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## Intervista con Loretta Giaroni Ottobre 2019

At the time it was the period of the war to be clear, because it was the war that dominated: the Resistance comes after 8 September. There was obviously even before, anti-fascists had already been on the border for twenty years, in prisons, see Gramsci for instance... But at the time I was a little girl: I went to Reggiane to work when I was fourteen so that age there was the war that dominated, there were bombings and even the Reggiane were bombed on 8 January 1944; I was right at the Reggiane at that time there. In short, I went to school, I did elementary school and then the three professional start-up mediums which was a luxury then because there was no compulsory eighth grade: for my mother it was a luxury, I am the daughter of a single mother.

And so when I was fourteen, having finished having the female professional start-up license, I went to work at the Reggiane: Officine Meccaniche Reggiane, also a war factory because they made projectiles then and I think also airplanes. So what did I do in that period there: I went by bicycle from home to the Reggiane and then later from the Reggiane they moved us after the bombing and we went to Coviolo which was an area towards the hill with the purchasing office, I worked in the office acquisitions.

So I didn't do the Resistance, I'm not a resistant; my husband is a resistant he is two years older than me, at seventeen he went to the partisans in the mountains, I didn't. I was in a family of old people, my maternal grandparents, my working-class mother at Bloch: anti-fascism was in my house but I didn't join the Resistance, I wasn't old enough at least it didn't happen to me nor could I at fourteen in a family of old men and with only my mother who kept me like gold in the box.

But the orientation, the values of anti-fascism, the contempt and I don't know what I could add towards the fascists and the war was clear. Except that, I repeat, I didn't join the Resistance. Naturally after Liberation we began to organize ourselves as girls, as women but above all I was a girl and as a girl I organized myself with the Youth Front which was already present in anti-fascism, in the Resistance and in clandestinity. I started campaigning for girls' rights.

The women who made up the Resistance weren't very inclined to talk about it, so much so that many who would have also been partisan fighters if they wanted to, would have obtained it if they asked for recognition: think of mother Cervi to set an example and the other women of the Cervi family they didn't ask for any recognition, so if those ones weren't partisans, tell me who were the partisans, just because they didn't shoot? There are plenty of women who didn't shoot but risked their lives carrying a weapon or a flyer in their purse.

Then with the passing of the years after the Liberation these partisans began to organize themselves to also hold conferences to say and write about what they had done. I have some documents here, you will have them too, there is a very important conference held twenty years later on the twentieth anniversary, therefore twenty years after 1945 where there is listed word for word what the claims of the Defense Groups were Woman: Women's Advocacy Groups, this is an important thing that we have never said enough. They were the form, the first mass organization of women in the clandestine period: Marisa Rodano supports this thesis and



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has documented it also because they were many women of various ideas. So these Women's Defense Groups, they were called that, and for the assistance of freedom fighters they were the clandestine association of women during the period of Nazi occupation and fascism.

These Defense Groups had in them, it is clear from the documents, also from these clandestine documents, leaflets, newspaper, there was the newspaper "Noi Donne" which was then taken over by the Unione Donne Italiane, this masthead but there was already clandestine period.

In the clandestine period, what did these women ask for: the right to vote when there would be Liberation; equal work equal wage; care for the elderly, children, etc. because women know that these problems concern them above all; then there is a very important program that starts from these things. It's clear that they didn't say how it should be done, who will do it... They thought that after the Liberation there would be a government and reforms that would allow these things here.

Here was the occupation: where there was the occupation of the Nazis it was until the last moment, until 1945: instead Rome and Florence were liberated earlier.

The Northern Women's Defense Groups and the women who had organized themselves in the Udi and had begun to speak merged in 1945 and formed the Unione Donna Italiana: therefore we are embodied in the Resistance.

There is a list of demands, first of all the vote, the right to vote; then equal pay for equal work, a problem of equality of its own, of the emancipation of women who did not mention emancipation in the clandestine flyers that I remember.

We talked about children, kindergartens, they were called kindergartens because they were kindergartens, that is, shelters let's say, but it depends what these shelters were because at the time we only knew the kindergartens of parish priests: I attended one, I was little I was three years old and then they broke it in San Maurizio the parish kindergarten, but there were many.

