

<sup>5</sup> See in comparative perspective: Gro Hagemann, "Citizenship and social order: gender politics in twentieth-century Norway and Sweden", *Women's History Review* 11, (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Blunden, *Il lavoro e la virtù: l'ideologia del focolare domestico* Florence 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, Louise Tilly, *Women, Work and Family*, London 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Eloisa Betti, Elisa Giovannetti, *Senza giusta causa. Le donne licenziate per rappresaglia politico-sindacale a Bologna negli anni Cinquanta*, (Bologna: Socialmente, 2014).

against unfair dismissals, revealing the key role of the Ducati women in the process.<sup>9</sup>

### Gendering class conflict in 1950s Italy: women workers unfairly dismissed in Cold War Bologna

From the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, thousands of workers were dismissed in Italy for being communists, socialists or members of the Italian General Confederation of Labour – the main left-wing trade union organizations in Italy. The discriminatory nature of those dismissals was recognized in 1974, when a law established that workers dismissed on political grounds were entitled to compensation<sup>10</sup>. More than 40,000 workers across Italy made claims and won compensation for having been unfairly dismissed<sup>11</sup>. Although the potential number of unfairly dismissed workers may be far higher, the only reliable data are those resulting from the legal disputes undertaken by the workers and collected by the *Associazione Licenziati e Perseguitati per Rappresaglia Politica e Sindacale* (Association of workers dismissed and persecuted for political or trade union reprisal).

The phenomenon of unfair dismissals arose in the same period across Italy and it is closely related to a general climate of political repression, which Della Porta and Reiter termed the “inner Cold War” to emphasize the impact of the Cold War on Italian society.<sup>12</sup> Employers’ attacks on the labour movement both in the factories and in the rural areas reflected the influence of Cold War ideological rivalry at the local level.<sup>13</sup> Thousands of

<sup>9</sup> See also Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class and Citizenship*, Ithaca, NY 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The law passed in 1974 allowed for those who had been recognized as having been dismissed “for reasons that, independently of the forms and the motivations adduced, can be traced back to reasons of political belief or religious creed, to union membership or to involvement in union activities,” to reconstruct their national insurance status for their retirement pension, obtaining figurative contributions starting from the date of the dismissal.

<sup>11</sup> Adriano Ballone, *Uomini, fabbrica e potere: storia dell’Associazione nazionale perseguitati e licenziati per rappresaglia politica e sindacale*, Milan 1987.

<sup>12</sup> The term “unfair dismissal” is used to refer to workers dismissed for political reasons, according to the definition given by the legislator in 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988*, New York 2003.

labour movement activists were tried and imprisoned in the early 1950s just because they took part in strikes, demonstrations and land or factory occupations.<sup>14</sup>

Due to Bologna's peculiar political history, unfair dismissals peaked there in the 1950s – and more than 1,800 workers were compensated for their dismissal, thanks to the 1974 law. Bologna was the only major Italian city uninterruptedly governed by the Communist Party from the end of World War Two to the fall of the Berlin Wall, representing a peculiar case of “local communism”.<sup>15</sup> During the early Cold War phase (1948-1956), an institutional struggle took place in Bologna between the municipal power, held by the Communists, and central State power, which was held by Christian Democracy, the Italian Catholic party that had pledged its allegiance to NATO.<sup>16</sup> Many demonstrations held by labour movements and even left-wing women's associations were harshly repressed by the police, while Communists themselves were generally persecuted as they were considered to be the “internal enemy”.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike other industrial cities such as Turin, in Bologna at least 40% of unfairly dismissed workers were female, as women's participation in paid work, especially industry, and their trade union membership rates and political involvement were the highest in Italy. Bolognese women in the late 1940s-early 1950s were highly involved in the public sphere, in politics and labour movement struggles. At the time 400,000 women lived in the province of Bologna. According to some estimates, 63,000 of these women were members of the Italian Communist Party, 70,000 of the Italian General Confederation of Labour and 80,000 belonged to the Union of Italian Women, the largest Italian women's association.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the percentage of women workers in Bolognese factories was

<sup>14</sup> Eloisa Betti, Giovannetti, *Senza giusta causa*, 31-32.

<sup>15</sup> Norman LaPorte, “Introduction: local communisms within a global movement”, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 5 (2013). Andrew Wirsching, “Comparing local communisms”, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 5 (2013).

