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ANDREA ROKNIĆ BEŽANIĆ

## Italian Women's Press and Political Education in People's Power Istria (1943-1954)

**Francesco Maria Mengo**  
Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona  
Spain

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*During and after the Second World War, the Agitation and Propaganda branches of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the related Communist Party of the Julian March started the publication of periodical news issues in the territories they controlled in Istria, and some of these issues were aimed at female audiences. These female-oriented publications encouraged the Italian-speaking Istrian women to mobilize both militarily, in the partisan struggle, and politically, for the construction of the new socialist society through political education and active participation. On the one hand the KPJ made reference to generic Marxist gender egalitarianism; on the other hand, though, it was acting within the context of the preexisting fascist policies of social segregation and belittlement of women.*

*The primary sources hereby analyzed are the magazine La Donna Istriana and two different publications both named Donne, as well as the wartime pamphlet 8 marzo.*

**Keywords:** Istria, Agitprop, female partisans, women's press, political education.

### Introduction:

In 1943 the partisan insurrection started in Istria, after Italy's surrender in September and the subsequent fall of the whole region under Nazi administration, under the denomination of *Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland* (Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral), along with the later Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the former province of Ljubljana, which was annexed to fascist Italy after the invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941. Between the first months of partisan war and the proclamation of Federal

People's Republic of Yugoslavia, almost the whole geographical peninsula gradually fell under the authority of the Yugoslav partisan forces, and the issue of the borders of its north-westernmost part was not solved until the 1954 Memorandum of London<sup>1</sup>. In this period, many editorial ventures started up in the areas under Yugoslav control and the frontier zone that was initially liberated from Nazi control by the Yugoslav partisans, and later divided between the Yugoslav and Anglo-American provisional administrations; these newspapers and magazines had an orthodox socialist political stance, endorsed Yugoslavia's territorial demands on Trieste and followed a clear pattern of political education of their audiences.

Undoubtedly, one should bear in mind that Yugoslavia was a single-party regime, where any kind of journalism had to align with the government's policies in order to circulate. However, this does not fully explain the usage of political education: many reviews and newspapers focused on the construction of a new concept of citizenship and sociality, with a clear tendency to filter reality through the guidelines of socialist orthodoxy and educate the audience to do so. Such a tendency was clearer in the many institutionalized publications, the ones that related to the different bodies and organizations of the KPJ (*Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije*, Communist Party of Yugoslavia) and its Republican branches, as well as to the people's power's credited institutions, such as *Unione degli Italiani*, the official association of Istrian Italians, that was born during the partisan war in order to coordinate the military and political activity of its members within the Yugoslav partisan institutions and the context of people's power<sup>2</sup>. The Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) branch of the KPJ, whose main task was to produce or propagate orthodox political and cultural products, had a strong role in both the fields of censorship and direct cultural production, by writing articles and manifestos that addressed the audience with the purpose of creating an ideological base for interpreting reality, and also judging what was suitable for publication in the aforementioned institutional newspapers and magazines, so that the vast majority of the materials assumed a firm characterization of political education<sup>3</sup>. The same scheme, despite the different context where the KPJ did not hold an institutional power, worked in the contended territories

<sup>1</sup> Bogdan NOVAK, *Trieste 1941-1954. The Ethnic, Political and Ideological Struggle*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 133-406; Marina CATTARUZZA, *L'Italia e il confine orientale. 1866-2006* (Bologna: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 2007), 210-326; Glenda SLUGA, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border. Difference, Identity and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, 83-155.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview on the concept of "people's power" as civic control and administration of the Yugoslavian society within the framework of socialist authority, see Mila ORLIĆ, "La creazione del potere popolare in Istria (1943-1948)", in *Una storia balcanica. Fascismo, comunismo e nazionalismo nella Jugoslavia del Novecento*, ed. by Lorenzo BERTUCELLI- Mila ORLIĆ, Verona: Ombre corte, 2008, 123-151.

<sup>3</sup> For a good overview on the work of Agitprop in the press of early socialist Yugoslavia, see Carol S. LILLY, "Problems of Persuasion: Communist Agitation and Propaganda in Post-war Yugoslavia, 1944-1948", *Slavic Review*, 53 (2-1994), 395-413; Jelena BATINIĆ, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans. A History of World War II Resistance*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 48-52.

around Trieste: the local socialist branches of Agitation and Propaganda acted according to akin schemes and policies in the publications of the provisional Yugoslav institutions during the forty-three days after the liberation from German occupation, as well as of the branches of the later Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste.

Some of the aforementioned publications specifically addressed women. Languages and contents of political education, in this case, should necessarily be analyzed alongside the very codification of female gender roles this kind of publications proposed. This codification into predetermined gender roles paired up with every other aspect of political, cultural and social life, since the purpose of such a political institution that was set up on a preexisting and normalized ideological apparatus, as mentioned, was to apply orthodoxy to the current reality of the society in which the Party was acting and to educate the citizenry to do the same by itself. The female role was thus codified from the starting point of how a woman should act and believe in the actual – or hoped for – socialist society: what her interests should be, what her role was in the home economics, what her social behavior and her obligations towards the Party and its institutions were. Such a need for a codification of gender roles stemmed from the fact that conceptions of a structured femininity were already present in both the ideological framework and the context within which it was being applied. In Marxist orthodoxy, the female question was seen as nothing more than an appendix of the class one: no real theoretical disquisition on gender and roles was ever given by the same Marx, who deemed these kinds of issues to be part of the superstructure, which would have necessarily changed after the relations of production. The oppression of men on women would have disappeared with the disappearance of class division in the socialist society<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, Marxist orthodoxy did not actually question the same bourgeois categorization of predetermined gender roles: it just promoted gender equality.

