
“NO AI MISSILI A COMISO, NO AI MISSILI IN EUROPA!”

A case study of transnational contacts between Comiso (Sicily, Italy),
Greenham Common (England) and the Dutch peace movement



H.E. Wink

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Supervisor: Dr. B.S. van der Steen | Second reader: Dr. D. Fazzi

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Translation of the title: “No to the missiles at Comiso, no to the missiles in Europe!” Image: International Institute of Social History: [Poster.] made by Opland, (call number IISG BG E9/598), via <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/903B422B-BBE6-48B7-8FB4-733CB4BB406E>.

Introduction

In 1983, an article published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* discussed a demonstration in Comiso, Sicily, against the placing of nuclear cruise missiles on an air base close to the town, in which some Dutch activist took part. “They say that one Dutch pacifist is worth nearly ten Italian pacifists,” rang one of the conclusions of the article.¹ This mention of international pacifists joining an Italian demonstration, and the fact that their presence supposedly had a bigger influence than the presence of local people, is telling of the intensity and framing of transnational contact between Western European anti-nuclear movements.

After nearly two decades of détente, tensions between the USA and the USSR rose again at the end of the 1970s. NATO announced its Double-Track Decision on December 12, 1979, following the Soviets’ continued expansion of its number of SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe. In the decision, NATO offered negotiations with the Warsaw Pact about mutual limitations of middle-range nuclear missiles in Europe, with the threat that in case of disagreement, more Pershing-II missiles would be placed in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, West Germany and Italy. Negotiations started in 1981, but as they yielded no results, preparations were started to deploy the missiles to the respective bases in Western Europe.

In response to this decision and the preparations, new peace movements emerged all over Western Europe. These movements manifested themselves in many ways, of which the massive demonstrations in many Western European cities in 1981 and 1983 are the most well-known. But there were many more forms of protest.

The Dutch peace movement was very influential in Europe, mainly due to its strength and early start; already in 1979, opposition to the deployment had started.² Large demonstrations against the NATO Double-Track Decision, in 1981 and 1983, caused the American historian Walter Laqueur to coin the term ‘Hollanditis’.³ There were many protests around the air base at Woensdrecht, where American cruise missiles were to be stationed, as well as in other places.

¹ Andrea Purgatori, ‘Domani in cinquecentomila a Roma manifestano per la pace nel mondo. Un colossale happening nella capitale organizzato dai pacifisti italiani’, *Corriere della Sera*, 21/10/1983, p. 4.

² Ruud Koopmans, *Democracy from below: New social movements and the political system in West Germany*, (Boulder, 1995), p. 197.

³ Sebastian Kalden, ‘A Case of “Hollanditis”. The Interchurch Peace Council in the Netherlands and the Christian Peace Movement in Western Europe’, in: Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke and Jeremy Varon (ed.), *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 251-267, p. 251.

Partly due to the massive protests in Amsterdam in 1981 and the fact that polls showed that a large part of the Dutch population did not support the deployment of NATO missiles in the Netherlands, the Dutch government was hesitant to agree to the Double-Track Decision.⁴ In 1985, the Dutch government finally decided to allow the deployment of the missiles on Dutch ground, but by then, negotiations between the USA and the USSR had become more fruitful. In 1987, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty was signed, rendering the deployment of the missiles in Europe unnecessary.⁵

One way in which people protested against the placing of the missiles was by establishing peace camps. Peace camps were not new in the 1980s, but the phenomenon gained an enormous popularity due to the media attention for the peace camp at Greenham Common, England. This camp was set up in 1981, next to a military base where nuclear cruise missiles were to be stationed. The camp remained there for 19 years, long after the missiles had been removed from the base. Soon after its establishment, Greenham Common became a women's only camp. This example was soon followed in other places, such as the United States (Seneca, New York), the Netherlands (Soesterberg) and Italy (Comiso). *La Ragnatela* (the Spider Web), one of the peace camps in Comiso, Sicily, was founded in 1983, after a large international demonstration in Comiso against the deployment.⁶ It soon became a women's only camp as well. It was internationally orientated, with many inhabitants of the camp coming from all over Western Europe, especially from the Greenham Common Women's Camp. Some peace camps were established in the Netherlands as well, near Woensdrecht and near Soesterberg Air Base, but they were never quite as successful in gathering media attention as Greenham Common.

Transnationalism

The European peace movements were connected with each other through official channels of communication, as well as through personal networks. This connectedness made it possible to coordinate large actions, such as massive demonstrations in capital cities on the same day. It also allowed for the transnational diffusion of protest repertoires between the peace movements.

⁴ Tom Duurland, *De wereld kwam naar Woensdrecht: een vliegbasis te midden van het kruisrakettendebat* (Franeker, 2018), pp. 16, 27.

⁵ Paul van der Steen, '1981 Liever rood dan dood. Het koninkrijk en zijn vredesbeweging', *Trouw*, 20/11/2013, via: <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/1981-liever-rood-dan-dood~bb1f3074/> (01/06/2020).

⁶ Francesca Piatti, *L'aeroporto di Comiso, ieri ed oggi*, <https://www.pressenza.com/it/2014/05/laeroporto-comiso-ieri-ed-oggi/>, 8/12/19.

Ad Knotter clearly explains what makes transnationalism such a useful concept for studying the European peace movements:

‘Transnational’ has a much broader meaning than ‘international’, as it refers to the interaction between individuals, groups, and organizations across national borders, and to structures that extend beyond the nation-state.⁷

This is important in the case of the European peace movements, since these movements interacted across national borders. Furthermore, the focus on non-state actors makes this approach well-suited for a research into social movements, as they were often non-state actors. With classical forms of research, as well as with comparative history, many of the similarities between movements were at risk of being ignored, or not recognized as the result of transnational contacts between (members of) the movements. “A transnational approach may contribute to the awareness that certain phenomena thought to be peculiar to one specific national context are indeed phenomena that occur elsewhere as well,” as historians Padraic Kenney and Gerd-Rainer Horn hold.⁸

Everett M. Rogers defines diffusion as “the process by which an *innovation* is *communicated* through certain *channels* over *time* among the members of a *social system*”⁹ (emphasise of the original author). During this process of diffusion, the innovation can be changed or adapted to the circumstances of the receiving party. The channels of which Rogers speaks are the official channels of communication and the personal networks that were mentioned earlier, as well as through media attention for a certain social movement.

Research on diffusion used to follow the definition of Rogers, and treat the elements of diffusion (the innovation, communication, channels, time and social systems) as fixed and coherent.¹⁰ In their article ‘Globalization and transnational diffusion between social movements’, Sean Chabot and Jan Willem Duyvendak however argue that this assumption is

⁷ Ad Knotter, ‘Transnational Cigar-Makers: Cross-Border Labour Markets, Strikes, and Solidarity at the Time of the First International (1864-1873)’, *International Review of Social History* 59 (2014), pp. 409-442, p. 411.

⁸ Padraic Kenney and Gerd-Rainer Horn, ‘Introduction. Approaches to the Transnational’, in: Padraic Kenney and Gerd-Rainer Horn (ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, (n.p., 2004), pp. ix-xix, p. pxii.

⁹ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations* (New York 1995, Fourth edition), p. 10.

¹⁰ Sean Chabot, Jan Willem Duyvendak, ‘Globalization and transnational diffusion between social movements: Reconceptualizing the dissemination of the Gandhian repertoire and the “coming out” routine’, *Theory and Society* 31:6 (2002), pp. 697-740, p. 701.

wrong, and that diffusion can be “dynamic, ambiguous, and malleable”.¹¹ Their approach to diffusion is more flexible and open than the classical approach. This is the approach I will be following in this research: instead of only looking at transfers from centre to periphery, I look at all directions; instead of looking for a finished product being transferred as a complete package, I look at dynamic transfers of unfinished ideas.

Diffusion, however, is not the main focus of this research; instead, I will use the concept of transnationalism to explore how the contacts between (members of) the different peace movements influenced the evolution of these movements. For this, I based my approach on the aforementioned flexible approach of Chabot and Duyvendak.

To analyse the transnational contacts between the peace movement in Comiso (Sicily, Italy), Greenham Common (England) and the Netherlands, three models will be used. The first model is that of transfer. Some of the protest repertoires that were used in Italy, for example, were copied from other movements, such as the sit-in and the peace camps. There is not one clear origin of these repertoires, but nonetheless, they can be seen as examples transfer.

The second way of looking into the transnational connections within the Western European anti-nuclear movement uses the concept of failed transfer. Research into transnationalism has mostly focused on successful cases. However, unsuccessful examples of diffusion and transfer can provide us with interesting insights as well. An example of such a case study is the article on the continental abolitionist movement in the nineteenth century by Maartje Janse.¹² She coined the term “inverse transfer” which suggests that sometimes attempts at transfer and diffusion can be counter-productive.¹³ She argues that the fact that the continental abolitionist movement was very different from the British one was not a failed attempt at following the British example, but “a conscious decision to reject the model of British-style abolitionism”.¹⁴

In Dutch newspapers, one explicit example of unsuccessful transfer within 1980s peace movements can be observed. Mariët Moors, a “woman of peace” who had spent some time in an Italian prison cell for protesting near Comiso, stated in an interview in 1987:

With three women we went to Comiso in October of last year, in the first place to promote cruise-watching, keeping an eye on nuclear missile-transport and, if possible, blocking

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 706.

¹² Maartje Janse, ‘“Holland as a little England”? British anti-slavery missionaries and continental abolitionist movements in the mid nineteenth century’, *Past and Present*, 229:1 (2015), pp. 123-160.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 125.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

them. We knew that cruise-watching was possible, as could be seen by the success of this method at the English base of Greenham Common. If some people from Woensdrecht could (...) try to establish the practise of cruise-watching in Comiso, that would be fine [“prima”]. We also wanted to gain experiences, because all of the 112 missiles have been stationed there since 1984. But we wanted to export too many protest repertoires that are used in the Netherlands to Comiso, and that is just not possible. The situation there is very different. There are no manifestations or actions directly targeting the base, because that would mean losing the goodwill of the local population. Walking one lap around the base is seen as an extreme form of action.¹⁵

This quote shows the explicit intent to transfer a specific practice (in this case cruise-watching, watching the movements of the missiles to disturb training exercises and gather information) from Greenham Common and Woensdrecht to Comiso, as well as the general intent to learn from the experiences of Comiso and take those back to the Netherlands. However, the conclusion of the Dutch peace activist is that this transfer failed, because of the different circumstances at Comiso, compared to Great Britain and the Netherlands. It is not, however, an example of inverse transfer, since the practice was not adapted in an opposite manner as intended; instead, the practice simply did not catch on in Comiso.

There is a third way of looking at the transnational connections between these movements. In the previously mentioned models, the act of transferring ideas and practices was an explicit goal of the transnational activists. In this third model, I explore the possibility of ‘everyday transnationalism’, contacts that are simply there, not with the goal of transferring ideas. In the case of the Western European anti-nuclear movements, transnational contacts were a given, but they might not have been as influential as the first two models suggest.

In this research, I will use the case study of Comiso and its contacts with the British camp Greenham Common and the Dutch peace movement in general to explore which of these three models (transfer, failed transfer and ‘everyday transnationalism’) best describes the interactions between the different movements. To do this, this research is divided into four chapters, each focusing on one specific topic. Each chapter will first answer the question if any of the findings were unusual compared to other countries’ movements. Next, I will answer the question which of the three models best fits the case study, and thus the anti-nuclear movement in Western Europe in general. The first chapter analyses the emergence of the Italian peace

¹⁵ Harald Doornbos, ‘Vredesvrouw Mariët Moors zat maand in Italiaanse cel. ‘De Rode Brigades waren immers ook zo begonnen’, *De Waarheid* 24/01/1987, p. 7.

movement, and the influence other movements had on this. The second chapter investigates the international involvement with the peace movement in Comiso. The third chapter discusses with the involvement of the local population. The fourth and final chapter focuses on the peace camps at Comiso.

Historiography

The European peace movements in general have been the subject of intense research. An example is *Confronting the bomb* by historian Lawrence Wittner.¹⁶ This shorter version of his scholarly trilogy *The Struggle against the bomb* describes the history of the nuclear disarmament movement from the Second World War up until the time of writing (2009).¹⁷ The largest disadvantage this book has is that it mostly describes the different movements per country, ignoring the transnational contacts between movements. Wittner thus misses some of the similarities between the movements.

An example of research that does use the transnational approach is the article “Where do we go from Wyhl?” by Jan-Hendrik Meyer.¹⁸ This article focuses on the anti-nuclear energy movement, not the peace movement that struggled against nuclear weapons, but some of the findings can be transferred to my case study. For example, Meyer raises the valid point that there were many obstacles to transnational cooperation; it “usually required foreign language skills, time and (access to) resources for international travel and communication, as well as organizational and intercultural skills.”¹⁹ This was still difficult in the 1980s.