<sup>16</sup> On Bologna in the Cold War, see also: Eloisa Betti, “Bologna in the Cold War. Perspectives of memories from a Communist city in the West” in *Cold War Cities and Memories*, ed. Katia Pizzi, Marjatta Hietala (Peter Lang, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> On the definition of “internal enemy” see, for instance, Cesare Bermani, *Il nemico interno. Guerra civile e lotte di classe in Italia (1943-1976)*, Rome 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Eloisa Betti, “Donne e diritti del lavoro tra ricostruzione e anni '50. L'esperienza bolognese” in *Luoghi d'Europa. Spazio, genere, memoria*, ed. Maria Pia Casalena, Bologna 2011.

particularly high, compared to the national average: more than one third of the overall factory labour force, i.e. 20,000 workers, was female. They worked in a variety of sectors: traditional female ones such as the textile and garment industries, food and tobacco, but also sectors considered 'just for men' such as metalworking and brick-making. Metalworking at the beginning of 1950s employed more than 3,000 women in the Bologna area. The female metalworkers were mostly employed in big factories, such as Ducati, Weber, and Giordani, which were founded in the inter-war period.

Of the 1,800 unfairly dismissed workers in the province of Bologna, who claimed and won compensation, about 700 were female.<sup>19</sup> Most were in their twenties and thirties when they were dismissed. Although the data indicate neither women's marital status nor the presence of children, other sources reveal that many women were married and had young children at the time of their dismissal.

All the 700 female names and related biographical details have been collected by the Bologna Committee of the "Association of workers dismissed and persecuted for political or trade union reprisal" and are published in a book dealing with the history of the unfairly dismissed workers of Bologna. The book, titled *La costituzione negata nelle fabbriche* (The Constitution denied in the factories), also contains many photographs of the industrial disputes and factory occupations that at times followed the dismissals.<sup>20</sup>

The author of the book, Luigi Arbizzani (1924-2004), was for decades a member of the Bologna branch of the Italian Communist Party and a left-wing trade unionist, who contributed directly to the collection of the evidence relating to unfair dismissals.<sup>21</sup> The book was reprinted twice and has become the "official memory" of both the committee of unfairly dismissed workers and the Italian General Confederation of Labour of Bologna. This memory of the unfair dismissals is highly masculine. In spite of the hundreds of female names and photographs portraying women during picketing and demonstrations, has promoted a neutral conception of worker and class conflict that fails to recognize the

<sup>19</sup> Betti, Giovannetti, *Senza giusta causa*.

<sup>20</sup> Luigi Arbizzani, *La costituzione negata nelle fabbriche. Industria e repressione antioperaia nel bolognese (1947-1966)*, Bologna 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Although Luigi Arbizzani was not a historian by training, he became a point of reference for the local history of Bologna, contributing to the foundation of both the Gramsci Institute of Bologna and the Historical Archive of the Italian General Confederation of Labour of Bologna.

presence of women as well as men in the bitter struggles following the 1950s dismissals.

The highly masculine narratives also deal with Ducati, the biggest factory in Bologna in the early 1950s, and one of the most politicized. It was also, strikingly feminized: indeed, 60% of the overall workforce was female. The Ducati labour struggle in the early 1950s is particularly interesting from a gender standpoint, as the factory experienced the longest and most difficult industrial conflict that had taken place in Bologna, which saw its workers occupying the factory and battling hard against the 960 dismissals decreed by the management.

### The Ducati factory struggle: a gender approach

Radio Brevetti Ducati – later simply known as Ducati – was founded in 1926 to explore the industrial application of a radio broadcasting experiment. A decade later, in 1935, a large industrial plant was inaugurated for the production of capacitors for radio equipment, the most successful Ducati product, while other advanced technological products such as the cine projector, a small photographic camera, went into production. By the end of the 1930s, more than a thousand of workers were employed at the Ducati factory, most of whom women. During WWII Ducati production was put at the disposal of the military industry, employing several thousand workers (80% female) until 1944, when the plant was bombed and severely damaged.<sup>22</sup>

In the aftermath of WWII, the workers had a decisive role in restarting the production and in the material reconstruction of the factory buildings. The women, who continued to represent around 60% of the overall workforce, took part in the removal of the rubble and dealt with the restart of the company nursery, essential for the many working mothers employed in the factory. The nursery, thanks to the commitment of the women (both the women workers and the members of the Union of Italian Women) became an example of excellence at city level and beyond, providing necessary care to the numerous working mothers in the factory. At the restart of the activity the level of unionization and politicisation of the factory workers was very high: 2,218 out of 2,912 workers held the *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici* (Italian

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Pedrocco, “Bologna industriale”, in *Bologna in Età contemporanea (1915–2000), Storia di Bologna*, ed. Angelo Varni, 4, Bologna 2013.