Catholics have the merit of having built kindergartens a hundred years before us: what they were like can be debated but they were for children aged three to six perhaps even earlier, they also took them when they were kindergartens but they existed and therefore they had this merit. So it's not like you can expect from women fighters, fighters because they knew they risked their lives every day when they did the relays, what kindergartens were supposed to be: we didn't know either after the Liberation. When we started, and we started with those kindergartens there for the people, they were little more than kindergartens where the children could eat and satisfy their hunger, because it is no coincidence that we made with the stuff that the farmers brought us, vegetables, etc., we made pink soup because they used carrots do you understand? If we couldn't even figure out what they had to do for kindergartens after the Liberation but we did, you can imagine during the war.

Now I'm telling you about the kindergarten where I lived, not the one I attended as a child obviously because after the Liberation I was already older, I was twenty, eighteen-twenty, whatever it was.

San Maurizio is a case in itself, however it is a specific case: how was it born? Here I did the work of the identity card, I wanted to bring it out, I wanted to bring together those women who were there precisely to have the names and ways of how it was born.

It was born like this: there was a kindergarten teacher, that's their name, she must have attended I don't know what courses, private courses I don't know, she was a kindergarten teacher, not a kindergarten elementary school teacher, her name is Dea Bellelli she is dead which is not much.

Goddess Bellelli said: "Why don't we find ourselves in a cooperative..." Wait, Villa San Maurizio which is my Villa where I lived all the time I was a girl, later I got married and came to live in the city; San Maurizio is close to the asylum and hospice, San Maurizio is just a little further.



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In San Maurizio there is also the house of Ariosto, the poet: inside Ariosto's house where he wrote his poems this woman here, the Goddess Bellelli, said let's meet a group of women to see if we can open a kindergarten and if you want I'm also a teacher voluntarily.

We also try to go inside Ariosto's house which was empty, there was a caretaker doing nothing it wasn't a museum yet, because after the Liberation we are already talking about the first few months, San Maurizio opened it by the end of the summer. The women said let's go to asylum: these were left-wing women here. But not Bellelli, her brother was very involved in politics and perhaps he was a partisan, in short, to make it short, they met again to see how to leave and what to do and they opened the kindergarten there, in the summer. At Villa Sesso they opened some in the classrooms of the elementary school which was closed because there was the war but afterwards they were sent away to Sesso and to some other schools because they had to start elementary school, the superintendency sent them away and therefore they found some other solutions as local.

But the type of work that was done by these women, who were then women Udi let's say because they were the driving force behind these aggregations of women, was to find a place and to have a teacher paid very little, of course, to have a teacher and not just any carer for the children. For the time it was already the best that could be done in my opinion, and so it was for the 60 kindergartens built throughout the province of Reggio Emilia: eight of these in Reggio Emilia, in the Municipality of Reggio. There were those who ate the soup and there were those who didn't eat it because they brought the basket from home, they brought steak or cheese or something: but they then realized that it wasn't right, one ate one thing, another ate a 'other, but this with time.

Going back to the kindergarten in San Maurizio, the one there was born from the initiative of women. I have the list, I have a booklet which is the root for making the identity card of San Maurizio which is not yet there, is that clear? Many years have passed and there is still no identity card, why? The work is there, the material is there, the names are there. That asylum there became CLN, because the women left like Udi, they asked all the parties to commit themselves, they accepted with men delegated by them, men or women, and therefore it was the asylum CLN Liberation Committee National: there were those of all parties to be clear who had participated in the Resistance and resisted until it became municipal.

It was all delegated to the teacher, it was all delegated to the teacher, do you understand? The parents went there but they didn't count for anything they couldn't say anything, they were labourers, they were weeders, they were peasants what do you want them to say like a teacher must educate her child.

We were at this level so you can't expect more.

(Was there a management council in these structures?): In the individual schools, but it was management which meant finding the money to run the school, to pay the teacher and the cook, because there was always a maid who was also the cook if she cooked something, perhaps vegetables, eggs, there were those who brought eggs on Mondays for example.