Meyer mostly focuses on the efforts of the anti-nuclear movement to get large international organizations to join their cause, in an effort to stop the spread of nuclear energy. This is less relevant for my case study, as this is not found in the sources as a strategy used by the activists. Nevertheless, some of the findings of this article regarding transnationalism can be used in research of the anti-nuclear weapons movement.

¹⁶ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb. A short history of the world nuclear disarmament movement*, (Stanford 2009).

¹⁷ Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Volume One, One World or None: a History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement through 1953*, (Stanford, 1993); Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Volume Two, Resisting the Bomb: a History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*, (Stanford, 1997); Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Volume Three, Toward Nuclear Abolition: a History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the present*, (Stanford, 2003).

¹⁸ Jan-Henrik Meyer, “Where do we go from Wyhl?” Transnational anti-nuclear protest targeting European and international organizations in the 1970s’, *Historical Social Research* 39:1 (2014), pp. 212-235.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 230.

An example of research into the level of diffusion in the European peace movements is from the book *Democracy from below* by Ruud Koopmans.²⁰ In this book, Koopmans examines the role that diffusion played in different new social movements, among which the peace movement of the 1980s.²¹ His conclusion is that there was a large amount of diffusion between the Dutch and West German movement, mainly due to the strength of the Dutch movement.²² Furthermore, he mentions:

as a result of the international nature of the issue, international diffusion played an even larger role in the development of peace protests than it did in the movements discussed previously [the anti-nuclear energy movement and the squatters movement].²³

Koopmans' book has a much broader scope than this thesis, as he looked at multiple social movements from the same period. All these movements are from West Germany, but they are compared to similar movements in different countries. In his paragraph on the peace movements, he compares the West German movement to the Dutch, British and French movements, but he ignores the Italian and Belgian movements, even though these countries were scheduled to deploy missiles as well. Furthermore, where he used newspapers, he selected only the Monday issues of the titles he studied. This is because when this book was written, in 1995, digitalisation of newspapers was not as widespread as it is today, making it difficult to gather information from newspapers. I did not encounter this problem, as with modern tools it is easier to search through newspapers.

With this case study, I aim to combine the theory of diffusion with the existing theory of transnationalism, instead of only using diffusion as a framework.

One of the standard research works on peace camps is *Protest camps* by Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel and Patrick McCurdy.²⁴ Their work focuses on a number of protest camps from the 1980s (among which Greenham Common) and some from the 21st century. They state that protest camps should be researched not just as a method for social movements, but in their own right.

²⁰ Koopmans, *Democracy from below*.

²¹ *Idem*, chapter 4.4, pp. 194-206.

²² *Idem*, p. 197.

²³ *Idem*, p. 196.

²⁴ Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, Patrick McCurdy, *Protest camps*, (London: Zed Books, 2013).

A large part of the research into the peace camps of the 1980s has focused on the fact that many of these camps were women's only. Most of that research has been done from a feminist perspective, with a focus on the feminist symbolism that was used by the protesters, as in the article 'Beyond Greenham Woman?' by Catherine Eschle,²⁵ the article 'Circling the missiles and staining them red' by Margaret L. Laware,²⁶ and the book *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* by Cynthia Cockburn.²⁷ These articles mention protest repertoires born from an explicit wish to emphasise the femininity of the protesters, such as the use of menstrual symbolism ("the pinning of feminine napkins to the fence and the use of red paint (...) to throw at exiting convoy trucks and other military vehicles").²⁸

An example of this for the Italian case is the article 'C'era una volta la Ragnatela' by Agata Ruscica, one of the inhabitants of *La Ragnatela*.²⁹ This article tells about her personal experiences at the camp, but only from a lesbian and/or feminist perspective.

I will not be using this feminist perspective when looking at the peace camps and their connections. Many of the women who travelled to a camp did so with two goals in mind: to fight against the placement of the cruise missiles, and to feel connected to this movement of fighting women. I will focus mostly on this first goal. When it comes up, I will not ignore the feminist angle of some sources, but it is not my focus point, since this has been done by many previous, better suited, researchers. Instead, I will investigate the peace camps as part of the peace movement in general, not as an expression of feminism.

The Italian peace movement in general and in Comiso specifically have not been extensively discussed in English language scholarship. Most of the literature focuses on the decisions and actions of the Italian government, less on the local actions of activists and movements. An example of an article that combines the two is 'La sfida nucleare' by Leopoldo Nuti.³⁰ This

²⁵ Catherine Eschle, 'Beyond Greenham Woman? Gender identities and anti-nuclear activism in peace', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 19:4 (2017), pp. 471-490.

²⁶ Margaret Laware, 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 16:3 (2004), pp. 18-41.

²⁷ Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2007). Especially the sixth chapter on the methodology of women's protests is interesting in this context.

²⁸ Laware, 'Circling the missiles and staining them red', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, p. 36.

²⁹ Agata Ruscica, 'C'era una volta la Ragnatela. Esperienze lesbiche e femministe a Comiso', *Zapruder* 14 (2017) ("Once upon a time there was *La Ragnatela*/the Spiderweb. Lesbian and feminist experiences at Comiso").

³⁰ Leopoldo Nuti, *La sfida nucleare: La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche 1945-1991* (Bologna, 2007) ('The nuclear challenge: the Italian foreign politics and nuclear weapons, 1945-1991').

article focusses mostly on Italian politics in the post-war years, especially on its stance on nuclear weapons, but it also pays some attention to popular opinion in the country and to the peace movements.³¹

The article ‘Institutional actors and the Italian peace movement’ by Carlo Ruzza does look into outside influences into the Italian peace movement, but his research is focused on the national level.³² The problem with this approach is that the Italian peace movement was only very loosely connected on a national level. Most of the activity was on a local or regional level. There was never a strong national movement as in for example the Netherlands, where the *Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad* (Inter Church Peace Council, IKV) fulfilled that role. When looking at the national Italian level, most of the local differences between for example North and South Italy disappear, whereas on a local level, these differences are keenly felt. For example, a visitor from North Italy to *La Ragnatela* was perceived by the Sicilians the same way as a West-German visitor: as a foreigner.

With this research, I aim to add to the English language scholarship on Comiso specifically and the Italian peace movements in general. By studying a small case study, I can take into consideration the differences within the Italian peace movement and within the country itself, thus avoiding the problem that Carlo Ruzza’s article encountered.

Sources³³

The primary sources used in this research are mostly newspapers. This type of source was chosen because of the relatively wide availability of these documents, as well as the kind of information they provide. Of course, newspapers do not offer the complete picture of what happened, since not all information was available for all journalists at the time of the events. Furthermore, because of possible bias of the journalist, author, editors, or newspaper in general, information could be spun in different ways. However, they are a valuable source, since they make it possible to know what kind of information was available to the people of that time, as well as what journalists and editors thought of importance.

For this research, both Dutch and Italian newspapers were used. For the Dutch newspapers, I used the digital newspaper database Delpher as a research tool, to gather as broad a spectrum

³¹ Matthew Evangelista, ‘Leopoldo Nuti, *La sfida nucleare: La politica estera italiana e le armi atomiche 1945–1991*. Review’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11:2 (2009), pp. 52-154.

³² Carlo Ruzza, ‘Institutional actors and the Italian peace movement: Specializing and branching out’, *Theory and Society* 26 (1997), pp. 87-127.

³³ Most of the sources were in Dutch or Italian. These were translated by me.

of sources as possible. I used the search word ‘Comiso’, while only searching in newspapers from between January 1st, 1980 and December 31st, 1989. This yielded 472 results, most of which were concerning the peace movement, as there were almost no other reasons for Dutch newspapers to write about this small town. The most important newspapers that emerged were *De Volkskrant* (left-of-centre), *NRC Handelsblad* (liberal), *De Waarheid* (communist) and *Trouw* (protestant). Furthermore, quite a few regional newspapers could be found in the results. I have mostly chosen the larger, national, newspapers as sources, since these were more widely read than the smaller regional newspapers such as the *Leeuwarden Courant* (based in Friesland) and the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (based in Groningen and Drenthe). Only when smaller newspapers contained articles that were of particular interest have I chosen to mention them. All this is to offset the problem that Maarten van den Bos and Hermione Giffard observed with the use of a digital database such as Delpher.³⁴ All sources are presented as if they are carrying equal weight, when in reality, an article in *De Volkskrant* had a much larger impact than an article in a regional newspaper.³⁵

When looking at the newspapers that came up most often, there is one interesting detail. Many of the articles that reported about Comiso or Greenham Common were from *De Waarheid*, a communist newspaper. A possible explanation for this is that the beginning of the peace movement at Comiso can be found within the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, PCI). The Dutch communists would feel a closer connection to this emerging movement than liberal and centrist groups, which is reflected in how much their respective newspapers wrote about it. This causes a problem that Marcel Broersma explains further:

While media studies have not regarded the press as a ‘mirror of society’ for a long time, historians (...) continue to use newspapers as such, out of pragmatism. In this interpretation of the newspaper as a more or less ‘neutral’ medium passing through information and registering events, the nature and function of media is misunderstood. After all, they construct the news from an ideological perspective and, by doing that, structure reality for their audience.³⁶

³⁴ Maarten van den Bos, Hermione Giffard, ‘The Grapevine: Measuring the influence of Dutch newspapers on Delpher’, in: *Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies* 19 (2015), pp. 29-41.

³⁵ *Idem*, pp. 29-30.

³⁶ Marcel Broersma, ‘Nooit meer bladeren? Digitale krantenarchieven als bron’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 14 (2) (2012), pp. 29-55, p. 37.

This does not, however, negatively impact my research, as I am not so much interested in the facts of what occurred at Comiso, as I am interested in the interpretations of those events. Obviously, *De Waarheid* interpreted the events through their own ideology, but since I am aware of the signature of this newspaper, I am able to use these articles to study the interpretations of the events.

Unfortunately, a tool such as Delpher does not exist for Italian newspapers. Therefore, I chose one newspaper, the *Corriere della Sera*. This is Italy's most read newspaper, and it has a liberal centrist political alignment. I used the keyword 'Comiso' in combination with the terms 'IKV', 'La Ragnatela', 'Olanda' ("the Netherlands") and most importantly 'movimento pace' ("peace movement"). In total this yielded around a hundred results. I also searched for the term 'Greenham Common', but this only yielded results I had already seen with the earlier keywords.

Furthermore, pamphlets were used. Most of these were found in the archives of the University of Bradford, Special Collections. Within the archive of Sarah Meyer, relating to Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, there is a file related to *La Ragnatela*.³⁷ These pamphlets and newsletters were gathered during a visit of a group of Greenham Common women to Comiso. The file also contains some letters and documents recounting experiences. Lastly, some pamphlets were found in the archives of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam.

Propagandistic material such as pamphlets should be used with care: not everything in it should be taken as fact. Nonetheless, these pamphlets provide us with valuable information, mainly about their calls to action, or the ways in which they describe themselves, their actions, and their decisions. Furthermore, just as with the use of the communist newspaper *De Waarheid*, the interpretation of the makers of the source are just as interesting, if not more, than the facts.

Another option would have been the archive of the IKV itself. I requested permission to view some documents, but at the same time the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Netherlands and

³⁷ University of Bradford Special Collections, Papers of Sarah Meyer relating to Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, 1982-1985, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, via <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb532-cwlsma/cwlsma/5>. This will be abbreviated to 'Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5' in the following footnotes.

I never received an answer. Besides, permission would probably not be granted for a master's thesis research, since the IKV is quite private with its archive.

Chapter 1: The emergence of the peace movement at Comiso

There is as yet no single unifying body in the peace movement in Italy. Peace activities have been carried out by a proliferation of local groups, some dominated by the political parties, others of a more pacifist or religious orientation. At the time of the large demonstration in Rome in October 1981 a group called the 'October 24 Committee' was formed, which is perhaps the nearest thing to a representative committee presently existing, but the breadth of its membership seems to prevent it from taken up clear-cut positions, and it has therefore tended to become a co-ordinating body for the organisation of large demonstrations, rather than a unified secretariat capable of operating on all political levels against nuclear re-armament.³⁸

This is what Ben Thompson concluded in 1982 in a booklet titled 'END Special Report: Comiso', issued by the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) group in Great Britain. The Italian anti-nuclear movement emerged relatively late, compared to the movements in for example the Netherlands and Britain, and it never reached similar levels of organisation. In the case of Comiso they struggled to keep the initial momentum of the movement going after a while, as will be demonstrated in this paper. In the North Western European countries these movements emerged in the 1950s, when Great Britain became the third atomic superpower and fears for a nuclear war in Europe grew. In Italy, however, it was only in the late 1970s, after the decision was announced to station missiles on Italian soil that something changed. According to *De Volkskrant*, prior to the government's decision, there had been almost no public discussion about the topic, no demonstrations and no debate within the political parties. "This is only now, partly under the influence of developments in Northern Europe, starting to change", the newspaper stated in the fall of 1981.³⁹ Around this time, a large demonstration of about half a million people was held in Rome. According to *De Waarheid*, "an important role in the establishment of this large demonstration was no doubt the massive attendance in Bonn [300,000 people] on the 10th of October, which made a big impression in Italy."⁴⁰ Furthermore, during speeches made at this demonstration in Rome, the point was made that "there was a

³⁸ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson', p. 7.