Marxist visions on gender and orthodox female roles were assumed by the KPJ's cultural production, although within the limits of the context of the preexisting environment of Istria and the Julian March. Until the Italian surrender in September 1943, these territories underwent years of fascist authority, which actively promoted sexist cultural policies with the purpose of reducing the female figure to the function of fireside angel, housewife and birth-giver for the regime's natalist policies<sup>5</sup>.

Nonetheless, during the war the same Yugoslav socialist forces had experienced a big involvement of women in themselves and their struggle. In 1942 female fighters started to enlist in the partisan forces that were controlled

<sup>4</sup> Joan W. SCOTT, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *American Historical Review*, 5/91 (1986), 1053-1075; Sandra Lee BARTKY, *Femininity and Domination. Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 33-36.

<sup>5</sup> Victoria DE GRAZIA, *Le donne nel regime fascista*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2007, 27-36; Alessandra GISSI, "Un percorso a ritroso: le donne al confino politico (1926-1943)", *Italia contemporanea*, 226 (2002), 31-37; Arianna FIORE, "La rappresentazione della volontaria nella guerra civile spagnola attraverso gli organi di controllo del regime fascista", *Revista internacional de Culturas y Literaturas*, 15 (2014), 4-7.

by the AVNOJ (*Antifašističko V(ij)eće Narodnog Oslobođenja Jugoslavije*, Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) and formed the *Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije* (Women's Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia): the action of AFŽJ contributed to the creation of a conception of female emancipation, that started from warfare and expanded into the new socialist Yugoslav society later. Numerically, women's participation in the first partisan units reached a proportion of 20% at the moment of their active inclusion; one hundred thousand more female fighters joined the partisan troops during the conflict, and it is commonly estimated that during the war there were around 25000 losses amongst women<sup>6</sup>. The experience of the war also brought to an active inclusion of the women in the heroic narratives of postwar Yugoslavia's public culture, even if – as Jelena Batinić points out – they were usually represented in roles of active fighting and care at the same time<sup>7</sup>.

Chiara Bonfiglioli maintains that female participation in Yugoslav political life and the lobbying capability of female associationism had a non-negligible importance in the Yugoslav society after the war, especially in comparison with the Mediterranean European scenario; nonetheless, she also illustrates the presence of conceptions such as a common division between the theorizations of «women's equality in the public sphere and [...] "social motherhood" in the private sphere». While the public claims of gender equality expanded and were emphasized in compliance with Marxist orthodoxy, with the provision of legal grants such as equal pay and welfare, the socialist discourse still conceived the same gender categorization as the previous contexts, conferring on women the well-known social roles of care of the household<sup>8</sup>.

The same definition of women's press, for the hereby analyzed materials, might not be so exact: the Istrian Italian-speaking press that specifically addressed women, treating topics that were conceptualized as suitable for the women, rarely, if ever, was made up of articles that were written by women. In most cases, these articles were produced either by the already embedded male journalists of the Istrian Italian community or even by the Party organs, which were comprised mostly of men.

Furthermore, the Italian-speaking context of people's power Istria has been chosen as the central focus of this article because, as mentioned previously, the Istrian women had been living under the fascist conception of femininity, and at a cultural level Istrian Italians made reference to an external

6 Ivana PANTELIC, "Yugoslav female partisans in World War II", *Cahiers Balkaniques*, 41 (2013), 242; BATINIĆ, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 131-138; Barbara JANCAR-WEBSTER, *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia. 1941-1945*, Denver: Arden Press, 1990, 83-84.

7 BATINIĆ, *Women and Yugoslav Partisans*, 236-239; Biljana KAŠIĆ, Sandra PRENDA, "Women's History in Croatia: Displaced and Unhomed", *Aspasia*, 7-1 (2013), 156.

8 Chiara BONFIGLIOLI, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era. The Case of Yugoslavia", *Aspasia*, 8-1 (2014), 7-11.

homeland<sup>9</sup> that was not socialist. After the war, in fact, the DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*, Christian Democracy: the Christian-democratic party that ruled the Italian political scene after the war, in which it already contributed to the partisan struggle and the formation of the new Republican political scenario, until the 1980s) started getting more and more political power in Italy, whilst the country was losing its authority on the peninsula, until the shaping of the aforementioned FTT with the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty. The Italians who decided to remain in Istria instead of fleeing to Italy gradually witnessed the change of authority over their peninsula, with radical modifications to its social fabric, and the rise of tensions between their external homeland and the land where they decided to stay<sup>10</sup>. For postwar Istrian Italians, the elaboration of femininity and female gender roles tapped into a more general need for an elaboration of their own identification as a group and their own role in the new Yugoslav society. Therefore, the construction of the new imagery of the Istrian Italian women unavoidably paired up with a more general effort to create a new identification for Istrian Italians as a group that was part of the new Yugoslav society.