It was all improvised and built with the effort of practically everyone in the area; parents if they were labourers, weeders and women who went to work day after day what do you want... There were no tuition fees, mind you, there were no contributions from the family because there wasn't even this. So the management and administration committees had to work, they were called I don't remember, to find the money: they ran bicycle depots when there was a dance, on certain occasions they organized dance parties and then they kept the bicycle depot to earn money some money; or else they sold sweets to make money on it, in short, all this stuff done like this, or mowing the grass from the banks of the ditches and selling it, in short, all stuff remedied with the good will of ignorant people, let's even say ignorant starting with those of the Udi, we. Because we couldn't do anything in qualifying and let Malaguzzi leave him alone for now because he doesn't



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exist.

They were committees that started with unity like that of San Maurizio: with everyone, even the Christian Democrats sometimes the parish priest was also there, in San Maurizio there is a photo with the parish priest at a meeting... For example, take Massenzatico that now I have enough in mind: the priest went to the first two or three meetings, he wrote it too because everyone makes his own stories, that is, the parish priest sold a cow to be able to go to asylum... Clothes like this! There are beautiful things too!

The parish priest in Massenzatico wanted the right to go inside the school when he liked, he wanted to do what he liked, and therefore he set conditions that were not acceptable: because he has to go inside a school to do what he likes that there is the teacher paid and is the teacher in charge of doing things?

And so they broke ties after the first three or four meetings they understood that they couldn't work together: the priest took refuge in the rectory and the Udi, because it is the Udi, which has always continued to work on the problem of children without provincial coordination, I can say this because it is the truth. The Udi was the local Udi that moved, that got busy, had many generous initiatives. They went around with the cart behind the bicycle to get the foodstuffs that in Reggio there was an office that analyzed the quality, the composition of foodstuffs: they looked at the butter, they looked at the oil, they looked at many things, even canned goods. They came to Reggio with the wheelbarrow from Sesso, from San Maurizio, etc., to get these foodstuffs.

Udi did these things here: it's not that they had the competence to say let's give the teachers tips, they didn't give any tips, they allowed her to do her job, they allowed her to do it with great generosity, commitment, in the ways I told you and there was no coordination.

Udi wasn't able to do it at the time and he didn't do it and no one else did it.

The CLN, the National Liberation Committees, have always sponsored these Udi kindergartens more or less because the Udi was always the engine of these things, so it is clear that those who were delegated to represent one or two of the parties that were in the CLN have said no.

I can't tell you this: the DC representatives probably agreed that he would enter but the others said no so it is clear that he could not have privileges just because he was a parish priest, because otherwise the school would become parochial: if one can enter when he pleases, has the preparation and has a structure, it is clear that he would become the master of the kindergarten.

Instead they created a parish kindergarten always getting along, they got along well but everyone made him the kindergarten.

It was all delegated to the teacher because until the Municipality arrives to take over the management of these schools that asked for it, and two parish schools also asked for it because there was the school of Gaida and that of Mancasale, a school managed by Don Artoni who then made a center for drug addicts, they asked us to become municipal officials.

As far as I know, I was at the Udi ten years before becoming a commissioner, so I was there until 1967, until '66, let's say, at the Udi for ten years in a row as provincial manager; later I became a councilor.

In those ten years there was no pedagogical coordination made by the Udi: there was no one who took care of it, there was a stamp with the words "Provincial Kindergarten Federation", something like that, and it seems that that stamp I Malaguzzi did it but he never attended a meeting, he never promoted it, nor did Udi call him. Maybe sometimes she called him but the ten years that I was there which are the ten years that preceded the birth of the municipal schools, because let's face it up until 1967 there were two schools, I found two when I became a councilor.

From 1967 to 1975 there were twenty schools which are the ones that still exist today, plus the nursery scho-



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ols, five or six nursery schools which were the first of others, double the number now I can't remember the figures.

So there wasn't any pedagogical coordination either then or as long as they remained with the Udi: this doesn't rain for us, this is the pure truth because there are people who are very enterprising, stamps can be made, you pay for them in a stamp shop; the problem is that there has never been any meeting on pedagogical problems although the national Udi has held conferences with the top managers or pedagogists of the moment to give impulses in this regard, on childhood problems, etc. I have some brochures that are very interesting but some time passes before the stuff reaches the base so I can tell you that in Reggio Emilia, and I tell you this as provincial coordinator of the Udi from 1957 to 1967 I spent ten years there, there there was no pedagogist who dealt with it. There were three women, three teachers who came out of private schools: Sofia Gandolfi, Giovanna Grassi and Saccani, the three historic teachers of municipal schools who met to exchange ideas because they had no support, none shore and therefore this was the situation.