³⁹ Yvonne Scholten, 'Socialist Spini schetst angst voor communisme. "Italië kan binnen NAVO geen afwijkend standpunt innemen"', *De Volkskrant* 28/10/1981, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Redactie buitenland, 'Klinkend bewijs in Rome. Beweging tegen atoomraketten breekt baan in Italië', *De Waarheid* 28/10/1981, p. 5.

need to get the movement, which had grown in the Netherlands, West-Germany and Belgium, to gain a foothold in Italy.”⁴¹ From this it is clear that in the beginning, the Italian anti-nuclear activists used international examples to form their own movement.

Eight months later, *De Waarheid* called the Italian movement the “fastest growing in Western Europe”.⁴² However, other newspapers focused more on the difficulties the movement encountered. Around the same time of the article in *De Waarheid*, *De Volkskrant* published an in-depth article about Comiso and the growing peace movement in Italy:

From the beginning, it has been clear that the peace movement in Italy has come off the ground in a different way than for example in the Netherlands. It is less a movement grown from the basis. In Italy it is practically impossible – for any movement – to start a large-scale action without the help of the political parties – especially the PCI – and the trade union federations.⁴³

Furthermore, the article mentioned that the influence of the Catholic Church in Italian society played a large role in reducing the possibilities for movements to grow. These different circumstances played a large role in the development of the movement in Italy. The cultural differences between Italy, and specifically Sicily, where the Comiso camp was set up, and other Western European movements were larger than between for example the Netherlands and Great Britain, which helps to explain why the Italian movement was regarded as weaker. The main social-political difference was that in Italy, the role of the Catholic Church was much larger than in other countries. Furthermore, the Italian socialist and communist parties had a much larger influence in (local) government than in other countries, which was suspicious in the eyes of the Americans, who were afraid of a large Soviet influence in this NATO country. This played a role in the willingness of the Italian government to deploy missiles in Italy. Lastly, the culture of social movements working together was more developed in the North Western European countries, even in the Netherlands, where up until the 1960s *verzuiling* (pillarization) had played a large role in society. In the Dutch peace movement, groups of all backgrounds (catholic, protestant, non-religious, women’s only, et cetera) worked together. The problems this different social-political background caused were also signalled in the END

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Redactie buitenland, ‘Westeuropese vredesbewegingen: “Overkomst dringend ongewenst”’, *De Waarheid* 01/06/1982, p. 5.

⁴³ Unknown author, ‘Reagan’s Europa-reis: overal demonstraties en thuis gaan ze ook de straat op’, *De Volkskrant ‘Het Vervolg’*, 05/06/1982, p. 7.

Special Report. According to this, the broad basis of the Italian movement, in which many different groups joined together, all with different goals and backgrounds, complicated the formation process of a movement capable of exercising influence on the authorities.⁴⁴ According to the END Report, this was one of the reasons why the Italian movement was less strong than others.

Even in later years, when the anti-nuclear movement in Italy had been established, it was continued to be seen as “the weak little brother”⁴⁵ of the European anti-nuclear movements. In December 1982, *NRC Handelsblad* stated that the initiators of a “march for peace” (from Milan to Comiso) had thought it impossible “that the fear for nuclear weapons in Italy would grow to be as big as in for example the Netherlands and West-Germany”.⁴⁶

In 1983, A. Kamsteeg wrote an opinion piece in the conservative Christian *Nederlands Dagblad* on the Western European peace movements, after he had made a trip visiting some of Europe’s peace camps. He argued critically that the anti-nuclear movement could be seen as “a new, international belief”, one that did not stop at national borders. This transnational nature of the movement did not, however, negate the fact that there were many differences between the movements, based on for example national history. Kamsteeg also stated that the Italian peace movement was weaker than the others, and that it had to be supported by Dutch and West-German activists. One of the reasons for this was that Sicily was relatively isolated, both geographically and politically.⁴⁷

In late 1981, Laurens Hogebrink, a board member for the Dutch *Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad* (IKV), wrote a memorandum about the position of the Sicilian anti-nuclear movement, in which he made some recommendations.

The new peace movement in Sicily needs to be much more supported by peace movements in Europe and the United States. She must urgently be lifted from her, geographically imposed, isolation. This is why representatives from the Sicilian peace movement must be invited for important events in other countries. Sit-down actions in Sicily must, when the time for them has come, be international. Twenty Germans are more impactful than 30.000

⁴⁴ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 7.

⁴⁵ A. Kamsteeg, ‘Naar de ‘hete herfst’’, *Nederlands dagblad: gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 05/10/1983, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ben van der Velden, ‘Italianen zijn niet in beweging te krijgen tegen de kruisraketten’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 04/12/1982, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Kamsteeg, ‘Naar de ‘hete herfst’’, *Nederlands dagblad*, 05/10/1983, p. 7.

Italians. (...) Sicilian groups must be able to profit from the experiences of local groups in Britain and the United States to reform local communities into nuclear-free zones.⁴⁸

All these commentaries on the international peace movement, both critical and supportive, share that they saw a need for international support of the Sicilian movement. They saw a guiding role, like a mentor, for the movements from the Netherlands and Great Britain, supporting the Sicilian movement with ideas as well as physical support during demonstrations and protest actions. At many points in time, at the beginning of the movement as well as later on, comparisons were made between Sicily, the Netherlands and Britain.

Dario Fazzi, however, also sees an opposite direction for this guiding role. He mentions how the Italian *Comitato Unitario per il Disarmo e la Pace* (the Unitary Committee for Disarmament and Peace, CUDIP) invited delegations from the Netherlands, Britain, West Germany and France to Comiso, “so as to give these delegations an idea of successful bottom-up mobilization”.⁴⁹ According to Fazzi, the Italian peace movement was not just the movement that had to be guided to the level of the other movements; instead, it could bring some knowledge and experiences to the other movements as well. However, he follows this with the fact that the other European movements helped the Italian movement “to launch a petition calling for the closure of the military base and to organize a large national demonstration on 4 April 1982.”⁵⁰ Thus, Fazzi sees the relation between the movements more as a mutual exchange of information between the movements, where the Italian movement had things to teach as well as things to learn, in contrast to earlier commenters, who saw only the guiding role of the other movements in helping the Italian movement grow.

Ben Thompson, one of the earlier commenters, ends his END Special Report with this conclusion:

We need to assist the Italian peace movement in its struggle to develop a unified structure, both by encouraging those peace workers in Italy who are currently working on the possibility of creating a CND type structure in that country, and also by locating the reliable

⁴⁸ Henk de Mari, ‘Nederlandse vredescomités regisseren verzet tegen kruisraketten op Sicilië’, *De Telegraaf*, 19/06/1982, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Dario Fazzi, ‘The Nuclear Freeze Generation: the early 1980s anti-nuclear movement between ‘Carter’s Vietnam’ and ‘Euroshima’’, in: Knud Andresen, Bart van der Steen (ed.), *A European youth revolt: European perspectives on youth protest and social movements in the 1980s* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), pp. 145-158, p. 152.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

and established local committees and suggesting that they act as clearing houses for actions planned on an international scale.⁵¹

First of all, Thompson also saw the assisting role of the European peace movements. Secondly, he mentions Italians creating a “CND type structure”. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was an organisation from Great Britain, with a central group in London, national groups in Wales, Ireland and Scotland and regional groups all over the country. As this structure was developed in Britain and then copied by the Italian movement, this can be seen as an example of transfer. However, from the report it is not clear if the transfer of this structure was successful.

Which of the models fits best here? It is clear that in the beginning at least some aspects of the peace movement were transferred from other movements to the Sicilian one. This is seen in the fact that people often referred to the Dutch and British movements in the beginning stages of the movement in Sicily and Italy in general. In later stages, it was still thought that outside influences (and thus transfer) were needed to keep the movement alive.

Of course, transfer was never a hundred percent successful, but it was clearly not a failed transfer, as most of the transferred ideas took hold in Sicily, and a movement came off the ground. It is also not an example of everyday transnationalism, since without the frame of a social movement, there was not really a network in place in which everyday transnationalism could take place.

⁵¹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 16.

Chapter 2: International involvement

When talking about international involvement, we can discern two categories. The first category is the international involvement on the place of action, that is to say, people travelling from abroad to visit or join the protests. The second category is international involvement far away: solidarity actions in other places, for example. Both types of international involvement can be seen in the case of Comiso. One reason for this international involvement was the fact that people felt connected to the issue at Comiso itself, without its connection to the broader issue of the consequences of the Double-Track Decision in other European countries; more often, however, direct links were made between the struggle at Comiso and in other countries. One person, IKV secretary Mient-Jan Faber, even said that “if the international peace movement is able to avert the placement of the more than a hundred cruise missiles in Comiso, then the placement of the missiles in Central Europe will be averted as well”.⁵² He did not offer any concrete ways in which this would happen, and suggestions to that end can also not be found in the sources. Even so, most of the sources see a connection between what would happen in Comiso and in the rest of Europe. The Information Bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso articulated this as follows: “If the missiles are deployed at [sic] Comiso, it will be that much more difficult to prevent them from coming to Great Britain, West Germany and other countries in Western Europe.”⁵³ However, this connection was not as straight forward as Mient-Jan Faber’s statement; often it was felt that by stopping the deployment in one place, the leverage in other countries would grow, which would make it easier to stop the deployment there.

The first type of international involvement with the Italian peace movement in Comiso was relatively common. Dutch newspapers provide many examples of international activists travelling to Italy to help organise demonstrations or peace camps. In the aforementioned Information Bulletin, there is mention of a training in nonviolence, “a seminar (...) for the first Italians to be trained as trainers in nonviolence by the methods used in North Europe and the United States”.⁵⁴ This training was organised by a group from the Netherlands, and would

⁵² Unknown author, ‘Protest tegen plaatsing van kruisraketten’, *Trouw*, 21/06/1982, p. 3.

⁵³ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy’, Letter of War Resisters’ International, p. 1.

⁵⁴ *Idem*, p. 10.

prepare the Italians “for the coming summer camp where non-violent direct actions are to be planned”.⁵⁵ Firstly, this serves as an example of the first type of international involvement, since a group of Dutch activists came to Italy to help the Italian movement. Secondly, it is an example of transfer: the techniques of nonviolence were being transferred, in a very organised way, from one group to another. Another example of the first type of international involvement is seen in late 1981 and in 1982, when several groups visited Comiso: representatives of the IKV, CND, END, Pax Christi, Die Grünen, Le Cun du Larzac, and other groups all came to Comiso.⁵⁶

Halfway through 1983, a small group of international volunteers was sent to Comiso to help improve the communication between the peace movements of Europe. The Dutch delegate was Imco Brouwer, who was attached to the IKV. At Comiso, he worked together with Martin Kohler (West Germany) and Rosalinde Ramirez (USA).⁵⁷ They wrote a bulletin in three languages (German, Dutch and English), that mostly contained the same articles, translated into the respective languages.⁵⁸ This “international bureau of peace” was connected to other groups, such as the Dutch *Comiso Comité Nederland* (“Dutch Comiso Committee”), “a partnership between the Dutch peace movement on the one hand, on the other hand a few organisations of Italian immigrants.”⁵⁹ In a bulletin issued by this committee, it was stated that its goal was “to provide information regarding the situation in Italy in general and Sicily (Comiso) in particular. And also to organise solidarity actions with the peace movement in Sicily”.⁶⁰ Some people were convinced that this international support was necessary in order for the Italian peace movement to succeed, as it was seen as weaker than other movements.⁶¹

There were not only people from elsewhere travelling to Comiso, it also happened the other way around. In 1982, *De Waarheid* mentioned a demonstration in Groningen, the Netherlands,

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 12.

⁵⁷ International Institute of Social History (IISH), ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292), Comiso bolletino nr. 4, September 1983, ‘voorwoord’, p. 2.

⁵⁸ IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin.’ (call number IISG ZDO 35442); IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292); IISH, ‘CUDIP-bulletin: (English version)’ (call number IISG ZDK 40509).