The hereby examined case study of the Italian language female press in people's power Istria provides us, in its semantics and in its expressive forms, all the tools to read into what was a total transformation of a society, of which the new conceptualization of women was a part: a process of conceptualization and categorization within the struggle for conceptualization and categorization of a whole group of population.

Lastly, there is another reason for this choice, that comes from the very state of studies. While the topic of Yugoslav women's press only got some attention from the scholars, mainly from the Yugoslav academic world, the Istrian Italian specificity did not have the same dedication. It looks like the Yugoslav women's press has been analyzed only in scholarly essays and papers that were focused either on Yugoslav partisan press as a whole<sup>11</sup> or, on a wider scale, on the role of women in the Yugoslav society during and after the Second

9 For the definition of "external homeland" as the land of ideal cultural reference for groups living outside the borders of a political entity that founded its own political and cultural institutions on the identification of its populace as a group, which is seen as made up of co-nationals by the groups sharing the same cultural imagery outside the border, see Rogers BRUBAKER, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

10 As an essential bibliography about the social, political and demographic changes the Italian community experienced in the first years of socialist control over Istria, the author suggests Cristiana COLUMMI, Liliana FERRARI, Gianna NASSISI, *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 1980; Jože PIRJEVEC, *Foibe. Una storia d'Italia*, Torino: Einaudi, 2009; Piero PURINI, *Metamorfosi etniche. I cambiamenti di popolazione a Trieste, Gorizia, Fiume e in Istria. 1914-1975* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2010), 207-303; Tullia CATALAN, Giulio MELLINATO, Raoul PUPO, Marta VERGINELLA (eds.), *Dopoguerra di confine – Povojni čas ob meji*, Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione del Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 2007; Pamela BALLINGER, *History in Exile. Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

11 Peter BROCK, "Dateline Yugoslavia: The Partisan Press", *Foreign Policy*, 93 (1993-1994), 152-172.

world war<sup>12</sup>, even if a bigger attention to the topic was paid by some specific studies that focused on the women's cultural organization in the partisan institutions, showing women's press as an indicator of social involvement and empowerment for the category<sup>13</sup>.

The Istrian Italian women's press, specifically, did not have the same fortune, because while the Yugoslav scholarly sphere never paid particular attention to the issues of the Italian minority, the scholars from the external homeland hardly accepted any representation of their co-nationals at the other side of the border as really identifying themselves as socialist, Yugoslav citizens<sup>14</sup>. A representation of the Istrian Italians as forced to identify as Yugoslavs would scarcely match with such a reality of political initiatives. At the moment, most of the historiography on Istrian Italians comes from the minority, with its own historians and cultural institutions; this topic, though, has not garnered interest yet.

The first hemerographic source that is going to be examined in this essay is *La Donna Istriana* ("The Istrian Woman"), which was issued during the same years of the war, throughout the territories that were under partisan control. Its target was made up of both female partisans and women who had not enlisted yet, or who were giving external support to the partisans. This was the first systematization of the new vision of women by the Italian language partisan press that made reference to the KPJ's Agitprop, hence by the very ideological direction of the Party. A wartime pamphlet dedicated to the International Women's Day will also be observed.

Two more periodicals will be examined, as a comparison of the contrasting contexts of Trieste and Yugoslav Istria. The two had the same title, *Donne* ("Women"); however, they did not share the context nor the authors. One started its publications in 1946 in Trieste and the further frontier territories that were under the administration of the Allied military forces; it was the women's press service for the Slavic-Italian Antifascist Union, which was the civil mass organization of the Communist Party of the Julian March, later Communist Party of the FTT. Therefore, it was not the expression of an actual ruling power, but rather of a mass movement that was seeking for hegemony and had a strong critical stance towards the Anglo-American administration. The other magazine had been the women's issue of the many magazines that were edited by *Unione degli Italiani* in Istria, where the ruling institution was

12 Barbara JANCAR-WEBSTER, "Neofeminism in Yugoslavia: A Closer Look", *Women & Politics*, 8 (1-1988), 1-30; Ivana PANTELIC, "Partizanke I Antifašistički Front Žena Jugoslavije (1942-1953)", *ProFemina*, 2<sup>nd</sup> special edition (2011), 59-80; Đurđa MILANOVIĆ, "Ženska štampa kao fenomen masovne kulture", *Opredjeljenja*, 9 (1978), 229-238.

13 Lydia SKLEVICKY, "Organizirana djelatnost žena Hrvatske za vrijeme Narodnooslobodilačke borbe, 1941-1945", *Povijesni Prilozi*, 3-3 (1985), 83-127; Antun GIRON, Mihael SOBOLEVSKI, *Goranke, Istranke, Primorke u NOB-u: Izbor iz glasila AFŽ*, Rijeka: Muzej Narodne Revolucije, 1978.

14 Raoul PUPO, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio*, Milano: Rizzoli, 2005, 147-148; Gianni OLIVA, *Esuli. Dalle foibe ai campi profughi: la tragedia degli italiani d'Istria, Fiume, Dalmazia*, Milano: Mondadori, 2009, 89-91.

the same the governmental association of Istrian Italians pledged allegiance to.