Federation of White and Blue-collar Metalworkers) membership card and just over half (1,550) were registered with the Italian Communist Party, 872 of whom women. Furthermore, 625 women belonged to the Union of Italian Women, which had its own group inside the factory.<sup>23</sup>

The factory seems to have been a crucial place for the Ducati women born in the 1920s: it was the place where emancipation through work could be achieved and, especially during WWII and in its aftermath, a place of collective and political engagement. In her memoirs, Anna Zucchini, dismissed in 1953, clearly underlines the importance of the factory in her biography. It was the place where her political awareness grew during the Nazi occupation, leading her to join the Partisan Resistance movement during the war and to become an activist for women's and labour rights in its aftermath.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, blue-collar workers, like Jole, stressed their ability to do their job, showing their sense of pride in being Ducati factory workers: "I used to make radio and television capacitors; a machine wound the spindles. I liked it a lot and was good at it, because I never caused any faults. I wasn't fast but my work was perfect, there was never anything to discard. I've always been like that".<sup>25</sup>

In the period 1945-1953 the factory was the scene of a process of productive reconversion which was accompanied by a major downsizing of the workforce, interwoven and eventually overlapping with the phenomenon of unfair dismissals. Of the two plants active during the conflict, one in Bazzano and the other in Borgo Panigale, in 1948 only the latter remained. From that year, it was the scene of progressive dismissals, as worker levels fell from 2900 in 1945 to 2212 in 1953, when the last and most significant wave of dismissals took place.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Anna Zucchini, Linceo Graziosi, *Gli anni difficili. Antifascismo, ricostruzione post-bellica e sviluppo industriale nei ricordi di due operai metalmeccanici*, ed. by Giovanni Mottura, Bologna 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Anna Zucchini recalls her experience as a Ducati factory workers in several autobiographic texts including: Zucchini, Graziosi, *Gli anni difficili*; Anna Zucchini, *8 marzo 1955: racconto, storia, documento*, San Giovanni in Persiceto 1998; Anna Zucchini, "Cara Unità", Anna Zucchini private archive.

<sup>25</sup> Between June 2012 and September 2014, three interviews were made with former Ducati women (Jole T., Maria M. and Albertina B.) who, born in the 1920, were in their late 80s/early 90s at the time of the interview. All these women were fired from Ducati in the early 1950s, obtaining compensation for their unfair dismissals after 1974.

<sup>26</sup> Sandro Bellassai, "Noi classe. Identità operaia e conflitto sociale in una democrazia imperfetta (1948-1956) in *Democrazia e conflitto. Il sindacato e il consolidamento della democrazia negli anni*

Of the 960 dismissals of the summer of 1953, 660 struck women, most of whom were also members of the Italian Communist Party (600 according to sources) and of the Italian Federation of White and Blue-collar Metalworkers, thus highlighting their discriminatory nature.<sup>27</sup> Women participated greatly in the factory occupation, promoted by the Ducati workers in the summer of 1953 to fight against the announced dismissals. During the almost six months of conflict that took place as the management-union negotiations unfolded, there were numerous episodes in which women implemented specific forms of protest in a climate of escalating police repression.<sup>28</sup>

The 1953 struggle soon involved the whole city of Bologna as Ducati was considered a crucial part of Bolognese identity, as testified by the Communist journal *La Lotta* (The Struggle) which titled one of its several articles dedicated to the dispute “Ducati is Bologna and Bologna is Ducati”.<sup>29</sup> The Ducati case was considered to be a collective struggle that concerned the city as well as the Bolognese working class as a whole.<sup>30</sup> The analysis of the Ducati case is particularly interesting from a gender standpoint. Indeed the female workers who were in the front line in the struggle against the factory’s downsizing policies and unfair dismissals, were hit hardest.

Apart from their participation in factory gate picketing, the demonstrations and the factory occupation, the Ducati women were engaged in raising public awareness and informing the local community of what was happening, forming in groups and distributing leaflets in the city’s neighbourhoods. Particularly emblematic was the action of the women employed at the company summer camp in the Bolognese Apennines who, even after they had

*Cinquanta (Italia-Emilia-Romagna)* ed. Luca Baldissara (Milan: Angeli, 2006)

<sup>27</sup> Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna (hereinafter FGER), Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiana (PCI) - Archivio Luigi Arbizzani (hereinafter ALA), Serie “Pubblicazioni e scritti”, Sottoserie “Volumi monografici”, b. 133, fasc. 13, *dattiloscritto*, “Testimonianza di Gianna Baldazzi” Archivio Storico della Camera del Lavoro di Bologna (hereafter ASCLBo), Fondo Licenziati per rappsaghi (hereafter FLRBo), Scatolone 1, “Documentazione Ducati”.