⁵⁹ IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292), Comiso bolletino nr. 2, April 1983, ‘Comiso Comité’, p. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ See chapter 1.

where a representative of the Sicilian anti-nuclear movement spoke to the protesters.⁶² The same happened on multiple other occasions, for example in Amsterdam and Delft.⁶³

This brings us to the second type of international involvement: solidarity actions abroad. Dutch newspapers mentioned a small number of such actions. Most of them were general demonstrations for peace and nuclear disarmament, in which Comiso might have gotten a special mention.⁶⁴ These kinds of actions were oftentimes driven by the presence of, in this case Italian, guest workers and immigrants.⁶⁵ During some of these demonstrations for Comiso, someone from Comiso might come and speak, as was the case at a demonstration in June of 1982 in Amsterdam, for which advertisements can be found in *De Volkskrant* and *De Waarheid*.⁶⁶

In April of 1983, following a demonstration of a group of Italians in Delft earlier in the week, *Trouw* stated:

Italians in our country are sometimes surprised that Dutch people show so little interest in the NATO-plan to place a large amount of cruise missiles in Southern Italy, near Comiso in Sicily. (...) [Tonino] Boniotti [one of the speakers at the manifestation] stated that Italians find it strange that people worry about the arrival of the missiles in the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain and Germany, but not about Comiso, while the majority of the Sicilian population spoke out against the missiles through a petition.⁶⁷

This perceived lack of support for Comiso can also be seen in the fact that in April of 1983, the peace movement in Comiso asked the Dutch Comiso Committee to put together a photo exhibition “to show the total population of Sicily that the Peace Movement is a massive movement, one that is not limited to Comiso, but one that is global.”⁶⁸ Apparently, a large part of the local population felt that there was no support from the international community, despite

⁶² Unknown author, ‘Stem tegen de atoomraketten!’, *De Waarheid*, 07/09/1982, p. 1.

⁶³ Among others: Wim Schoutendorp, ‘“Comiso” maakte Italië wakker’, *De Waarheid*, 27/11/1981, p. 5; Yvonne Gnirrep, ‘Stop de N-bom hield internationale conferentie. Europa aan vooravond van nieuwe vredesacties’, *De Waarheid*, 17/02/1982, p. 7; Advertisement in *De Volkskrant*, 18/06/1982, p. 1; Unknown author, ‘IKV en Italianen vragen aandacht voor Comiso’, *Trouw* 11/04/1983, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Advertisement in *De Waarheid*, 23/11/1983, p. 8.

⁶⁵ T. Veldstra-van Akker, ‘Samen doen’, *Leeuwarder Courant: hoofdblad van Friesland*, 14/01/1982, p. 5; Author unknown, ‘IKV en Italianen vragen aandacht voor Comiso’, *Trouw*, 11/04/1983, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Advertisement in *De Volkskrant*, 18/06/1982, p. 1; Advertisement in *De Waarheid*, 19/06/1982, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Unknown author, ‘IKV en Italianen vragen aandacht voor Comiso’, *Trouw* 11/04/1983, p. 2.

⁶⁸ IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292), Comiso bolletino nr. 2, April 1983, ‘Oproep!’, p. 9.

the presence of international visitors and volunteers. This perceived lack of awareness and support might have been caused by the fact that Comiso was far away from all the other centres of protest; the other countries were all Northern European and relatively close to one another, whereas Comiso was about 3,000 kilometres away.

An interesting example of a different type of solidarity action is connected to the arrest of twelve women in Comiso during a protest in March 1983. In the Netherlands, protests took place at the Italian consulate, and the consul was pressured to communicate the demands of the protestors to the Italian government,⁶⁹ while in Sweden a group of a hundred demonstrators protested outside the Italian embassy against ‘police brutality’ against the women who were arrested.⁷⁰ The same thing happened again when the women went to trial, a year later, when women occupied the consulate for a few hours.⁷¹ These kinds of solidarity actions directed at one specific event abroad are not mentioned often in newspaper sources, although at least two instances of occupation of the Italian consulate can be found in Dutch newspapers: once in September of 1983, as a general protest against the cruise missiles at Comiso,⁷² and once in April of 1984, as was mentioned before.⁷³ It is, however, mentioned as a possible protest action in some of the pamphlets, as an alternative for when it would not be possible to come to Comiso.⁷⁴ Another alternative action was writing protest letters to Italian officials, for which an example letter was attached, in English and Italian.⁷⁵

An interesting source regarding international involvement is a pamphlet intended to rally support for a demonstration in (presumably) 1983 at the base near Comiso. This pamphlet ends with a call to action:

⁶⁹ IISH, COLL00284 Documentatiecollectie Solidariteitsbewegingen in Nederland, inv. nr. 133, Italië, Comiso Comité Nederland, Letter of the Comiso Comité of March 18th, 1983.

⁷⁰ F.S. Alonzo, ‘Da Londra a Stoccolma accuse alla polizia italiana. Pacifisti svedesi comprano lotti di terra a Comiso’, *Corriere della Sera*, 18/03/1983, p. 9.

⁷¹ Author unknown, ‘Actie voor Comiso-vrouwen’, *De Waarheid*, 14/04/1984, p. 3.

⁷² Unknown author, ‘Bezetting van Italiaans consulaat’, *Het Parool*, 26/09/1983, p. 5; Unknown author, ‘Italiaans consulaat anderhalf uur bezet wegens kernraketten’, *De Volkskrant*, 27/09/1983, p. 3.

⁷³ Unknown author, ‘Actie voor Comiso-vrouwen’, *De Waarheid*, 14/04/1984, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Latest news on what’s happening to the wimmin of ‘la Ragnatela’ in Comiso, Sicily’; Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘La Ragnatela Wimmin’s Peace Camp’, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘La Ragnatela Wimmin’s Peace Camp’, p. 2.

The outcome of the struggle in Comiso will affect the whole of Europe and the world. It is vital that it does not remain isolated, therefore as wide an international presence as possible is necessary. If you can't come to Comiso we ask you to work in your own area drawing attention to the situation there either by reproducing this leaflet or by doing any other kind action that you think suitable to support the occupation.⁷⁶

Once again, a connection was suggested between what happened in Comiso and in the rest of the world, as we have seen before in the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, the call to action itself is interesting: the best option, according to the pamphlet, is to travel to Comiso (the first type of international involvement), however, if that was not possible, the second type, of involvement abroad, was also an option.

Not only large demonstrations were planned to coincide with actions in other countries, sometimes actions around the bases would be too. One example for this is a series of demonstrations planned on 11 December 1983, for which an advertisement can be found in *De Waarheid*.⁷⁷ This day was proclaimed to be the Day of the International Solidarity Actions against the Arrival of the Cruise Missiles in (Western) Europe. The plan was to form a human chain around the bases of Greenham Common, Mutlangen (West-Germany), Comiso, Florennes (Belgium) and Woensdrecht (the Netherlands), all at the same time. These kinds of coordinated actions seem to have happened more later on in the years, when all countries had established which bases would host the missiles. This might have been because it was easier to plan one action for all the countries, instead of one action for the countries in which it was clear early on which base would host the missiles (Great Britain and Italy), and another action for the countries in which this decision had not yet been made (the Netherlands, West Germany and Belgium).

The activists at Comiso also tried to use this strategy of forming a human chain around the base earlier in 1983. According to one of the organisers, they copied this strategy from German activists.⁷⁸ The action, to form a human chain of fifteen kilometres, however, failed. According to *Het Parool*, the cause of this failure was “not only the bad weather, but also the bad

⁷⁶ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Comiso 22-23-24 July Mass occupation’.

⁷⁷ Advertisement in *De Waarheid*, ‘Omsingeling van Woensdrecht’, 03/12/1983, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Gianfranco Ballardini, ‘A Comiso nuove marce pacifiste. I missili custoditi dai marines’, *Corriere della Sera*, 29/11/1983, p. 2.

organisation”.⁷⁹ This is a small example of a transfer that failed, as it is clearly mentioned where the organisers got their idea from.

In Italian newspapers, references would often be made to how the Dutch and Belgian government reacted to the commotion that the Double Track Decision caused. In an open letter written by Italian scientists and activists to the prime minister, the authors emphasised, among other things, that “the role of our country in the international context is such, that it permits the government to take a position of more autonomy and to develop a course of action like has been done in Belgium and the Netherlands, refusing to accept the missiles.”⁸⁰ In *Trouw*, in an account of a demonstration in Comiso, it is stated that in many speeches, there were positive remarks about the Netherlands, because of the government’s doubts about the placing of the missiles.⁸¹ Initially, the Dutch government had agreed to the placement of the missiles on Dutch grounds, but after the massive protests and a change in government coalition after the general elections of 1982, this was changed to a conditional agreement. In 1985, permission was given to place the missiles at Woensdrecht, but by then, the US and the USSR had negotiated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This meant that the cruise missiles would be removed from European countries and destroyed. Due to this delay in giving permission to place the missiles, in the end, no missiles were placed in the Netherlands at all, as the only of the five chosen countries.⁸² This was something the Italian peace movement looked at with admiration, as their government would not listen to the doubts and protests of the people. This had a political reason: Italy tried to enlarge its role in the global political field, especially within NATO. To achieve this, they were eager to agree to the Double-Track Decision, as well as other (peacekeeping) missions.⁸³ This aspiration to be taken more seriously made it difficult for the Italian government to even entertain the thought of backtracking on their decision to station the missiles.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Unknown author, ‘Vier activisten in Duitse VS-basis’, *Het Parool*, 05/12/1983, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Felice Cavallaro, ‘Appello di vedove della mafia a Spadolini contro l’installazione dei missili a Comiso’, *Corriere della Sera*, 09/09/1981, p. 15.

⁸¹ Peter van Deutekom, ‘Het is goed vrede stichten op Sicilië’, *Trouw*, 05/05/1984, p. 25.

⁸² Duurland, *De wereld kwam naar Woensdrecht*, p. 135.

⁸³ Douglas A. Wertman, ‘Italian foreign policy in the 1980s: what kind of role?’, *SAIS Review* 1:4 (1982), pp. 115-125, p. 118.

⁸⁴ *Idem*, p. 120-121.

Was this level of international involvement unusual in the European peace movements? On one hand not. There was a lot of contact and coordination between various different movements. In February of 1982, there was an international conference, organised by the Dutch movement *Stop de N-bom* (“Stop the neutron bomb”). Representatives from peace movements from more than twenty countries gathered to share their experiences and to coordinate plans for the future.⁸⁵ One example of such coordination was the campaign that was designed to take place during the visit of American president Ronald Reagan to Europe in 1982. During this visit, demonstrations and actions would be held in the countries he visited, with a special focus on the actions in Britain and Italy, since these were the countries that would first be receiving the missiles.⁸⁶

Another way in which there was contact between the European movements is that many people travelled to different countries to visit peace camps there. Some activists visited multiple peace camps, as a way to garner attention for the cause, or to spread ideas. One example is Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold, an American politician who was interested in the women’s peace movement.⁸⁷ She visited Greenham Common and Comiso in 1983.⁸⁸ Another example is an action by two Dutch men, Frank and Rik, and their dog, who went to Comiso to hike back to the Netherlands, as a way of garnering attention for the Comiso movement. They would write (semi-)regular updates for *De Waarheid*, in which they detailed their adventures and their observations about the Italian peace movement.⁸⁹

On the other hand, the level of international presence in Comiso was unusually high, compared to other places of protest, and this led to problems. In 1986, Patricia Melander, a British woman who had spent more than a year in Comiso in the later stages of the peace movement, wrote the following:

⁸⁵ Yvonne Gnirrep, ‘Stop de N-bom hield internationale conferentie. Europa aan vooravond van nieuwe vredesacties’, *De Waarheid*, 17/02/1982, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Unknown author, ‘Europese vredesbewegingen. Reeks acties tijdens bezoek Reagan’, *De Waarheid*, 05/03/1982, p. 7.

⁸⁷ The University of Texas at Austin, School of Law, *Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold | About Farenthold*, <https://law.utexas.edu/farenthold/about/about-farenthold/>, 8/12/19.

⁸⁸ The University of Texas at Austin, School of Law, *Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold | Peace and Disarmament*, <https://law.utexas.edu/farenthold/international/peace-and-disarmament/>, 8/12/19.

⁸⁹ Among others: Unknown author, ‘Voettocht Comiso-Woensdrecht. Nijmegenaren lopen tegen de raketten’, *De Waarheid*, 07/04/1984, p. 1; Frank, Rik and Jochie, ‘Afscheid van Sicilië. Voettocht tegen kruisraketten’, *De Waarheid*, 10/05/1984, p. 7.

Actually [sic] the camp was founded by foreign women and bought through donations but actually, soon real problems set in. A separatist camp in a culturally isolated rural Sicily was not accessible to local women, in fact it was soon considered by locals as real taboo.⁹⁰

She clearly saw the foreign origins of the camp as the root of the problem. At some times, there were no local or Italian women living in the camp.⁹¹ This alienated the local population from the camp, as well as from the rest of the peace movement in Comiso.

This was different from other camps, where most of the inhabitants would be locals or at least from the same area. An example for this is Greenham Common, which was founded by a group of women who walked from Cardiff (Wales) to Greenham Common (England). This could be deemed an example of international travel, but the distance between these two locations is only about 160 kilometres, whereas the distance between Greenham Common and Comiso is almost 3,000 kilometres. Furthermore, Greenham Common should not be classified as an example of international travel, because of the fact that the women from Wales all spoke English, so there was no language barrier between the local population, the authorities and the protesters.