The two periodicals were not even issued in the same span of years, as the Triestine issue stopped its publication in 1948, after the purge of the Slavic component of the Communist Party of the FTT due to the arrival of the Soviet agent Vittorio Vidali in the city, even before the expulsion of the KPJ from the Kominform on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June<sup>15</sup>. The Istrian issue, instead, started its publications in 1950 to later merge into the generalist cultural magazine *Panorama* at the latter's opening in 1952.

### ***La Donna Istriana* and 8 marzo. Istrian Italian women in the Yugoslavian partisan struggle:**

The first Italian-speaking partisan issue to be addressed to women was *La Donna Istriana*. Like other partisan publications, it had a Croatian-speaking counterpart, called *Istranka*<sup>16</sup>. The two magazines shared the same contents, which were initially written in one language and translated into the other. This was a common practice at the beginning of the Yugoslav control over Istria, especially during wartime: there were shared newsrooms with Agitprop members inside, who let the committee control every kind of publication straight away. Inasmuch as the Agitation and Propaganda committee was involved, the purpose of political education of the readers, be in their native language of Croatian or Italian, was clear<sup>17</sup>.

*La Donna Istriana's* articles, therefore, were written under the supervision of Agitprop, or came directly from its own political production, as well as *Istranka's* ones. From the first issue, in July 1944, the magazine took the shape of a means of political education for the readers: this can be seen, for example, in the opening article.

Its very title, *Perché esce "La Donna Istriana"* ("Why is "La Donna Istriana" issued"), was intended to show the readers the journal's programmatic foundations. The first cause was very basic: the article started stating that many Istrian women were asking the partisan authorities why there was no Istrian journal for women, and the distribution of partisan periodicals such as *Primorka* and *Žene u Borbi* was not perceived as enough by the potential readers. In the article's own words, after having looked from the outside at others' mobilizations, the Istrian women wanted a publication that could specifically talk about them and to them. The article went on to list two more

15 Ivo BANAC, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988; Vittorio VIDALI, *Ritorno alla città senza pace. Il 1948 a Trieste*, Milano: Vangelista, 1982.

16 VV.AA., *Documenti V. La Voce del Popolo e i Giornali Minori*, Trieste-Rovigno: Centro di Ricerche Storiche - Rovigno (1979), 13.

17 See Hrvatski Državni Arhiv u Zagrebu (further: HDA), *Oblasni Komitet Komunističke Partije Hrvatske za Istru (1943-1947)* (further: OK-KPH 43-47), HR-HDA-1808, KP-286/45, 71, 73, 78, 165a; HDA, OK-KPH 43-47, HR-HDA-1808, 2.8.2.2, GK Rovinj, 405-19/02/1947, 4.

tasks for the publication. The first one was to assemble both Croatian and Italian women together, in order to build a shared identification as partisans and as future Yugoslav citizens, overlooking the national issue and starting a practice of brotherhood and unity, as per the KPJ's ideological bases of Marxist internationalism, which could be applied well to the context of plurinational Yugoslavia. The second goal the magazine overtly set was to «give impulse for our women's social education»: the article later referenced the framework of stillness and repression the Istrian women had been living in during the fascist regime, and the necessity of making women aware of their roles and perspectives in both the partisan struggle and the eventual new socialist society<sup>18</sup>.

After the fascist forcible denationalization of the Slav inhabitants of Istria, the necessity of applying the principles of brotherhood and unity to the tense Istrian context was particularly urgent; on the other hand, there was the urge to build an aware identification as Yugoslav citizens, and, in a publication that addressed women directly, it took the shape of creating a collective consciousness of the systematized roles for women in the society the KPJ was meant to build.

Another article highlighted the functions of the Women's Antifascist Front. Its main task was to gather all the antifascist women and make them active in the liberation struggle: to this end, one of the Front's main fields of action was to fight the enemy's propaganda against the AVNOJ, in order to make the people join the partisan faction, and the organization that could suit this purpose best for addressing women was a women's one. Above all, according to the article, Italian women were hard to approach<sup>19</sup>. While Slovenians and Croats in the region had to undergo the above mentioned denationalization and forcible Italianization, the cultural and social primacy of Italian nationality was sanctioned by law, and this also marked a difference between their very experiences of opposition: Istrian Italian antifascists opposed the regime under the political point of view, whilst the Croatian and Slovenian ones were also motivated by the discrimination they underwent for cultural and linguistic reasons<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, Italian antifascist women had more to lose than their Croatian counterpart. Another reason which kept the Italian antifascist women from engaging in the partisan war was the fear of getting the same treatment as the fascist oppressors by the Yugoslav partisan troops, i.e. by the part of the prewar Istrian society their co-nationals oppressed. In this case, the article maintained that under the Yugoslav authority their national rights would have been guaranteed. The report concluded in complaining that Istrian women