When I went councilor in 1967 we had these miserable Udi schools behind us that now lived only with the solidarity of all the people, especially the peasants, even the whites and it doesn't matter if they were red, white or black, everyone participated.

The meetings that we held as Udi for the schools of the Udi, to bring them to life, were these: there is the history of the Udi which is this one you see, it is 800 pages.

My job in those ten years there was to develop the idea that it was necessary to ask for them to be handed over to the Municipality, to pass this idea on to Udi so as not to believe that the women who had sacrificed so much did not want to hand them over to the Municipality. In Sesso for example, that stuff you have, Rosa the one who was the littlest who went to bring food every morning, she was a peasant woman, to the cook to make food for the children, she didn't want to pass it on to the Municipality, instead we, like Udi, have said that this misery is enough now, now we ask that it be the Municipality and we wage a political struggle so that the Municipality manages the municipal schools and ours too. In fact, when I became councilor, one of the first things I did in July 1967 (I became councilor in January) was an assembly of all those who asked for municipal schools for their children, there were two, I have already said. Robinson and Anne Frank alla Rosta; I said we need to look for ready premises because it took four years to build, we needed the money immediately from the Municipality and four years of time, and we didn't have any more time because we had lost even too much.

So in the Sala del Tricolore we said get busy "find some rooms that are suitable for a municipal school" and to do this I obviously had the consent of the "magician" of Malaguzzi because I went first to talk to him, you can't do things so in spite or without speaking.

I went there, I said this in some meetings, as councilor I went to him, not he to me, he didn't become a knight I went to him, the typist went to the graduate, to the magician... So I said to him "Listen, here we have to act quickly because we can't stand it anymore, we have more questions and we don't have schools, so what do we do?"

I go back to saying we only had two: one made in 1963, one in 1964, we were already in 1967 and that means we were stopped for three or four years.

So he listened to me and then said "I've been to Florence" to hold a teachers' assembly where he said how in his opinion the kindergartens should be like, so the audience listened with interest, there were many young teachers, in the end one he asked him: "But how many schools do you have in Reggio Emilia?" and he had to say two, then a great chorus to say "Ah it's comfortable! You illustrate two jewels but it's comfortable" then who knows how many things he added on his own because he went very little to the prefabricated house and went there he really went turtleneck because he said it was a chicken coop.

He was right, now I say he was right but for us it was the first school finally authorized by the Prefecture after



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the struggles that had taken place and we couldn't wrinkle our noses because he sniffed instead. Therefore the families helped us but also the institutes: it was a period when the boarding schools closed, the asylum closed, we were lucky, the school closed there near the hospital where Neruda is, it was the school for construction workers and therefore we were lucky, the institute for the blind was closing down and we launched the slogan get busy make the committees for municipal schools to parents and look for these places. The institutions also showed up: the retirement home for the elderly, the president phoned me and said "Look, Loretta, we have a cottage that doesn't do anything", it was the director's cottage, and then the cottage of the hospice. So we left and from 1967 the schools in the eight years that I was councilor we went to twenty schools. Now there are twenty-one.

To make it quicker we thought, because even if we weren't caught the head was there, that is, to do what must we do first?

Because four years is a long time I couldn't wait four years to do the first schools after those two so we said let's ask those who have buildings to rent them to us because we understand each other between institutions, it was an interest for them and also for the municipality and let's say to the parents who set up initiative committees to create municipal schools because they have to apply pressure, basic pressure on the Prefecture because there was also no possibility: municipal schools were not compulsory expenses, they were optional expenses and if the municipality he was in deficit he couldn't do them and the Prefect always said no to us because we asked questions but he always said no.