In short, it could be said that the level of international involvement outside of Sicily with the cause of Comiso was relatively comparable to other movements. It was quite high, but that was because it was one of the countries in which the missiles would be placed first. The level of international presence at Comiso itself was higher than normal, which brought its own problems with it.

It is possible to find sources that do not agree with the hypothesis that the European peace movements were internationally and transnationally orientated. The 1985 article 'European peace movements and missile deployment' by Paul R. Viotti, professor of political science at the U.S. Air Force Academy, posed the interesting idea that, although the movements show "a strong degree of international solidarity among activists," "the peace movement as a whole is organized on separate, national bases."⁹² The report of the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) group came to a similar conclusion, that the campaigns of the Western European anti-nuclear movements were mainly directed to their own countries, even though the movements

⁹⁰ IISH, ARCH01537, War Resisters' International Archives, inv. nr. 580, letter of Patricia Melander.

⁹¹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'The women on trial on April 13th, 1984', p. 1.

⁹² Paul R. Viotti, 'European peace movements and missile deployments', *Armed Forces & Society*, 11:4 (1985), pp. 505-521, p. 506.

were in close contact.⁹³ According to Viotti’s article, this national orientation could be explained by the fact that “the relevant decision-making authorities to be influenced are national”.⁹⁴ Cultural, language, and geographic problems were also mentioned as obstacles to transnational coordination. This seems contradictory to all the other sources, that mention international visitors to Comiso, the international volunteers helping local movements in organising demonstrations and protests, etcetera. A possible explanation for this is that the article was written in 1985, close in time to the events studied here. This means that not all the details of transnational contacts and coordination might have been available to the writer at the time. Furthermore, the fact that international visitors went to Comiso to join protests was not unusual at the time, which could have led the researchers of that time to underestimate the influence these visits had on the evolution of the movement. Nonetheless, this article is an interesting addition to this research, as a kind of primary source. Apparently, at the time, the transnational contacts were not very visible to researchers, or they were not seen as very important.

One reason why the transnational contacts might not have been very visible to researchers at the time is a phenomenon that can be called “not in my backyard”, which can be found in many of the protests. Most of the protests were indeed in the first place nationally orientated, and only secondly came the focus on the rest of the world. Examples of this are the slogan of a campaign by the IKV: “help make the world free of nuclear weapons, starting with the Netherlands!”;⁹⁵ the slogan of a campaign at Comiso: “Comiso does not want to become the Hiroshima of tomorrow”;⁹⁶ and their poster for a demonstration in 1982, that read: “No to the missiles at Comiso, no to the missiles in Europe” (see figure 1).⁹⁷ This figure in itself, incidentally, is also an interesting example of transfer. The original



Figure 1

⁹³ Unknown author, ‘Zelfstandig Europa centraal in Vredesweek’, *De Volkskrant*, 18/09/1982, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Viotti, ‘European peace movements and missile deployments’, p. 507.

⁹⁵ Pax voor Vrede, *Help de kernwapens de wereld uit, om te beginnen uit Nederland!*, <https://www.paxvoorvrede.nl/actueel/dossiers/kernwapens/geschiedenis/help-de-kernwapens-de-wereld-uit-om-te-beginnen-uit-nederland>, 25/05/2020.

⁹⁶ Denise Jacobs, ‘Vredeskamp Comiso met symbolische belegering afgesloten. Tegen grootste Cruise-basis in Europa’, *De Waarheid*, 11/08/1982, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Figure 1: IISH, [Poster.] made by Opland, (call number IISG BG E9/598), via <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/903B422B-BBE6-48B7-8FB4-733CB4BB406E>.



Figure 2

drawing was made for a demonstration against cruise missiles in Amsterdam, on November 21st 1981 (see figure 2).⁹⁸ The original caption was ‘No new cruise missiles in Europe’ (“*Geen nieuwe kernwapens in Europa*”) and it was drawn by the Dutch cartoonist Opland.⁹⁹ The poster was later adapted for use in many demonstrations and occasions. A quick search in the poster collection of the International Institute of Social History yielded many variations of this poster, aimed at youths, soldiers, working women, et cetera.

The Comiso poster (figure 1) focused firstly on the own environment, and then the rest of the world. This can be interpreted as proof of the national orientation of the movements. However, most of these slogans

have in common that they do not *only* focus on their own environment, but that the rest of the world is an explicit part of the end goal. One possible explanation is the one put forward by Viotti in his article, that the decision-making authorities were nationally orientated, so it was most efficient for the protests to be nationally orientated as well. Another part of the explanation may be that most people would not easily be mobilised for a demonstration regarding a vague and seemingly unattainable goal of a world without nuclear weapons. For a more locally orientated demonstration, especially one regarding nuclear weapons that would be stationed in the direct vicinity of the population, it would be a lot easier to gather massive support and a large turnout at the demonstration. This would in turn make it easier to influence the decision-making authorities. This could explain the seeming national orientation of the European movements.

In December of 1981, members of the *Comitato Unitario per il Disarmo e la Pace* (the Unitary Committee for Disarmament and Peace, CUDIP), one of the groups in Comiso, joined a working group meeting in Brussels titled ‘local opposition to nuclear arms: the Comiso example’.¹⁰⁰ The END Special Report lists all seven of the conclusions of this group, most of

⁹⁸ Figure 2: IISH, ‘Demonstratie. Geen nieuwe kernwapens in Europa. Amsterdam, 21 November, Museumplein, 13 uur’ (call number IISG BG D9/513), via <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/0416E2C2-5A14-41A1-BD2F-924364C1E4A6>.

⁹⁹ Verzetsmuseum, *Verzetsmuseum | Oorlog en Vrede*, https://www.verzetsmuseum.org/museum/nl/kinderen/bronnen/digitale_expo/protesteer/protesteer.oorlog_en_vrede, 21/06/2020.

¹⁰⁰ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 9.

which revolve around the importance of international involvement and collaboration in Comiso. The first and presumably most important one is:

The peace movement should internationalise itself; exchange information; co-ordinate timetables for international demonstrations; develop adequate strategies for mass communications (getting the national press to report on events in other countries); practise international solidarity in situations of crisis.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the importance of local involvement and nonviolence are emphasised, but most of the conclusions deal with the need for internationalisation of the Comiso movement. One reason given for this is that the largest problem in Comiso is despair and the feeling of the local population that nothing can be done against the decision of the government in Rome.¹⁰² “Only if the campaign is intensified at international level will it be possible to prevent resistance at Comiso from isolation and the missiles installed to the detriment of European and global security,” was the conclusion of the International Bulletin.¹⁰³

According to an article in the *Corriere della Sera* about the eviction of the women’s peace camp at Comiso, it was not only the peace movements that were internationally orientated. The authorities might have had some international connections as well:

The action [of evicting the women’s peace camp], coincidence or not, happened at the same time that the police in Britain received the order of removing the Greenham Common camp, the twin location of Comiso, where another 160 missiles are supposed to be placed. Two of the British girls that were arrested Friday in Comiso are from Greenham Common and have been convicted in their own country for the same crime (roadblock) that the Italian magistracy accuses them of today.¹⁰⁴

This (suggested) international connection between the authorities cannot be found often in the available sources. In fact, this is the only mention that was found within the Dutch newspapers

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰² *Idem*, p. 10.

¹⁰³ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy’, Letter of War Resisters’ International, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Nicola D’Amico, ‘Smantellato a Comiso il <<campo della pace>>. Sotto processo venerdì le donne arrestate’, *Corriere della Sera*, 13/03/1983, p. 5.

at the time and the archive of the Italian *Corriere della Sera*. It does not seem likely that the authorities in Sicily and Britain would have coordinated this action, although it is entirely possible that the Sicilian authorities looked at how the British police and justice system dealt with the protesters at Greenham Common. The fact that the arrested women were accused of the same crime in both situations might point to this. However, it could also just be that this charge was the easiest way to legitimise the arrest of the women; as they did not enter the base, there was no other crime with which they could be charged.

Which model is the best fit regarding international involvement? Because there was such a big international presence at Comiso, one might expect a lot of transfer to be happening. In a way, this is true. Similar actions were happening at Comiso as at other places, e.g. peace camps, protest marches and specific actions like the forming of a human chain around the base. In some of these cases, there is a clear indication that the idea of the action came from somewhere else, as with the human chain. On the other hand, since it was mostly international visitors performing the actions, one might argue that this was not so much a transfer of ideas as a transfer of people performing those ideas. Furthermore, most of the ideas that were transferred, were not as successful as elsewhere, and sometimes they outright failed, as with the human chain.

Most of the first type of international involvement, people coming to Comiso to participate in actions and protests there, falls under the ‘everyday transnationalism’ model. In 1980s Europe, it was quite normal to have contacts with likeminded people across borders. As was mentioned before, some people would make a trip around multiple peace camps in a few months’ time, thus strengthening the transnational bonds between these camps. The second type of international involvement does not fit this model as well as the first type, since this was not part of ‘everyday contact’ between people connected to the different movements; instead, the purpose was to work together, to enlarge the effects of the demonstrations and protests. This might be seen as a part of the model of transfer, even though not all transfers were successful.

Chapter 3: Local involvement

One of the ways to judge how successful a movement was, is by looking at the amount of local involvement it gathered. Local involvement has been very important to the European peace movements. Movements would try to mobilize the local public for their cause, as happened in Woensdrecht in 1983, when it was announced that this would become the Dutch base where the cruise missiles were to be stationed. Multiple peace movements, some national, some more local, established the *Vredesbeweging Woensdrecht* (“Peace movement Woensdrecht”), consisting of five autonomous teams. One of these teams was solely focused on the goal of mobilising the local population for demonstrations and other actions, while the others were focused on the political decision-making process and press communication.¹⁰⁵ Another way to probe the importance of local involvement is the emphasis that was put on it. In many of the early news reports on Comiso, a strong emphasis is placed on the fact that many of the demonstrators were Sicilians.¹⁰⁶ This first of all suggests that this was unexpected, and second of all that this said something about the success of the movement.

In the case of the Comiso peace movement, two distinct phases in the development of local involvement can be discerned. Up until the end of 1982, there was a lot of local involvement and local initiatives; from this point onwards, this decreased significantly. This evolution can be clearly seen in Dutch newspapers.

Multiple newspapers wrote in late 1981 about a large demonstration in Sicily, where around ten thousand Italians had gathered,¹⁰⁷ and the large demonstration in Rome on the 24th of October, on the international Day of the United Nations.¹⁰⁸ *De Waarheid* wrote:

Without diminishing the immense demonstrations of last weekend in Brussels, London, Paris, Copenhagen, and Oslo, it can be determined that the enormous manifestation against nuclear missiles and the neutron bomb in the Italian capital Rome means a true breakthrough. (...) An hours-long procession, with, according to realistic estimates half a

¹⁰⁵ Duurland, *De wereld kwam naar Woensdrecht*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁶ Among others: Author unknown, ‘Wapenoverleg gaat hoopvol van start’, *Trouw* 30/11/1981, p. 1; Correspondent, ‘Protest tegen kernwapens’, *Het Parool* 05/04/1982, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Unknown author, ‘10.000 betogers op Sicilië’, *Het Vrije Volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*, 12/10/1981, p. 7; Unknown author, ‘Demonstratie tegen Cruise op Sicilië’, *De Waarheid*, 13/10/1981, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Unknown authors, ‘Demonstraties’, *De Telegraaf*, 26/10/1981, p. 5; The correspondent, “‘Italië kan binnen NATO geen afwijkend standpunt innemen’”, *De Volkskrant*, 28/10/1981, p. 4.

million protestors, most of which young people, removed all doubts unequivocally: the opposition in Italy against the nuclear missiles is growing and is taking on massive forms.¹⁰⁹

This quote demonstrates the success of the movement within the local community. People felt connected enough to show up during demonstrations, which was necessary to send strong signals to the authorities. This mobilisation effort of the movement was apparently most successful under young people. This was a widespread phenomenon: most of the activists and demonstrators were young(er) people, not only in the peace movement but in many social movements. When writing about early demonstrations at Comiso, Dutch newspapers also emphasised the participation of the young population, as can be seen in an article in *Het Vrije Volk*, which spoke about “(...) ten thousand predominantly young Italians”¹¹⁰ who demonstrated in Sicily against the cruise missiles.

One of the reasons mentioned for this large local involvement is the fear that the area would become a target for pre-emptive strikes in case of rising tensions between the USA and the USSR.¹¹¹ This fear was heard in every region where missiles were to be placed, especially in West Germany, a country that was already in the precarious position of bordering the Eastern bloc and being close to the Soviet missiles. Another fear was that Sicily was going to be a militarised zone, like an American military colony. There were already around twenty American bases (airports, radar stations, etcetera) stationed on the island.¹¹² The END Special Report pointed to the situation in Sardinia, where bases that were established earlier showed “an alarming tendency to grow and grow, so much so that they have now swallowed up 9.2% of the island”.¹¹³ If this were to happen in Sicily, lots of highly fertile land would be lost.