18 Anonymous, "Perché esce 'La Donna Istriana'", *La Donna Istriana*, 1 (1944), 1.

19 Anonymous, "Che cosa è il F.F.A. e quali sono i suoi compiti", *La Donna Istriana*, 1 (1944), 3-4.

20 Sandi VOLK, *Esuli a Trieste. Bonifica nazionale e rafforzamento dell'italianità sul confine orientale*, Udine: Kappa Vu, 2004, 13-19; Marta VERGINELLA, "Il processo Tomažič", in *Dal Processo Zaniboni al Processo Tomažič. Il Tribunale di Mussolini e il Confine Orientale*, (eds.) Marco PUPPINI-Ariella VERROCCHIO-Marta VERGINELLA, Udine: Gaspari, 2003, 103-140; Matic BATIČ, "«Dell'Italia nei confini/son rifatti gli italiani». Italijanski fašizem in njegov koncept italianità", *Acta Histriae*, 24-4 (2016), 819-836.

were still leaving many activities to the men, such as charges in the partisan institutions, the production of propaganda and the same active fighting; yet there was satisfaction with other kinds of activities they undertook, such as the care of supplies<sup>21</sup>. The role of care was accepted as matter of fact; however, there was the intention to enlarge the spectrum of social activities for the women, without relegating them to the previous conditions of social segregation.

The last programmatic article to be examined in this paper focused on the new women's rights the KPJ would have guaranteed, and can be considered an in-depth examination of the scenario the other two articles prospected for the Istrian women and their eventual achievements in the new society. After specifying that every woman in the territories the Yugoslav partisan authorities controlled had the same right as men to engage in the military activities and to exercise their political rights in every institution, the article illustrates how the women under the previous Yugoslav and – most of all – Italian authorities were deprived of any right of political expression. According to the article, this was derived from a natural tendency of reactionary regimes to prevent the people from questioning the established powers, whilst the Communist Party would have had equal rights for the women as one of its bases for legitimacy. The article also reminded the audience of the situation of widespread military repression the partisan and antifascist women had been living and were living in, in order to highlight the promised better life conditions after the victorious end of the war, and invited the women of Istria to take part in the political activity of the people's power institutions<sup>22</sup>.

As a last remark, the article – whose author only signed by the initials D.E. – seems to have been written by a woman, or better, this is the impression it was supposed to give. Linguistic forms such as «Ciascuna di noi» ("each one of us", with a feminine declension of the pronoun), «Noi donne» ("we, the women") or «potremo partecipare all'edificazione del nuovo stato» ("we could take part in the edification of the new state", while talking about female participation) had been repeatedly used in the article's last column, while it did not happen in the other two articles analyzed above, which had an impersonal and more dispatch-like approach. Nonetheless, the usage of topical representations of the female role in patriarchal societies, while describing what the Istrian women would have aspired to, was still present. Many references were made to a social collective responsibility of the female component towards the sons and their future, looking towards the end of the war («Il destino del popolo, il destino dei nostri figli è nelle nostre mani [...] siamo responsabili davanti ai nostri figli [...] Da noi dipende se i nostri figli godranno dei frutti di queste care vittime», meaning "the destiny of the people, the destiny of our sons is in our hands", "we are responsible before our sons", "it depends on us whether our sons might enjoy the outcome of these dear casualties", respectively), and in one case the sons were shown alongside the husbands as the first casualties of war («Col

21 Anonymous, "Che cosa è il F.F.A. e quali sono i suoi compiti", *La Donna Istriana*, 1 (1944), 4.

22 D.E., "Ora le donne godono degli stessi diritti degli uomini", *La Donna Istriana*, 1 (1944), 8-9.

sangue e le ossa di migliaia dei nostri combattenti caduti, dei nostri figli e dei nostri mariti [...]», meaning “with the blood and bones of thousands of our fallen fighters, of our sons and of our husbands”). By using these expressions, the article appealed to the women through evoking their loved ones, who were represented either as fighters (as it was attached to any dominant imagery of masculinity the addressed could have internalized from the context in which they grew up) or as the weak and infantilized who needed protection, in order to live in a better society once they grew up. This choice of semantics and topics could reflect a theoretical pattern: the women were considered to have the uttermost care of the household and, above all, the offspring, so much so that the cultural production would get women more involved in the common struggle by appealing to feelings that were evaluated as the most important to them. Yet, as seen before, the new conception of active citizenship for women was considered to be equally appealing: the old conceptions of femininity that were widespread in the previous context of patriarchy were questioned, though not yet at their very foundation, such as the schematized gender roles.

As all the three articles pointed out, partisan institutional concerns about women's rights arose at the third conference of ZAVNOH (the Croatian branch of AVNOJ), held in the village of Topusko on May 8 and 9, 1944. In the conference's final resolution, the equality of rights between men and women found its place in the Declaration on the basic rights of peoples and citizens of Democratic Croatia (“*Deklaracija o osnovnim pravima naroda i građana Demokratske Hrvatske*”)<sup>23</sup>. That was not the first occasion in which attention was paid to Istrian Italian women, though. In the previous March, the Istrian Agitprop had issued a pamphlet<sup>24</sup> that was dedicated to International Women's Day, on March 8. This 12-pages long booklet started with narrative about the violence the Istrian women were subjected to by the Nazi troops and the Italian fascist occupiers who remained. This was a particular form of violence, in addition to the war-related one: besides bombings, killings and looting, the women were also constantly suffering from sexual harassment, rape and rape-related murder<sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, after referencing such violence, the women were called to active mobilization, using as an example the active, armed resistance of the women in the USSR: more than three of the twelve pages were dedicated to the glorification of their struggle and of the KPJ who vocalized the principles of Soviet society in Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, one of the female models evoked to the readers was Rosa Luxemburg, for her active

23 Hodimir SIROTKOVIĆ (ed.), *Zemaljsko Antifašističko Vijeće Narodnog Oslobođenja Hrvatske. Zbornik Dokumentata 1944*, Zagreb: Institut za Historiju Radničkog Pokreta Hrvatske (1975), 17-18, 25-27.

