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Living in War. Women in Italian Historiography (1980-2016)*

by

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Riassunto: L'avvio delle ricerche sulla società italiana in guerra risale alla fine degli anni Sessanta, quando la nuova stagione politica e sociale ha condotto a una svolta determinante ed ha orientato la ricerca verso la storia sociale ed economica. L'attenzione alla vita quotidiana, alle trasformazioni sociali, istituzionali e mentali indotte dal conflitto, hanno portato in primo piano l'esperienza di vita e di lavoro delle donne. Nella prima parte la rassegna rende brevemente conto delle ricerche degli ultimi trent'anni sulle modificazioni del mercato del lavoro, sulle condizioni di vita delle contadine, delle operaie, delle tranviere, delle infermiere, delle maestre, donne che per la prima volta ebbero cognizione della loro importanza nella sfera sociale e famigliare. La seconda parte si sofferma sulla attività asistenziale svolta dalle donne della piccola e media borghesia, mentre la parte finale è dedicata ai temi dell'interventismo e del pacifismo.

Foreword

The subject of women's experiences during the Great War is still largely unexplored by Italian historical studies, and has been particularly neglected in recent years during which interest has shifted progressively towards the Second World War. As Simonetta Soldani noted in 2003, making a first evaluation of the studies on women's history carried out from the end of the 1980s,

> Except for few inroads on the First World War [the binomial women and war] has had as its center the varied phenomena connected with the Second World War: the deportations and death camps, the civil and armed Resistance, the difficult managing of daily life and the mourning that marked it[1].

* This is an expanded and updated version of the essay: *Vivere in guerra. Le donne nella storiografia italiana (1980-1914),* in "Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione" 23. Jahrgang, 2014, Heft 2, pp. 67-97. Translation by Maria Grazia Suriano, revision by Geraldine Ludbrook.

[1] Simonetta Soldani, *L'incerto profilo degli studi di Storia contemporanea,* in *A che punto è la storia delle donne in Italia,* ed by Anna Rossi Doria, Viella, Roma 2003, p. 68.

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Unlike other European countries[2] we do not yet have monographic publications on women's experiences during the war, and in the works that reconstruct the history of women in the contemporary age, with some exceptions, the First World War is mostly absent or receives only passing mention[3].

Although some books published abroad have been widely endorsed by Italian historiography and have stimulated debate and research[4], comparison with other European countries is still under-represented, and the specific case of Italy is little known abroad[5]. Until very recently, Italy was not included in collections with a comparative perspective published in other countries[6].

In the following pages I will outline the issues raised by studies in light of the changes occurring in historiographical interest, in women's history as well as gender studies[7], in order to reflect on the state of research on the most debated issues and those still open.

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[2] Among the first works published on women and war in Great Britain see: Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918,* Croom Helm, London 1977; *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War,* ed. by Jyce Marlow, Virago Press, London 1998. Among the works published in recent years, of interest are, Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, Routledge, Harlow 2002, a study that takes under consideration several countries and that provides some insight on the case of Italy; on France: Margaret H. Darrow, *French Women and the First World War. War Stories of the Home Front*, Bloomsbury Academic, Oxford 2000; Évelyne Morin-Rotureau, *Françaises en guerre 1914-1918*, Editions Autrement, Paris 2013; on Britain: Kate Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One*, Hodder Paperbacks, London 2013; on Austria: Christa Hämmerle, *Heimat/Front: Geschlechtergeschichte in des Ersten Weltkriegs in Österreich-Ungarn,* Böhlau, Wien 2014. On Austria and Germany see the updated historiographic essays by Christa Hämmerle, *Traditionen, Trends und Perspektiven. Zur Frauen und Geschlechtergeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs in Österreich* and by Ingrid E. Sharp, *Geschlechtergeschichte und die Erforschung des Ersten Weltkrieges in Deutschland: Entwicklungen und Perspektiven*, in "Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione", 23, 2, respectively pp. 21-48; 49-66. On Canada: *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War,* ed. by Amy J. Shaw-Sarah Carlene Glassford, UBC Press, Vancouver 2012.

[3] Among the studies that take into account the war years, see: Anna Bravo-Margherita Pelaja-Alessandra Pescarolo-Lucetta Scaraffia, *Storia sociale delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001; Perry Willson, *Italiane. Biografia del Novecento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011.

[4] Françoise Thebaud, *La Grande Guerra: età della donna o trionfo delle differenze sessuali?*, in *Storia delle donne in Occidente. Il Novecento*, ed. by George Duby-Michelle Perrot, vol. II, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1992, pp. 25-90; Margaret Higonnet-Randolph Higonnet, *Behind the Lines. Gender and the Two World Wars*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1987; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Donne e guerra*, il Mulino, Bologna 1991.

[5] Exceptions are Peter Gatrell's volume, *Russia's First World War. A Social and Economic History*, Pearson-Longman, London 2005 and the recent monograph by Allison Scardino Belzer, *Women and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010.