A third, more local, fear was that the arrival of the Americans would bring organised crime to the area.

¹⁰⁹ Redactie buitenland, ‘Beweging tegen atoomraketten breekt baan in Italië’, *De Waarheid*, 28/10/1981, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Author unknown, ‘10.000 betogers op Sicilië’, *Het Vrije Volk: democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*, 12/10/1981, p. 7.

¹¹¹ Ben van der Velden, ‘Communisten actief tegen Kruisraketten op Sicilië’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 10/08/1981, p. 5.

¹¹² Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘American military bases in Sicily’.

¹¹³ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 11.

The people of Comiso are terribly afraid. If the placing of the missiles continues, thousands of Americans will come to operate and guard these bitches [“krenge”, sic]. Everybody knows what that means; prostitution, the mafia will come to the area, with violence and with drugs.¹¹⁴

Before this time, the mafia, a typical Sicilian phenomenon, was not very active in the province of Ragusa (where Comiso is located); it was mostly focused on the Palermo area. The fear was that this would change with the arrival of the Americans at Comiso.

The Sicilian mafia was a large advocate of the arrival of the base. In an interview with *De Waarheid*, Umberto Santino, lawyer and head of the Sicilian documentation centre Giuseppe Impastato (concerned with the struggle against the mafia), said that the mafia had a vested interest in the arrival of the base in three ways: speculation with land, something the mafia has been doing for a long time; the expected expansion of the drugs market; and the large assignments that were to be dispensed for the construction of the base, as three quarters of Sicilian building companies were in the hands of the mafia.¹¹⁵

The 30th of April 1982, Pio la Torre, communist member of parliament and party secretary in Sicily, was killed in Palermo, presumably by the mafia.¹¹⁶ He was “the driving force behind a large-scale campaign of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian communist party), against the mafia”, and he played an active role in the protest movement against the cruise missiles.¹¹⁷ His death was “a blow to the peace movement in Sicily”.¹¹⁸ Later that year, general Carlo dalla Chiesa, appointed prefect for Palermo to end the violence of the mafia on Sicily, was killed as well, in a similar manner. Although it was unlikely that the peace movement was the primary motive in these murders, both were linked to the arrival of the missiles in Comiso. According to Luigi Colajanni, the successor of La Torre, “the Mafia and Comiso are intuitively felt by the Sicilians as problems that are not far apart and that are in line with each other”,¹¹⁹ and Ben Thompson concluded in his END Special Report:

¹¹⁴ Wim Schoutendorp, “Comiso’ maakte Italië wakker’, *De Waarheid*, 27/11/1981, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Redactie buitenland, ‘Vredesstrijdsters uit gevangenis op Sicilië vrijgelaten’, *De Waarheid*, 18/03/1983, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Unknown author, ‘Communistenleider op Sicilië doodgeschoten’, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 01/05/1982, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Redactie buitenland, ‘Massale demonstraties tegen maffiamoord op PCI-bestuurder’, *De Waarheid*, 03/05/1982, p. 3; Unknown author, ‘Reagan’s Europa-reis: overall demonstraties en thuis gaan ze ook de straat op’, *De Volkskrant ‘Het Vervolg’*, 05/06/1982, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 13.

¹¹⁹ Unknown author, ‘Reagan’s Europa-reis: overall demonstraties en thuis gaan ze ook de straat op’, *De Volkskrant ‘Het Vervolg’*, 05/06/1982, p. 7.

It may not be too far-fetched to suppose that the choice of timing for the murder was intended as a deliberate warning to the new rapidly growing mass movement not to oppose mafia interests in the base.¹²⁰

In a pamphlet intended to rally support for a demonstration the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of July (presumably of 1983, although no year is mentioned on the pamphlet itself) at the base near Comiso, all those fears are summarised:

Comiso, Sicily, has been chosen to become part of the NATO masterplan to mine Europe with deadly atomic missiles. If this succeeds, local people will be forced to house the first and largest Cruise missile base in Europe. This will also mean supporting a foreign occupation comprising of 20,000 American soldiers and their families (possibly up to 100,000 people). In turn, this will bring the mafia into the area with their drugs and prostitution and protection rackets. The mafia will also have all the contracts for building the base. Further social effects of this temple of death will be: housing shortage, soaring prices of basic foodstuffs and other essentials, total militarisation of the area, destruction of the natural environment, etc.¹²¹

All the aforementioned fears (and more) are referred to here as reasons why the arrival of the base and the missiles should be prevented. The pamphlet followed up on this by saying that the local population was “vehemently opposed” and were calling for a mass occupation of the site. This conflicts with what can generally be seen as a decrease in local support for any protests around the end of 1982 (see below). Of course, this is a pamphlet written to rally support for a protest action, so it is part of the propaganda to say that the local population stands behind the announced actions, when in reality only the *Coordinamento Leghe Autogestite contro la base Missilistica di Comiso* (a local peace movement) supported it.

Around the end of 1982 the second phase started, and the local population of Comiso largely stopped supporting the peace movement. In December of 1982, *De Waarheid* wrote: “The population of Comiso, which was up until last year an ardent opponent of the base, now

¹²⁰ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘END Special Report Comiso by Ben Thompson’, p. 14.

¹²¹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Comiso 22-23-24 July Mass occupation’.

positions itself more passively or even cooperates.”¹²² The reason this newspaper gave for this change is the economic crisis.¹²³ While in the earlier years people were hesitant to work on the construction of the base,¹²⁴ in later years this had changed, and local people were actively involved with the construction. From this point forward, most of the protesters would be international visitors. In the fall of 1983, *NRC Handelsblad* reported the following regarding a demonstration in Comiso:

The demonstrators went home early because it rained too much. They were from all over Italy, as well as the Netherlands and West-Germany. Despite many calls to action for a nonviolent two-day blockade of the missile base, there were only around a thousand people in Comiso. Of the local population almost no one joined the actions.¹²⁵

Another reason why the local population might have stopped supporting the movement is the aforementioned fear for the mafia. After (at least) two murders that were linked to the arrival of the cruise missiles, it might have suppressed the local willingness to participate in demonstrations and protests.

Just over a year later, in 1984, an article in *Trouw* said that “the flame of the resistance” in Comiso had to be kept alive by the multiple peace camps, as the local population did not support the protests anymore.¹²⁶ This had consequences for the effectiveness of protests, as the lack of local involvement decreased the credibility of the movement in the eyes of the authorities. It also caused problems within the peace camps, which will be further explained in chapter 4.

An example of the intersection between international and local involvement is the photo exhibition which the peace movement in Comiso asked the Dutch Comiso Committee to put together, to show the Sicilian population the extent of international involvement with their situation (see chapter 2).¹²⁷ The fact that the local population had a limited awareness of the grander peace movement, as is explained in the request for the photo exhibition, might be an explanation why local involvement dropped in the end of 1982. At that stage, it seemed inevitable that the missiles would arrive, as they indeed did in the beginning of 1984. With this

¹²² Marjan Fleischer, ‘Italiaanse vredesstrijd voor dilemma’, *De Waarheid*, 22/12/1982, p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ Duurland, *De wereld kwam naar Woensdrecht*, p. 67.

¹²⁵ Ben van der Velden, ‘Politie treedt hard op bij vredesactie’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 27/09/1983, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Peter van Deutekom, ‘Het is goed vrede stichten op Sicilië’, *Trouw*, 05/05/1984, p. 25.

¹²⁷ IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292), Comiso bolletino nr. 2, April 1983, ‘Oproep!’, p. 9.

attempt to raise local awareness of the international community, the peace movement of Comiso tried to re-expand local involvement. One way of doing this was by showing that the arrival of the missiles was not inevitable, and that protesting could change the government's decision, as had happened in the Netherlands.

The division between the two phases posed in the beginning of this chapter is not clear cut. Even before the end of 1982, many people were sceptical about the opposition to the base. Some people saw it as a possibility for employment, or a project that would bring money to the area.¹²⁸ And, on the other hand, there was some local protest after 1982, as can be seen in an article in *De Waarheid* published late in 1983. It stated that the local population of Comiso looked at the demonstrators with more sympathy, as was evidenced by the fact that the local construction workers went on a two-day support strike.¹²⁹ However, this is more of an exception, as most of the sources point to a lack of local involvement with protests and actions by this time.

In the next chapter, I analyse the peace camps of Comiso in more depth, but it is important to take into account how the local population was involved in them. The local involvement with the peace camps was quite low. This is not surprising, as these camps were established in 1983, so at the point where local involvement with the general peace movement at Comiso was quite low already. *De Volkskrant* stated: "the local population does not show much solidarity with the female pacifists [at one of the camps] and makes their lives ever more difficult."¹³⁰ One of the reasons for this was the fact that these camps were mostly internationally orientated, and most of the inhabitants were internationals. This alienated the local population from them, which became a vicious cycle. Furthermore, some of the protest repertoires were alienating as well: the women of one of the camps would perform 'dragon dances' and 'magic', something which did not fit into the Sicilian culture.¹³¹ One example of the mythology used by these protesters can be found in a short story written presumably in the summer of 1983, as an invitation for a Halloween 'Rock around the base' event.¹³² In this (fictional) story, water,

¹²⁸ Unknown author, 'Reagan's Europa-reis: overal demonstraties en thuis gaan ze ook de straat op', *De Volkskrant* 'Het Vervolg', 05/06/1982, p. 7.

¹²⁹ Marjan Fleischer, 'Vredesstrijd bloeit op in Italië', *De Waarheid*, 06/10/1983, p. 5.

¹³⁰ Loucky Content, 'Politie in Sicilië arresteert twee Nederlandse vrouwen', *De Volkskrant*, 15/03/1983, p. 5.

¹³¹ Unknown author, 'Spinneweb voor de vrede', *De Waarheid*, 28/10/1983, p. 4.

¹³² Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Angelica and Annette, La Ragnatela'.

earth, fire and air goddesses join the women (spelled womym) in their protests against the base, eventually fighting off policemen with their powers. An interesting detail of this story is how the policemen are described at some point: “The policemen looked as if they had regained their self-confidence – and threw the teargas into the crowd of womyn with visible pleasure”.¹³³ Of course, this story was written as propaganda for the camp and its cause, so this should not be taken as absolute truth, but it does correlate with other reports of the Sicilian policemen acting violently towards the protesting women, of whom it is always emphasised that they were protesting in non-violent ways. One example of this can be found in a description of the events of March 1983 of one of the arrested women, in which she mentions that in two days’ time, two women had their arms broken by police violence.¹³⁴

In an attempt to reach the local population, especially Sicilian women, the women from *La Ragnatela* would go to the local market to sell handmade items, to earn some money, as well as to talk to the locals.¹³⁵ They would also try to overcome language and cultural barriers by working as closely as possible with local women.¹³⁶ However, this was never very successful, and the camp was only visited by a handful of local women, most of whom were already active in the peace movement.

In the Information Bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, the problem is identified as that the local population did not “understand our new ideas and [finds] our behaviour strange”.¹³⁷ Another problem was also made out:

[T]hey [the local population] are weary..... [sic] they don’t want the missiles either, but don’t want to struggle against them.... [sic] they don’t believe that they could possibly change a government decision¹³⁸

This fatalistic world view was something that more people signalled in the Sicilian population. Since ancient times, Sicily was ruled by outside forces, and in modern times this had not

¹³³ *Idem*, p. 7-8.

¹³⁴ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Events at Comiso’, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Unknown author, ‘Spinneweb voor de vrede’, *De Waarheid*, 28/10/1983, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Cruise missiles in Comiso’, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy’, ‘Comiso’, p. 7.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*.

changed.¹³⁹ Decisions were made by the government in Rome, and nothing could be done about it, was the general feeling in Sicily. According to the writers of the Information Bulletin, people had forgotten about the recent past, when many actions were undertaken by the local population to defend their rights.¹⁴⁰ By pointing this out, and telling the local population that protesting was an effective way to achieve results, they hoped to grow the local involvement with the movement.