24 A not so unusual medium of political communication at the time. For instance, even if we only consider the Yugoslav pamphlets that were issued in Italian language by *Unione degli Italiani* between 1947 and 1948, there were as much as 28 politically-connoted pamphlets between 10 and 60 pages of length. Most of these pamphlets either recollected Party resolutions or had a spin of political education for the children. Giovanni RADOSSI (ed.), *Documenti X. Documenti dell'UIIF 1947-48*, Rovigno: Centro di Ricerche Storiche – Rovigno (2010), 570-574.

25 Anonymous, *8 marzo*, Unknown: Propodjel Obl. N.O.-a za Istru, 1944, 1.

political effort, which was designed to exemplify what the Yugoslav women should do for their political affirmation within the framework of people's power<sup>26</sup>. However, along with these examples of self-determination, the same imagery of women as primarily devoted to their family and to a normalized gender role that implied an intrinsic devotion to motherhood recurred. There were many references to the children and their suffering in a situation of war, famine and danger. For example, on page 4 Russian women were shown as suffering for the lack of essential goods their children were enduring, as if their first concern as women could not be anything else than their offspring. In the same page, though, the children were shown as proud of «their fathers [who] were fighting on the front line»<sup>27</sup>: such a sentence seems to belittle the engagement of Soviet women in the war, which was glorified earlier in the same pamphlet to give a vivid example to encourage the enlistment of Yugoslav women. With continuous further examples of recalling family affections to the Yugoslav women in order to make them stand up in defense of their beloved ones, as well as evoking the enemy's mothers in a dialectic of shame for having raised assassins («The women from all over the world will have the right to tell the German women: “Your sons dishonored your mother's milk” [...] You did not raise sons who were worthy of us mothers' mother love, and for us the love towards the children is worthy of the uttermost respect»)<sup>28</sup>, the whole continuation of the pamphlet is focused on the perpetuation of the stereotypical female role of care of the family. Of the children, above all: as mentioned, the representation of the woman as primarily concerned about the well-being of her nuclear family, most of all of who were still represented as her byproduct, continued. Nonetheless, the interpretation of family this kind of propaganda promoted was not comparable to the famous model of antisocial nuclear family Edward Banfield would have provided in analyzing Italian families fifteen years later<sup>29</sup>. There was always an otherness, a further world, outer with respect to the family: it was the society, an external context of action and involvement for the women, as the KPJ hoped for. In order to mobilize them, though, the Party decided in touching them close to home first. The dichotomist pattern of a two faced propaganda, based on the perpetuation of a functional scheme that preserved stable gender roles on the one hand and of a perspective of involvement in the society they lived in on the other, is visible in this pamphlet.

26 Ibid, 2-5.

27 Ibid, 4.

28 Ibid, 4-5.

29 See Edward C. BANFIELD, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958.

## **Donne.**

### **Different narrations in two different contexts:**

As already said, there were two different communist publications for women called *Donne* in contexts of direct or indirect Yugoslavian influence.

The Triestine issue of *Unione Antifascista Italo-Slava* (Slavic-Italian Antifascist Union, UAIS) had been active between 1946 and 1948. The focus on political education was fairly evident: the purpose was to train politically aware women, in order to make them participate in the meetings and activities the UAIS was carrying forward.

As we can see from the review's third publication, for instance, the biggest emphasis was given to the immediate international and local political issues. On page 2, there was an article updating the readers on the developments of the Paris Peace Conference, which would have later created the Free Territory of Trieste. At the same time, while keeping the readers up to date with the debate on the assignation of Trieste and its background, the article had a clear purpose of political education, which was visible from the same title ("Who opposes the activity of the Paris Conference does not want peace", overtly recalling the Italian stances that were stuck on claiming Istria back) to the whole text, in which the Yugoslav claims on the city and on part of the Julian March were shown as the only way to «peace and the establishment of security»<sup>30</sup>.

Moving along in the same issue's pages, further attention is paid to the usual themes of home economics and organization of social daily life; structured, nonetheless, in a way that evokes the participation of women as active citizens. The articles have an explanatory tone, attentively informing the readers of the developments of the laws in the new Yugoslav society, highlighting the role of active citizenship in the participation in the institutions of people's power and their decision processes in particular. It meant that the readers would have taken part in the active democratic participation in communist institutions if Trieste went under Yugoslav administration, and it was their task to do all in their power to make it a reality. For instance, in the following pages there were articles dedicated to topics such as voluntary work in Rijeka<sup>31</sup> or legislative processes on marriage<sup>32</sup> and healthcare<sup>33</sup>, as well as the organization of summer camps for the children<sup>34</sup>.

30 C.L., "Chi s'opponne all'attività della Conferenza di Parigi non vuole la pace", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 2.