[6] See: Simonetta Ortaggi, *Italian Women during the Great War*, in *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. by Gail Braybon, Berghahn Books, Oxford-New York 2003, pp. 216-237; Matteo Ermacora, *Women Behind the Lines: The Friuli Region as a Case Study of Total Mobilization, 1915-1917*, in *Gender and the First World War*, ed. by Christa Hämmerle-Oswald Überegger-Brigitta Bader-Zaar, Palgrave Macmillan, Basinstoke-New York 2014, pp. 16-35; Bruna Bianchi, *Towards a New Internationalism: Pacifist Journals Edited by Women, 1914-1919*, *Ivi*, pp. 176-194.

[7] The first considerations on the state of the studies on women's lives during the war were published in 1991 in a research review on the Great War dating from the 1980s: Bruna Bianchi, *La Grande*

Historiography: Phases and trends

Reconstructing women's conditions during the First World War in Italy lags behind other European countries in two main fields: studies on the Great War and those concerning the history of women and gender[8].

The beginning of research on society as a whole goes back to the 1960s. For a long time, in fact, after the years of fascism – during which patriotic celebration stifled the memory of the soldiers, obscured the wartime dissent of lower class women and diminished the emancipationist value inherent in mobilizing women – historical studies have privileged the political-military context[9]. Only the new political and social period in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a turning point, fostered by the opening of some funds held at the Central Archives of the State, such as that of the Ministry of Interior and Industrial mobilization, which were decisive in directing research toward social and economic history.

Demolishing the myth of the Patriotic War, the new studies have highlighted the distance of the popular classes from the ideological motivations of the war, the brutal repression in the army, the rebellion of soldiers and conflict in factories and in the countryside. Exploring new sources, collecting oral histories and a great deal of letters, diaries and memoirs[10] kept by families, the new historiographical studies explored the nexus of war/subjectivity, the feelings and the mentality of ordinary people, changes in popular culture.

Guerra nella storiografia italiana dell'ultimo decennio, in "Ricerche Storiche", 3, 1991, pp. 720-745. The first historiographical review wholly devoted to the topic "women and war" is the one edited by Augusta Molinari, *Appunti per una storia delle donne nella Grande guerra,* in "Quaderni del Dipartimento di LLSM", 11, 2001, pp. 69-92; in 2006 there appeared a review by Matteo Ermacora, *Le donne italiane nella Grande guerra. Un bilancio storiografico (1990-2005)*, in *Donne in guerra 1915-1918. La Grande Guerra attraverso l'analisi e le testimonianze di una terra di confine*, Centro Studi Judicaria Tione di Trento 2006. See also the updated essay by Simonetta Soldani, *Donne italiane e Grande Guerra al vaglio della Storia*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, ed. by Stefania Bartoloni, Vilella, Roma 2016, pp. 69-92. In respect to these reviews, this current one is to be considered as complementary to the others.

[8] Only since the 1990s has the history of women been welcomed at universities, but we cannot yet consider it as an affirmation of Women's Studies and even less of Peace Studies insofar as other countries have contributed to shed light on women's thought on peace and war and on female activism during conflicts. On delays and poor reception of women's history and gender studies in Italian universities, see: Elisabetta Vezzosi, *Un incontro mancato, ma possibile. Storia delle donne e Università italiana*, in "Menodizero", 8-9, 2012, http://menodizero.eu/passatopresente-analisi/255-un-incontro-mancato-ma-possibile-storia-delle-donne-e-universita-italiana.html (3 luglio 2014).

[9] The only exceptions were volumes published by the Carnegie Foundation such as those by Arrigo Serpieri, *La guerra e le classi rurali italiane*, Laterza-Yale University Press, Bari-New Haven 1930, and Giorgio Mortara, *La salute pubblica in Italia durante e dopo la guerra*, Laterza-Yale University Press, Bari-New Haven 1925, which shed light on civilians' conditions and still are considered an important reference point.

[10] In those years some preservation and research centers were found in Trento at the Museo storico del Trentino, in Pieve Santo Stefano (the Archivio diaristico nazionale), in San Giovanni in Persiceto and in Genova (the Archivio ligure della scrittura popolare).

The attention to everyday life, and to the social and mental transformations induced by the conflict, but also to the new functions of the State and the labour market, have brought to forefront the living and working women's experiences, both in the countryside and in urban centers. The studies have emphasized women's roles in protest against the war, the dramatic situation of displaced populations and civilians in occupied areas and near the front, mostly women, children, the elderly. Since 1989, these historiographical trends have suddenly received new impetus from the founding of the Società Italiana delle Storiche (Italian Society of Women Historians), which proposes by statute to "enhance female subjectivity and women's presence in history".

In those years historiography focused in particular on labour, on women in industrial sectors previously closed to them, on their visibility in urban areas, on the new behaviours that reflected the women's desire for greater freedom and a less restricted social life, that is on aspects of novelty and break with the past. Historical research on this issue has been reinforced by the social and political commitment of the women which led to the approval of the law on positive action for the realization of gender equality in the workplace in April 1991[11].