<sup>28</sup> Odioso gesto della direzione “Ducati” contro parenti e bambini degli operai, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 17 August 1953; Nuova provocazione alla Ducati mentre riprendono le trattative romane, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 18 August 1953; Aggressione poliziesca alla “Ducati” frustrata dalla serena fermezza dei lavoratori, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 20 August 1953.

<sup>29</sup> Da tutta Bologna si è levato unanime un chiaro monito contro i liquidatori della “Ducati”, *l’Unità*, 28 July 1953.

<sup>30</sup> FGER, ALA, Serie “Pubblicazioni e scritti”, Sottoserie “Volumi monografici”, b. 133, fasc. 13, *opuscolo*, “Tre anni per ricostruire la Ducati. Otto anni di lotta contro gli smobilitatori”.

received their letter of dismissal, continued to look after the children so as not to disrupt the normal running of the camp.<sup>31</sup> Children played an important role in the struggle, becoming an icon of 1950s Bolognese industrial conflict as Ducati women would demonstrate holding their babies in their arms. Furthermore, children were taken into the occupied factory to spend the mid-August summer holidays in 1953 with their parents, becoming the target of the police raid that followed.<sup>32</sup>

In their interviews, Jole and Maria recollect their participation in the several demonstrations that took place in the city of Bologna in 1953, recalling the tough repression they experienced as a police officer took action against Ducati strikers. Jole was beaten by the police officer while she was demonstrating in front of the *Questura*: “I know that the police was there striking out at us to break up the marches. It was a very hard struggle. [...] And then I got it and so I had to go into a dairy shop, where the owner wet my head.” Maria was beaten during a police raid in the occupied factory: “When we occupied the factory, we stayed inside day and night. [...] Once the special forces came, they struck us with a stiff rubber pipe which hurt like hell. Our people picked up the chairs and we defended ourselves like that.”

The press reports clearly show how women had a key role in the dispute and provided multiple forms of opposition against the dismissals. The reports also provide a great deal of information on the problems the female workers involved in the struggles had in minding their children, for whom the factory nursery was essential in order to combine family and work. Nevertheless, if we leave aside the cases above, the long struggle at Ducati was told by the press from an almost exclusively male standpoint in spite of the massive presence of women. The role of the female workers was underlined several times, but only when they were the protagonists of specific forms of struggle, separate from the collective, or when political or union discrimination was added to the gender discrimination. Specific attention was reserved, for instance, to the appeal that a group of Ducati women addressed to all the women of Bologna and to the case of the 18 female workers who received a letter in July 1953, suspending them from work while they were pregnant and/or had just given birth, something that had been outlawed in 1950.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Zucchini, Graziosi, *Gli anni difficili*.

<sup>32</sup> Odioso gesto della direzione “Ducati” contro parenti e Bambini degli operai, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 17 August 1953.

<sup>33</sup> La revoca della serrata alla Ducati rende possibile la ripresa delle trattative, *l’Unità*, Cronaca

Thus, many examples of solidarity were reported by the press. The dispute unfolding at Ducati saw the broad involvement of workers of both sexes from other factories and from other sectors and, more in general, that of the citizenry as a whole, including the council and provincial administrations. The political parties – *in primis* the Italian Communist Party – and the union organizations, starting from the Italian Federation of White and Blue-collar Metalworkers and the Chamber of Labour, performed a key role in directing public attention towards the talks and in promoting *ad hoc* measures.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the action of the Bolognese female associations in favour of Ducati women was continuous during the toughest phase of the struggle. In particular, the Union of Italian Women and its then secretary Ivonne Trebbi<sup>35</sup> protested against the dismissals which ran counter to the so-called “Women’s Charter of Rights” embraced by the main Bolognese political parties. The Provincial Council of the Bolognese Women, grouping women belonging to different milieu, sent a delegation to the factory for discussions with female factory workers.<sup>36</sup>

Solidarity actions from workers of other factories, farm workers, and women’s associations also clearly emerge from the Ducati women’s memoirs, representing a key aspect in the fight against dismissals that allowed women to continue the factory occupations, picketing for up to 20-30 days running. Maria recalls: “The farmers brought us the grain. The flour to help the families with no means of subsistence. The ones who had someone in the family who still worked left the stuff to those who had nothing. No one would do it now, but then we did it”.