31 Anonymus, "Impressioni di un viaggio", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 3-4.

32 Anonymus, "La legge sul matrimonio", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 4.

33 Anonymus, "L'organizzazione della sanità", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 5.

34 Anonymus, "Le colonie per i figli del popolo", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 6-7.

A tendency to provide the readers role models of proactive womanhood also stands out. In different volumes of *Donne*, there were dedicated articles providing examples of women who actively participated in the public life scenario, through representations that bore heroic traits in the description of their great, renowned deeds as well as their daily life activities. Such a model of representation enables us to shape three fields for its application: the individual, renowned example of a single famous woman who stood out for her deeds, like Marie Curie<sup>35</sup>; the collective example of groups of women who took action to improve the conditions of their own social surroundings in situations of hardship, like the Russian partisan women in the war<sup>36</sup> or the black women who ran self-organized community centers in poor and segregated contexts in Southern United States<sup>37</sup>; finally, the examples of everyday heroism of women who could stand up in the same Triestine society, like university students<sup>38</sup> or antifascist mothers<sup>39</sup>.

The latter was a model to which many of the readers could relate, as long as they were in Communist platforms and institutions, like the Antifascist Union and the related female section of which this issue was the official magazine.

The aforementioned namesake publication, instead, was issued in Istria a few years later. It was the official publication EdIt (*Edizioni Italiane*, the official Italian-speaking publisher in Yugoslav Istria, under control of *Unione degli Italiani*) issued for the female readers. The first volume came out in December 1950, and from its very first articles it is possible to spot the differences between it and the Triestine magazine. The only space for actual political news was half of the first page, with a press review that, moreover, addressed the readers with an oversimplified spin, for example when defining Italian socialist leader Pietro Nenni a «kominformist»<sup>40</sup>. The same title of what would have become a steady section in the magazine, «Politicus ha sfogliato i giornali per voi» ("Politicus browsed the newspapers for you"), implied a reduction of the necessity of creating a political awareness to a burden that an expert figure – characterized by the moniker of "Politicus" – could carry for the readers, who would have only benefited from a mediated re-elaboration of what was going on around them.

For the rest of the issue, all the articles were dedicated to matters that

35 Anonymus, "Marie Curie", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 1-3 (1946), 10-11.

36 Anonymus, "Donne nell'URSS", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 2-9 (1947), 12-13.

37 Anonymus, "Come vivono le donne negre negli Stati Uniti", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 3-1 (1948), 16.

38 Anonymus, "Ragazze all'università", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 2-9 (1947), 23.

39 Anonymus, "I problemi dei giovani", *Donne. Rivista mensile dell'Unione Donne Antifasciste Italiane e Slave*, 3-1 (1948), 6.

40 L.V., "Politicus ha sfogliato i giornali per voi", *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 1.

were part of the systematized depiction of the unquestioned social role of “fireside angel” the female gender already had before its exponents’ actual involvement in the partisan war. For instance, there are articles on domestic duties such as cooking<sup>41</sup>, cleaning<sup>42</sup> and knitting<sup>43</sup>. One of the issue’s main topics was the care of children: there were articles for reassuring the readers about the high-quality schooling of their offspring in socialist Yugoslavia<sup>44</sup>, where a bilingual teaching would have been guaranteed in compliance with the internationalist principles of the KPJ, as well as other ones concerning the behavioral education of children<sup>45</sup> and the glorification of maternity as a social duty<sup>46</sup>.

The division of tasks in the same magazine, or at least the gender segregation shining through the names that were used to sign the articles, could reflect a social division between gender roles, to some extent. Names of women, such as “Mariolina”, “Rossella”, “Maria” or “Edina”, signed articles that were centered on the care of the household and family, and that more generally addressed a figure of womanhood that was stuck in the same gender roles as before the war, with no participation in public life intended but a role of care that was perceived as having a social importance (although even less than in the namesake Triestine publication, that was more focused on building a new figure of woman as citizen). Meanwhile, the press review section was edited by the aforementioned “Politicus”; the pseudonym was in Latin, a language that was known by any Istrian who had had a higher education of any kind by the time *Donne* was issued, and it had a masculine ending. Furthermore, as an example, the author of the above seen article on education in socialist Yugoslavia was Pietro Marras, high school teacher and leading figure of the school commission of *Unione degli Italiani*. Marras was a man who held an important role in a community of which the readers were part, too, and he signed the article with his title of professor before his name. Another case of usage of a full name was a short novel by the renowned journalist and writer Giacomo Scotti, in the following number: he talked about his fictional mother, using an overly stereotyped representation of a Southern Italian woman, fully devoted to the care of the house and children even in situations of harsh poverty<sup>47</sup>.

It can easily be seen how for important figures of inner authority of the Italian community, that were mainly male, there was a focus on names

41 “Mariolina”, “Un pizzico di pepe...un pizzico di sale...”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 20.

42 “Rossella”, “Ed ora, pulizia”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 24.

43 Amalia LENTINI, “Corso di taglio”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 21.

44 Pietro MARRAS, “Alunni italiani nella Jugoslavia socialista”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 2-3.

45 “Maria”, “Conosci il tuo bambino?”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 18.

46 “Edina”, “Per te, mamma, che attendi il tuo bambino”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 1 (1950), 17.