Was this level of local involvement normal? The short answer is no, it was much lower than in other places where similar protests were held. At the same time, it is true that local support in other places was not guaranteed either. One example can be found in an article of *The Guardian* published in 2017, in which former inhabitants of the Women's Peace Camp of Greenham Common are interviewed. Two of these women talk about how the local population, the local townspeople, reacted to their presence. Fran De'Ath said: "In the early days the public was very supportive. I would dress smartly and go to Newbury with a clipboard, asking people to come and have a cup of tea with us at the camp. Many did."¹⁴¹ This tells us two things: one, there was some support for the camp, but she felt like she had to dress smartly to get it, as if the townspeople would not accept her if she were to present herself as she did in the camp. The second thing it tells us is that the support was largest in the beginning of the camp. This is confirmed by a second interviewee, Suzanne Barkham, who went to the camp in the spring of 1982, only a few months after the camp was established in late 1981. She went by minibus, with a group of women, and she recalled the following: "My other problem was the difficulty I had trying to find somewhere to park our minibus – the locals were awful to us. They were swearing at us, shouting, throwing things – I thought they were really nasty."¹⁴² In only a few

¹³⁹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Cruise missiles in Comiso', p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy', 'Comiso', p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Homa Kheleeli, 'Fran De'Ath: 'I thought if I was an artist or poet I would have a voice, but all I could do was sit in the mud'', in: Suzanne Moore, Homa Khaleeli, Moya Sarner, Leah Harper, Justin McCurry, 'How the Greenham Common protest changed lives: 'We danced on top of the nuclear silos'', *The Guardian*, 20/03/2017, via: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/20/greenham-common-nuclear-silos-women-protest-peace-camp>, 25/06/2020.

¹⁴² Leah Harper, 'Suzanne Barkham: 'I felt the police were very hostile and fierce, like warriors'', in: Suzanne Moore, Homa Khaleeli, Moya Sarner, Leah Harper, Justin McCurry, 'How the Greenham Common protest changed lives: 'We danced on top of the nuclear silos'', *The Guardian*, 20/03/2017, via: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/20/greenham-common-nuclear-silos-women-protest-peace-camp>, 25/06/2020.

months' time, things had drastically changed in the attitude of the local population. This was similar to what happened in Comiso. First, there was some degree of support for the protests, which later vanished and, in some cases, even turned to hatred and violence.

The amount of local support and involvement can be seen at a second level, besides how local townspeople reacted to demonstrations and the presence of a peace camp. In the case of most peace camps, many of the inhabitants were from the region (or at least the country) in which the base was located. This was the case for Greenham Common, but also for example for demonstrations and peace camps in the Netherlands (Soesterberg, Woensdrecht). This ensured that contacts with the local townspeople, the authorities, and each other would be easily made and that communication would go smoothly. Of course, visitors would still be internationals, but as long as this group did not constitute the majority of the camp or the protesters, this would not cause problems. This was all very different in Comiso, where most of the activists were international visitors, as is demonstrated in this research.

Local involvement in itself is not something that can easily be fitted into the three models that were mentioned in the introduction, but the ways in which the movement would try to increase the local involvement do fit into the models. One of the ways in which movements would try to grow local involvement was by organising large demonstrations and other actions. The ideas for these actions were often transferred from other places and, if necessary, adapted to the local circumstances. This can be classified as either transfer or failed transfer, as the actions themselves were (often) successful, however, they did not grow the local involvement at Comiso. After the initial spike in participation in demonstrations and other actions, the involvement slowed down and eventually came to a sort of stop. This did not mean that everybody in Comiso agreed to the building of the base and the deployment of the missiles. Most local people simply did not think that the chosen methods of protest (or, indeed, any protest) would help against the issues at hand.

Within the topic of local involvement, we see almost no 'everyday transnationalism' at Comiso, because there was almost no contact between international visitors to the demonstrations and the local population. The only locals that were involved with actions were the people of the local peace movement, and they were already part of the group that supported the movement. Any transnational contacts between visitors and these people would thus not enlarge the local support of the movement. Furthermore, most of the people in the local peace movement were not in fact locals, but rather foreigners that had lived in Italy for a few months

or years. Most of these people would speak Italian, but they were not considered locals by the Sicilian population.

Chapter 4: Peace camps

This final chapter will explore the specific protest form of the peace camp. The idea of starting a peace camp in Sicily had already been put forward by representatives of the Italian peace movement during an international conference of peace movements in Amsterdam in early 1982,¹⁴³ and that summer, there was an international tent camp in Comiso. This only lasted about a month, during which international representatives from all over Western Europe camped near the base of Magliocco.¹⁴⁴ During this short period, there were many debates, and even a seminar on non-violent resistance.¹⁴⁵ Later, in 1983, more permanent camps arose around Comiso. These camps were very internationally orientated; most of the inhabitants of the camps were international visitors, not local people. There were four groups that established (semi-)permanent camps. These were named *Vigna Verde* (Green Vineyard), *La Ragnatela* (The Spiderweb), International Meeting against Cruise Missiles (IMAC) and *Cigno Verde* (Green Swan).¹⁴⁶ All of these camps had different backgrounds. *Vigna Verde* was backed by groups like Pax Christi and stood for antimilitarism and nonviolence. *La Ragnatela* had similar antimilitarist views as *Vigna Verde*, but it was a women's only camp. IMAC was a more anti-imperialist, leftist orientated group, and *Cigno Verde* was mostly opposed to the government at the time. According to Vittorfranco S. Pisano, "its principal aim [was] the pragmatic exploitation in political terms of the pacifist movement."¹⁴⁷

For this research, I will use the case study of the women's only camp *La Ragnatela*, as this camp had close ties with the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in England. Greenham Common was one of the first peace camps protesting the placement of the NATO missiles, and it served as an example for the Comiso women's peace camp, as well as others.¹⁴⁸ Many of the visitors in Comiso came from Greenham Common, and they brought their protest repertoire to *La Ragnatela*. One prominent example is the use of spiderwebs as symbols. According to Margaret Laware, specialised in women's studies, this was one of the "most representative symbols of the Greenham women."¹⁴⁹ It was used on pamphlets, and webs were woven into

¹⁴³ Yvonne Gnirrep, 'Europa aan vooravond van nieuwe vredesacties', *De Waarheid*, 17/02/1982, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ Unknown author, 'Vredeskamp bij het Siciliaanse Comiso', *De Waarheid*, 29/07/1982, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Verslaggever, 'Zaterdag meeting vredeskamp Comiso', *De Waarheid*, 06/08/1982, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Vittorfranco S. Pisano, *The Dynamics of Subversion and Violence in Contemporary Italy* (n.p., 1987), p. 114.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁸ Laware, 'Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red', p. 18-19.

¹⁴⁹ *Idem*, p. 34.

the base fence. Laware quotes Alison Young, who specialised in law and the sociology of crime and who wrote a book on how women dissented, using Greenham Common as the most important example: “[The web] shows connections between women or between ideas”.¹⁵⁰ According to Young and Laware, the spiderweb “also represented ‘the discovery of interconnections’ and actions that took place at Greenham under the theme of ‘Widening the Web’, showing that the Greenham women saw their protest in a larger context of peace and anti-militarism”.¹⁵¹ The Italian peace camp took over this symbolism. This is most obviously visible in the name of the camp: *La Ragnatela* means ‘the Spiderweb’. But the symbolism was also used in newsletters and short stories written in and for the camp (see for example figure 3),¹⁵² as well as during protests, when webs would be woven into the fence of the base and over protesting women who were performing a sit-in.¹⁵³



Figure 3

The beginning of *La Ragnatela* is said to have been a march against sexual violence on International Women’s Day, March 6th, 1983. After this march, which was attended mostly by international visitors and Sicilian women from towns other than Comiso,¹⁵⁴ the camp was established. But already before this moment there was an idea of female action in Sicily, in the first place against their own oppression. The connection was made between “nuclear escalation and male violence”,¹⁵⁵ by a group of women from Catania, who had already become involved in the peace movement in 1981, when they joined an international meeting of Women for Peace in Amsterdam.¹⁵⁶ The women from Catania decided together with a group of women from Comiso to march against sexual violence in their own town.¹⁵⁷ Late in 1982, two women from Greenham Common visited Sicily and showed slides of their own camps and actions. This is explicitly mentioned as the moment that links were established between the

¹⁵⁰ Alison Young, *Femininity in Dissent. Sociology of Law and Crime*, (London, 1990), p. 38 (as quoted in: Laware, ‘Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red’, p. 34).

¹⁵¹ *Idibem*, as quoted in: Laware, ‘Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red’, p. 35.

¹⁵² Figure 3: Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Angelica and Annette, la Ragnatela’, p. 1.

¹⁵³ Laware, ‘Circling the Missiles and Staining Them Red’, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy’, ‘International Women’s Day’, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁶ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Cruise missiles in Comiso’, p. 1,

¹⁵⁷ *Idem*, p. 2.

two groups.¹⁵⁸ The next large action was the aforementioned march against sexual violence on March 6th, 1983. According to the Information Bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, this was a moment during which local involvement was high. As was mentioned in chapter 3, most of the local population did not feel a connection with the peace camps, but in the case of the women's camp, local women felt "much stronger and better able to convince other women to join us".¹⁵⁹ However, the camp was soon mostly inhabited by international visitors, which caused problems with the legitimacy the camp had with the local population (see chapter 3). At some points, as in January 1984, the camp was completely empty, which did not send strong signals to the authorities and the local population.¹⁶⁰

La Ragnatela was a women's only camp, but this did not mean they wanted nothing to do with men. In a newsletter from (presumably) May 1983, people were asked to donate to the peace movement, so that the land that was bought to build the camp on could be paid off:

For this we are asking for contributions from women and all women's groups in order to make an independent stand. But we do welcome support from men in the form of practical and financial aid, for the day-to-day running of the camp, administration and publicity. We also ask men for their moral support and for their respect for our decisions and actions.¹⁶¹

This was similar to the attitude the women of Greenham Common had towards men. Men were not prohibited from being in the camp, but they were asked to leave each night, as well as to let the women speak for themselves when talking to authorities or the media. However, the stand the women of *La Ragnatela* took on these issues made it difficult to keep good relations with the other, mixed, peace camps at Comiso. In a 1984 letter to 'Spare Rib', a magazine linked to the Women's Liberation Movement, a woman who had joined *La Ragnatela* in the summer the year before describes her experiences.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Al Magliocco. Third international edition of the information bulletin of the International Peace Camp at Comiso, Italy', 'International Women's Day', p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, Letter to *Spare Rib* of January 22nd, 1984, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Cruise missiles in Comiso', p. 3.

During the summer there were a number of clashes with men and women from the mixed camp (I.M.A.C.). We were accused of being divisive, splitting the peace movement in two, by standing firm on our women only “line”.¹⁶²

This is not the only mention of this: in an article in the Dutch protestant newspaper *Trouw*, some struggles between *La Ragnatela* and some of the other camps came to the surface, caused by the fact that the women’s camp took a feminist stand on the issues at hand.¹⁶³

The woman also talked about the difficulties the women experienced in getting publicity for their actions, which she described as “successful and empowering for all the women who took part”.¹⁶⁴ If there was any kind of publicity for their actions, it was generally in a larger article on Comiso, in which the women’s actions would only be mentioned in a small part. My own research confirms this: the Italian newspaper I investigated published only a few articles on actions taken by *La Ragnatela*. Dutch newspapers published more on this topic, but only a small amount was solely focused on actions by the women; most of the articles treated all the peace camps in the same article.

Lastly, the woman described the differences in the actions people were willing to partake in. One example she mentioned was entering the base:

Whilst actions like these may be simple everyday actions at Greenham, they were something else at Comiso.

First because of the enormous psychological barrier concerning the police, Carabinieri and Polizia. Italian people are really afraid of their police and expect violence. (...) So going into the base in broad daylight whilst police and military were watching was a big step for all the women who took part.¹⁶⁵

This is one clear example of why a transfer of protest repertoires was not always possible. In this case, the transfer of the action of entering a base failed, because of the consequences that this action would have in Comiso. Whereas in Great Britain, the consequences would be

¹⁶² Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, Letter to *Spare Rib* of January 22nd, 1984, p. 1.

¹⁶³ Peter van Deutekom, ‘Het is goed vrede stichten op Sicilië’, *Trouw*, 05/05/1984, p. 25.

¹⁶⁴ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, Letter to *Spare Rib* of January 22nd, 1984, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, Letter to *Spare Rib* of January 22nd, 1984, p. 1.

relatively small, in Italy it might have more serious ramifications. This is only one examples of the many reasons why a transfer could fail.

Some of the peace camps actively invited international involvement. In the Bradford archive, a pamphlet can be found called 'Come to Comiso'.¹⁶⁶ This pamphlet invited people from Britain to come to Comiso for a summer camp organised by the Italian peace movement (an example of international involvement). In it the following is said:

There will be various activities according to the different interests of the organisations involved. The peace camp [Italian peace movement] will be organising non-violent training with the aim of doing some direct action. The type of action is open for the participants to decide, however we envisage [sic] a range of actions from street theatre in different towns and villages near Comiso, to painting murals, blockades, occupation etc.¹⁶⁷

This call for international involvement with the peace camp of Comiso shows that transfer was a normal phenomenon within the peace movement community. Participants discussing action forms meant they could bring new ideas from somewhere else to this place. This might have been an intentional transfer, but it might also have been 'everyday transnationalism', where someone proposed something they were used to doing in their own movement, without the explicit intention of transferring the practise.