The dispute ended in late 1953, sanctioning the break-up of the company into two branches and the start of vocational retraining for a part of the workforce, most of whom were women, as can be seen in photographs preserved in family archives. Only 50 workers were reinstated, while the others who

di Bologna, 1 August 1953; T. Bitelli, Riassunte alla Ducati 18 lavoratrici sospese, *La Voce dei lavoratori*, 27 March 1954.

<sup>34</sup> Diversivi per non rispondere alla precisa richiesta della CGIL, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 3 July 1953; Appello della CCDL alla cittadinanza per salvare la Ducati dalla smobilitazione, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 6 July 1953.

<sup>35</sup> Tutti i lavoratori in fabbrica nonostante la odiosa sanzione padronale, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 22 July 1953.

<sup>36</sup> La pretesa crisi della Ducati smentita dalle numerose commesse, *l’Unità*, Cronaca di Bologna, 9 July 1953.

took part in the courses were fired in January 1955.<sup>37</sup> Overall, 660 women were dismissed out of a total of 960 workers during the Ducati dispute.

Women's reactions towards dismissal was generally dramatic, because of their awareness of the further consequences, such as the extreme difficulty in finding another job in a period where unemployment was rising, as Jole stressed: "It was sad, I can remember it, because I had a family to support: my mother, my younger sister. Staying at home from work was tough!" Sadness seems to be the prevalent emotion in women's memories of their dismissals, but the feeling of being discriminated against is also present. All of the interviewees clearly remember having been dismissed because of their political engagement, for being Communists or left-wing trade union members. The dismissal was also experienced as a moment of great discrimination. There are cases of women dismissed because they were directly involved in the strikes and in the protests, other simply for being members of the Italian General Confederation of Labour, the Italian Federation of White and Blue-collar Metalworkers, or the Italian Communist Party.

The feeling of personal failure is also present in many memories. Both the collective dimension of the factory and the ability to put their professional skills to good use played an important role in those women's identities: "We went to a woman's house, she made slippers, a shoemaker, Rosa. [...] There was no chance. At Ducati I made capacitors that were super [...]. If not, where could I go? Before going to Ducati I had worked in a slipper factory. After the dismissal one of those who made the slippers worked at home and I went to work with her [...]"

## Conclusion

Italian historiography has considered the Ducati struggle as paradigmatic of the climate of political violence and repression that deeply characterized post-war Italy.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the Ducati struggle is particularly relevant for understanding the connection existing in 1950s Italy between local labour

<sup>37</sup> Bellassai, "Noi classe".

<sup>38</sup> Arbizzani, *La costituzione negata nelle fabbriche*; Pedrocco, "Bologna industriale", Bellassai, "Noi classe"; Simone Selva, "Gli industriali bolognesi e la ristrutturazione post-bellica: scelte economiche e iniziative imprenditoriali tra anni Quaranta e Cinquanta" in *Democrazia e conflitto*.

conflict and international dynamics, namely the Cold War. Ducati workers, mainly women, were persecuted and fired primarily because they were Communists or members of Communist/Socialist-oriented trade unions, such as the Italian General Confederation of Labour. Class and political membership were crucial to the Ducati women's identity. Gender, however, was not always seen as a key aspect of their personality, although several Ducati women, such as Anna Zucchini, were very committed to women's rights, being part of female associations like the Union of Italian Women.

Analysing the Ducati struggle from a gender standpoint also reveals the gap between women's roles and actions in the labour struggle and its representation in contemporary sources (e.g. trade union and political), which often stressed the mixture of public and private and women's domesticity in the labour struggle instead of women's activism *tout court*.<sup>39</sup> Working mothers and women workers were key figures in the Ducati struggle, even though they were not perceived as such. The major industrial conflict in Bologna should be represented as the struggle of the whole Bolognese working class, which in 1950s was represented as being highly masculine.

Ducati women's memoirs shed light not only on their subjective reactions towards major events occurring in their lives, mainly their dismissals and the struggles that followed, but also on the gendered path they experienced after their dismissals. While many men found other jobs in the industrial sector or else became craftsmen opening their own small businesses, women were often unable to find another job and became industrial homeworkers or housewives.

The gendered analysis of the Ducati struggle helps to reveal the interconnections between sources, memory and historical works, as the collective memory of unfair dismissals has been highly masculine, despite the voices of women who wrote about their own experiences and left important traces of their activities. Finally, historical works dealing with the Ducati conflict have often failed to recognise women's role in spite of their presence in the contemporary sources, something that this article has attempted to bring to light.

<sup>39</sup> Scott and Tilly, *Women, Work and Family*.