47 Giacomo SCOTTI, “Mamma napoletana”, *Donne. Mensile d'attualità, moda, cultura, varietà*, 2-3 (1951), 22-23.

and titles, as they engendered prestige and favored social acknowledgment; authorship, therefore, played a big role. The authors of the minor articles, instead, were either men who used female pseudonyms – in order to make the readers feel closer to the authors’ narration – or women who covered less important themes and for whom there was no perception of a necessity to use real names anyway, as there was no actual authorship intended.

## Conclusion:

The Agitation and Propaganda offices of the KPJ, in Istria as well as in the whole Yugoslavia, invested on propaganda from the very start of the partisan involvement in the Second world war. Such propaganda addressed many different sectors of the society, and this also applied to women, who got the attention of specific publications.

These magazines and pamphlets promoted the visions the Party had for Istrian women on what their role should be both in the partisan action and once the peninsula was annexed to the new socialist Yugoslavia. They had to work within two different existing frameworks, the ones of principles and context: the ideological guidelines of Marxist egalitarianism, according to which the inequality between man and woman would have disappeared along with any other superstructural disparity once capitalism ended, needed to harmonize with a context – the Istrian one – that had just been liberated from fascism. The previous fascist penetration into Istrian society meant that the vision of womanhood Mussolini’s regime promoted, which was made up of the well-known imagery of the fireside angel whose purpose in life was only to take care of house and family, had a propagation and could not be overlooked. Deconstruction could only work to some extent, either, because the expected transformation of the society would have been radical and total.

From the first publications, the Italian-speaking socialist women’s press in Istria embodied the two conflicting frameworks of Marxist devices and a previously fascistized context by synthesizing for the female audience guidelines that followed a pattern of innovation while, at the same time, still recalled a deep-rooted imagery. The gender roles that had previously been systematized by the fascist cultural production were not deconstructed in-depth, yet the promotion of new ways for the social involvement of women questioned them.

In cultural byproducts of the Istrian Agitprop such as the issue *La Donna Istriana* and the pamphlet *8 marzo*, the role of care for the women continued being promoted: the sphere of care of household and family was not questioned as a female typicality, as a context of interaction that was still shown as natural for the women, and it was depicted with no need for a systematical theorization but with representations that always involved the private sphere. In the cultural production addressing women, it was common



to talk about home, family and children, whose well-being was threatened by the war, without questioning the common representation of the female gender as having the most important role in their care. In the actual partisan publications that were not addressing women, none of these above mentioned themes ever got such an attentive dedication by the authors.

Nonetheless, another pattern was the invitation to take part in the partisan struggle. The call to mobilization was the ultimate purpose of these publications, indeed; such a mobilization would have also implied an active participation in the social and political life of the new socialist society after the war, within the framework of people's power's institutions. This was the most innovative aspect of the political discourse relating to women in Istria: in opposition to the inwards, house-centered vision of women fascism promoted, the communist partisan institutions overtly called the women to take part in the construction and the well-being of the new society, thus making the prospected future attractive for the audience these kinds of publications had.

The existing, normalized gender roles were questioned by the same prospect of the women's active involvement in the actual local political life. Nonetheless, the two patterns of referral to the gender categorizations through the systematization of a gender-based typicality and of active participation in social and political life intersected in the languages and the imagery that were used to call women to arms and political mobilization. The calls, as seen above, were mainly focused on the quiet living of the very nuclear household, which was threatened by the war and ought to be defended and restored by the action of women: the images of war as destruction of the social fabric were functional to encourage the female involvement in the partisan activity.

When comparing the two issues called *Donne* – that were the official women's publications for UAIS and *Unione degli Italiani*, thus reflecting the official stances of the two institutions on the issue of the female social role – a big difference in themes and semantics can be noticed. While the Triestine issue addressed women in a context in which a call to mobilization was still necessary to make the Party exercise a larger political influence, thus inviting women to an active participation in social and political life, in Istria a position of authority had already been reached by the Yugoslav Communist Party, while the construction of a cultural hegemony was still in the making. Therefore, a bigger attention could be paid to the private sphere, as the mobilization of women was only meant to be within the structures of what was already the ruling party.

## Sažetak

### TALIJANSKE ŽENSKÉ NOVINE I POLITIČKO OBRAZOVANJE LJUDI U ISTRI (1943.-1954.)

Francesco Maria MENGÒ

Tijekom i nakon Drugog svjetskog rata grane Agitprop-a jugoslavenske Komunističke partije i povezane Komunističke partije Julijske krajine započeli su s objavom periodike za teritorije koje su kontrolirali u Istri, a neki od tih novosti bili su namijenjeni ženskoj publici. Ove žensko orijentirane publikacije djelovale su kao poticaj istarskim ženama koje su govorile talijanski da se mobiliziraju, bilo vojno kroz partizansku borbu, bilo politički za ostvarenje novog socijalističkog društva putem političke edukacije i aktivnog sudjelovanja. S jedne strane KPJ je navodila općenite marksističke teze o rodnoj jednakosti, dok je s druge djelovala unutar konteksta već postojećih fašističkih politika socijalne segregacije i obezvrijeđivanja žena.

Temeljni izvori koji su ovdje analizirani odnose se na časopis *La Donna Istriana* te dvije različite publikacije istog imena *Donne*, kao i ratni pamflet 8 marzo.