The pamphlet ended with a practical description of how to get to Comiso from Northern Europe (with all the prices in pounds). This pamphlet was clearly an invitation for further international involvement into the Comiso peace camps. The summer camp was organised by a local peace camp, but most of the participants of the peace camp were not locals.

The women's peace camp of Comiso is a good case study for the three models that were mentioned in the introduction. It is clearly modelled after the peace camp at Greenham Common, which had started in 1981, almost two years before *La Ragnatela*. In this regard, this can be classified as an example of transfer, the first model. However, the peace camp in Comiso was never as big or successful as Greenham Common. The local population was not involved, and local government almost succeeded multiple times in destroying the camp. Similar things happened in Greenham Common: the local population was not friendly towards the women of

¹⁶⁶ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Come to Comiso'.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

the camp, and the police acted often and quite violently.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the camp in Britain was more resilient, probably because most of the inhabitants were at least semi-local: everyone spoke English, which made it more difficult for the authorities to destroy the camp. In Italy, as most of the inhabitants were international visitors who spoke little or no Italian, it was easier for the authorities to make it impossible for them to stay in the camp, or to even get there in the first place. In some pamphlets, practical advice was given for how to handle the bureaucratic part of coming to Comiso. One advice was, when one was planning to stay in Comiso for an extended period, to get a *permesso di soggiorno* (tourist permit) for any police station not in Sicily – apparently it was more difficult to get the permit on the island.¹⁶⁹ The Dutch version of the ‘Comiso Bolletino’, a newsletter written by the international volunteers in Comiso, advised to go to the police station with a local resident, as this would make it easier to get the permit.¹⁷⁰

In March of 1983, a group of twelve women was arrested while protesting near the base. The group contained one Italian woman, the rest were international women from Britain, Denmark, West Germany and two from the Netherlands. A few of these women wrote down what happened to them while in custody, and some of these documents can be found in the Bradford archives. A document by Veronica Kelly, written only nine days after the initial arrest, shows that the Italian authorities tried everything to make life very difficult for the women.¹⁷¹ At first, when they were arrested, there was only one charge: *blocco stradale* (blocking the road). A few days later, a second charge was added: that of trespassing (*invasione di territorio*). Before this, when there had been only one charge, the women had to be trialled within ten days, but with a second charges added, this obligation fell away, and the authorities could temporarily release the women. One of the conditions of this temporary release was that the women had to leave Italy, presumably without ever being able to return. Documents that were offered to be signed upon temporary release were not translated from Italian. In this way, the Italian authorities managed to get rid of a group of vocal protesters, because they were not locals and did not speak or read the language.

¹⁶⁸ Among others: Suzanne Moore, Homa Khaleeli, Moya Sarner, Leah Harper, Justin McCurry, ‘How the Greenham Common protest changed lives: ‘We danced on top of the nuclear silos’, *The Guardian*, 20/03/2017, via: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/20/greenham-common-nuclear-silos-women-protest-peace-camp>, 25/06/2020.

¹⁶⁹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘The women on trial on April 13th, 1984’, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ IISH, ‘Comiso-bulletin’ (call number IISG ZK 45292), Comiso bolletino nr. 3, June 1983, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ Bradford, Sarah Meyer, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, ‘Events at Comiso’.

The idea of the peace camp could not be completely transferred without change. One of the main reasons why the British camp was so successful is that the basic idea of camping somewhere was not illegal. Great Britain has a long tradition of ‘common grounds’, where everybody is allowed to walk and work.¹⁷² The area of the missile base was built on (former) common ground, which legitimated the protesters in their goal of removing the base. Such a concept never existed in Italy, therefore, the protesters had to adapt the idea of the peace camp to the local situation. At first, they would just erect a camp somewhere near the base, sometimes with permission from the landowner, sometimes without. This strategy was not without risks, as the police would remove the protesters regularly, citing trespassing as the main charge. Soon after the camp was first erected, a new strategy was developed. The new plan was to buy a piece of land close to the base, with support from all over the world. Each person would buy one small piece of a square meter. In this way, it would be easier to collect the money for the campground, as well as hindering the process of expropriation of the land. With this new strategy, when the time for expansion of the base would come, the government would have to buy small pieces of land from people all over the world, most of whom were not willing to sell.¹⁷³ In order to reach this goal, advertisements appeared in newspapers, for example in *De Waarheid*, in which people were asked to donate to a Dutch bank account.¹⁷⁴

With this in mind, it seems that the first model, of transfer, is the most fitting in the case of the peace camps. Although the peace camps were not as successful as they were in Britain, the transfer worked, and the peace camps in Comiso stuck for a while.

Within the peace camps, it could be argued, most of the interaction fell into the model of ‘everyday transnationalism’. This is most obvious within the camps at Comiso itself, as most of the inhabitants were international visitors who would stay there for only a few days or weeks. Through interactions with their co-inhabitants, ideas would be exchanged, but usually in an informal way, during conversations. When these people returned to their own country, where most of them were quite active in the peace movement already, they would spread these ideas further. Another way in which ‘everyday transnationalism’ would take place is by corresponding through letters. Writing letters was an integral part of the peace camps, according

¹⁷² Sasha Roseneil, ‘The global common. The global, local and personal dynamics of the women’s peace movement in the 1980s.’, in: Alan Scot (ed.), *The Limits of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 53-65, p. 56.

¹⁷³ Unknown author, ‘Spinneweb voor de vrede’, *De Waarheid*, 28/10/1983, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ Rinke van den Brink, ‘Italiaanse vredesbeweging organiseert referendum’, *De Waarheid*, 19/05/1983, p. 8.

to Margaretta Jolly, professor of cultural studies at the University of Sussex.¹⁷⁵ These letters would be sent to someone in another peace camp, often addressed personally, but meant for the whole community. People telling their stories of travelling to another country or peace camp inevitably also spread some ideas around, through for example explaining the layout of a camp or through recounting actions that the writer was witness to.

¹⁷⁵ Margaretta Jolly, “‘We are the Web’: letter writing and the 1980s women’s peace movement”, *Prose Studies*, 26:1-2 (2003), pp. 196-218.

Conclusion

Studying the case study of Comiso has provided us with the opportunity to research the nature and effects of transnational contacts between the Western European peace movements. In the introduction, three models were proposed to assess these transnational contacts: transfer, failed transfer and 'everyday transnationalism'. These three models were then applied to the four main themes: the emergence of the Italian peace movement, international involvement with this movement, local involvement, and the peace camps.

In all four themes, it was clear that at least some level of transfer took place. One example of this is the emergence of the Italian peace movement: although not every aspect of the North Western European peace movement was copied exactly in Italy, the concept of the peace movement was successfully transferred. Another, classical, example is the idea of peace camps: the idea of a women's only peace camp originated in Great Britain with the Women's Peace Camp of Greenham Common, and this concept was transferred to Comiso, where *La Ragnatela* was established two years later. Of course, changes had to be made to the concept for it to work in the Sicilian context, such as buying the land on which to camp, but in general this can be classified as a clear example of transfer. Furthermore, the international involvement with the Italian movement in the form of solidarity actions can be seen as an example of transfer, since these actions were deliberate attempts to work together to change things in another place or country.

Most of the transfers were not entirely successful, but only a few things can be regarded as examples of failed transfer. Most of these examples are attempts to transfer specific protest repertoires such as 'cruise watching', or actions like entering the base. Due to differing circumstances, these transfers failed. Other transfers were not always fully successful, but most of them were successful enough that they cannot be classified as failed transfers.

The model that can be observed most often is that of 'everyday transnationalism'. This concept plays a major role within the peace camps, and within the international community at Comiso in general, where almost all daily interactions fall into this category. Because most of the activists and inhabitants of the peace camps were internationals, and most would stay only for a short time, the level of 'everyday transnationalism' was quite high. Specific examples are difficult to find, precisely because of the nature of the interaction: there was no explicit intent to transfer ideas, so it is difficult to find evidence of what happened. However, examples were found where conversations and discussions among protesters led to the exchange of ideas.

The theme of local involvement was the most difficult to categorise into one of the three models, since the local involvement with the movement soon dropped to a level lower than in other countries. One of the difficulties with this theme is that all the issues were quite localised, such as the fear of militarisation and the fear of growing mafia influence.

It has long been recognised that all types of social movements are connected to other social movements, but this has only recently become the subject of academic research. This case study, of the connections between the peace movement at Comiso, the movement at Greenham Common and the peace movement in the Netherlands in general, shows that these connections were crucial in the evolution of the movements. Through sharing experiences and protest repertoires, all the movements could grow and become more influential. In this case study, it has been demonstrated that not all instances of transnational diffusion were intentional moments of transfer, but that the concept of 'everyday transnationalism' played a key role in the connections between the peace movement at Comiso and the other European movements. Through the use of this concept, the transnational connections between (European) social movements can be discerned on a more detailed level, thus making the study of these movements complete.

This research used mainly newspapers as sources. Although this type of source has its shortcomings (namely that it does not paint a complete picture and that it is a biased source, depending on the background of the newspaper, the editors and the reporter), it is a valuable source in the sense that it shows us what was generally known at the time of the events. Furthermore, the fact that newspapers are not neutral providers of information but instead interpret the news through their own ideology does not impede this kind of research, since the goal was not to find facts, but to find interpretations of those facts.

The use of newspapers from other countries (in this case the Netherlands) gives us insight into what information was available to the people of events abroad. The shortcomings of the source could be avoided by completing the research with other sources, e.g. archival studies and oral history interviews.

The use of pamphlets is not without its difficulties either: since most of them are propaganda for the peace movement, their contents should not be taken as fact. Nevertheless, they are a valuable source of information, because they show ways in which international and local involvement are encouraged and stimulated, as well as how they viewed certain actions and events.

To expand our understanding of the transnational contacts between various peace movements, more sources would have to be consulted. For this case study of the Comiso peace movement, further research would have to be done in more Italian newspapers and in Italian archives where sources of various peace camps and movements are located. Furthermore, it should be possible to interview participants and eyewitnesses of the events and protest actions, both local people and international visitors.

One of the further questions that should be answered to paint a more complete picture of transnationalism within the European peace movements is what kind of transnational contacts other local peace movements had between themselves. Research could focus on the early Dutch (women's only) peace camp of Soesterberg, the actions at Woensdrecht, or movements in Belgium, West-Germany, or any other country. For this, the same approach as this research could be used, or a broader research of archival materials, interviews, and newspapers. Other questions that should be researched could be how the activists looked at their transnational contacts: did they think them useful or futile? And did they purposefully try to transfer ideas, or were most of the transfers part of the 'everyday transnationalism' of the movement? What did the activists think of this 'everyday transnationalism'? By answering all these questions, a more nuanced understanding of the transnational contacts of the European peace movement can emerge.

An article in *De Volkskrant* from 1982 summarised much of the situation in Italy:

A spokesperson for END: "We try our hardest at this moment to for example make connections between groups that fight the arrival of the cruise missiles in Greenham Common, England, and Comiso, Sicily. There needs to be an international team of volunteers that will help the unexperienced Sicilians with their campaign against the base. The Italian political parties are sadly not interested in international actions and, despite massive demonstrations, local opponents remain afraid of the mafia, which is a proponent of the arrival of the missiles in Comiso."¹⁷⁶

Many of the elements of the Comiso case study are mentioned in this quote: the connections between two peace camps, the international volunteers, the need to mentor the "unexperienced Sicilians", the lack of local support and the local circumstance of fear for the mafia. This quote

¹⁷⁶ Author unknown, 'Zelfstandig Europa centraal in Vredesweek', *De Volkskrant*, 18/09/1982, p. 19.

is a good explanation why the peace movement in Comiso had such a different history from other, similar, movements such as Greenham Common and Woensdrecht.

On the 7th of December 1987, the USA and the USSR signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned all the cruise missiles that were deployed in Europe due to the Double-Track Decision of 1979. *De Volkskrant* reported that “the population of Comiso on the island of Sicily taken this opportunity to party”.¹⁷⁷ However, in February 2019, President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement, citing Russian violations of the treaty as the reason. This has as of yet not lead to a level of protesting comparable to that of the 1980s. Additionally, the protests nowadays would look very different compared to the 1980s. The level of ‘everyday transnationalism’ would probably be much higher, facilitated by the rise of social media in the last few years.

¹⁷⁷ Author unknown, ‘Sicilië viert INF-akkoord met groot vuurwerk’, *De Volkskrant*, 10/12/1987, p. 4.

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Figure 2: International Institute of Social History, 'Demonstratie. Geen nieuwe kernwapens in Europa. Amsterdam, 21 November, Museumplein, 13 uur' (call number IISG BG D9/513), via <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/0416E2C2-5A14-41A1-BD2F-924364C1E4A6> .

Figure 3: University of Bradford Special Collections, Papers of Sarah Meyer relating to Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, 1982-1985, GB 532 CWL SMA Bradford, GB 532 Cwl SMA/5, 'Angelica and Annette, la Ragnatela'.