I don't know, five or six, some are gone, maybe five now I could count them with my fingers but I'd better leave it alone because my memory you know isn't that efficient; but I could count them for you, for example the Foscatto school which today is called Tondelli is the school that belonged to Udi including the priest, who also withdrew after a while because we have to consider that after 1945 in '47- 1948 saw De Gasperi's trip to America; when he returned the anti-fascist unit broke down, the CLNs went to hell and the national government also broke down and therefore these structures here too, which were just sketchy, broke down.

They financed themselves until the Municipality arrived because we didn't take them en bloc also because they didn't offer themselves en bloc: now I'm talking about the one that resisted the most which was Sex, Rosa Galeotti didn't want to give it because she was the her life, she was a peasant but her life was school, she was a woman who had very Catholic ideas but she was in love with Udi but above all with kindergarten, so we had to stagger.

But they resisted.

Every municipal school has been conquered with the struggle, I call it a struggle because that's how it was, of the parents and citizens who wanted the municipal schools. Each school, each of these twenty-one was born this way: each then has its own particularity, let's say, but each school was conquered with the participation of parents, citizens, the neighborhood council when it existed, with an awareness that there was not first, because in the Udi phase there wasn't a real awareness precisely that matured on the push of need but also because times have changed and people knew that education is fundamental for children especially between 3 and 6 years old, this we understood that.

And therefore from there to make this participation even more aware, even more engaging precisely in the merits of the decisions with the municipal management which was our municipal management coordinated by Malaguzzi, let's say it because we have always thought of Malaguzzi with this role. He was the only pedagogue, the only psychologist that the Municipality had, he was the only one who had attended a psychology course for a few months, six months I think: because in Italy we didn't talk about psychology with the fascists, there was no it was the psychology schools.



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Then he, after he was hired by the Municipality in 1951, therefore a long time before we started municipal schools, and worked at the municipal psycho-pedagogical medical centre.

CMPP ... Municipality of the Municipality of Reggio but what was Malaguzzi doing? He took care of children with disabilities, who peed in the bed, who had problems, families who wanted to be helped and then he did this work with a social worker, then there was a psychiatrist at the beginning too and then then there he sorted where they had to go I hope in families as much as possible, but someone also went to some institute because Malaguzzi was his job there.

I have never dealt with it because it would be interesting to talk about my relationship with Malaguzzi, the operational relationship: because I used to churn out the municipal schools but with the fight, not with lies, not with table games and various compromises because I went to city council to wage battles with the groups that didn't want schools because we've always had to fight with DC because when they didn't know what to say they said "There's already a parish there, you don't have to build it, you can't there because there is another..." Well, in short, then we can never run municipal schools, not even where there were premises owned by the Municipality: for example, the firefighters who were in via dell'Abbadessa when they came here to Canalina, and I'm talking about the years just before I became councilor, not to say things that don't belong to me but the Municipality asked the question and there was a senior councilor I think it was... I don't remember... It was Morini Sergio, professor.

He made the proposal in the municipality to create a municipal school in the premises of via dell'Abbadessa: no, the Christian Democrats are not good there either, because there is a prison nearby, because there is a covered market nearby, it is not suitable for a municipal school, however, there was a nice little garden outside which could be a school with two sections if not with three.

In short, you understand it was an endless struggle so I repeat those things there, they are sipped, I confirm them: every school was conquered with the participation of the parents and when you did this no one can send you out if perhaps they had the intention, but there seems to have been no intention because the parents have begun to participate in the decisions, in the section assemblies to talk not only about their children but about the progress of the school and the parents have also grown up together with the children, and I am sorry that administrators like me haven't grown enough, I'm talking about myself, because they didn't involve me. Is this big?

The involvement comes in 1972 when there were already many schools and we had to draw up a regulation which said a municipal consultation must be held not to have an owner who manages them as he pleases: the Christian Democrats also supported this thesis and I supported them, we must participation also in operational management not only to have and conquer them with the delegations, with the delegations in Rome, with all the struggles we have waged, the collection of signatures, thousands of signatures we have done everything to overcome this resistance.

The law that gives the green light to the municipalities dates back to 1968 when the socialists were in government. One of the conditions that Nenni placed on the Christian Democrats was this: the obligation of state middle school, i.e. the increase in the age of compulsory schooling, as a condition for going to government and also for the municipalities that could set up schools of childhood if they wanted it, at their expense of course.