The desire to give visibility to the efforts of the past women workers, to investigate the relationship between work and family, and to reflect on the characteristics of women's work has resulted in numerous innovative research and studies on the Great War, then gradually interwoven with the history of women and gender[12].The events of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, marked by a series of dramatic conflicts and an unusual escalation of violence against women, met an immediate historiographical interest in the tragedy of refugees and displaced persons of the Great War – mostly women – and in rapes committed during the occupation of Veneto and Friuli, identified as anticipatory elements of contemporary wars. At the same time there began an exploration of other fields of studies privileging a gender view on various topics, among which the presence of women in the public arena as leading subjects of assistance and propaganda. From the extraneousness of working class women to war, the focus moved forward to the active involvement of middle-class women in patriotic mobilisation.

If, in a first phase, the sense of the fracture with the past in the life of women and gender relations has been the focus of studies, then historiography has questioned the true extent of these changes, their persistence, the role of ideology and policy to maintain and recreate unequal relations between sexes, and to clear women's memory.

Within this general framework, the range of topics touched by historiography has been extensive and, without pretending to be comprehensive of the whole, it must be illustrated in detail.

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[11] Simonetta Soldani, *L'incerto profilo degli studi di storia contemporanea*, p. 65.

[12] In 1987 Paola Di Cori, who had already focused on the Great War, translated and introduced the essay by Joan Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, published in English in 1986, a milestone for Gender History at international level and that also influenced Italian studies.

Working in factories, public services and offices

As in all the countries involved in the conflict, but to a lesser extent than in Britain and Germany, modifications in production opened new employment opportunities for women, recruited massively in munition factories[13]. For the first time, many women became aware of their importance in the social as well as in the family sphere, acquiring a new perception of their abilities and their rights. The new experiences of autonomy, however, took place in an atmosphere of coercion that weighed on the entire civilian population and the working class in particular, producing feelings of precariousness and insecurity.

> It is a state of danger, uncertainty, shortage, which requires an extraordinary multiplication of activities, and demands completely new behaviours; which redefines the relationship with time, with space, with themselves and with others; which essentially contributes to creating a women's social visibility, part of which is the visibility derived from work– how great a part remains to be seen[14].

The inefficiency of food distribution, relations with bureaucracy, all the difficulties of everyday life, which was suspended between bereavements and uncertainties, weighed principally on women. Among the deaths that the war brought to women's lives, the most painful was the loss of sons, young men killed at the front, the children dead from cold and hunger. In Italy the infant mortality rate reached staggering levels, the highest of all the belligerent countries. From 1914 to 1918, the death rate in the first year of life rose from 129.9 to 186, in the second from 52.4 to 104.5[15].

Women entered factories without qualification and very often without any experience of industrial work, so the new workers were employed in low skilled jobs, they perceived paltry wages, were subjected to overtime and night work and to severe discipline. The militarization of the factories in fact placed them under the control of overseers who could punish them with imprisonment. The fatigue, the harmfulness of the work to which in many cases they were employed – the handling of explosives, for example, or the painting of aircraft wings, and the loading of shells – new workers were exposed to occupational accidents and diseases.

Explosions and serious fires followed one another during the conflict. At least two powder-mills where young women worked were completely destroyed and many factories could count high rates of sick absence among workers. Fifty percent

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[13] Among the first studies that triggered research devoted to women's work, see: Alessandro Camarda-Santo Peli, *L'altro esercito. La classe operaia durante la prima guerra mondiale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1980; Rosalia Muci, *Produrre armi, domandare pace. Le operaie milanesi durante la prima guerra mondiale*, in "Storia in Lombardia", 3, 1985, pp. 35-67; Giovanna Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta. Mentalità e comportamenti popolari nella Grande guerra* (1989), Bulzoni, Roma 1999.

[14] Anna Bravo, *Lavorare in tempo di guerra*, in *Operaie, serve, maestre, impiegate*, ed. by Paola Nava, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1992, p. 399. On the new roles women played, see also: Diego Leoni-Camillo Zadra, *I ruoli sconvolti: donna e famiglia a Volano nel Trentino durante la guerra del Quindici*, in "Movimento operaio e socialista", 3, 1982, pp. 421-438.

[15] For an overview on child mortality, see: Giorgio Mortara, *La salute pubblica*, in specific p. 176; Lucia Pozzi, *La population italienne pendant la Grande Guerre*, in "Annales de Démographie Historique", 1, 2002, pp. 121-142.

absence rates among the female workforce repeatedly paralyzed the activity of many plants and constantly threatened the continuity of work in many powder-mills[16]. Comparative research has shown that in Italy no steps were taken to reduce injuries and deaths, such as the reduction of working hours and the introduction of rest breaks, as happened in Britain from 1916. Similarly no rooms were restored to be used as dormitories, canteens and nurseries. Protective legislation was generally suspended and the labour inspectorate saw its staff drastically reduced[17].

The Ministry of Weapons and Ammunitions' files and the factory archives have allowed the reconstruction of working conditions in auxiliary factories, little is still known about those in small workshops located in the suburbs or in small rural centres where female and child labour was exploited[18]. They were in many cases small temporary factories without any protective systems.

In urban centres women were also employed in public services and in clerical work, as documented by Barbara Curli[19] in a volume published in 1998. For the first time light was cast on female tram drivers, workers that in war iconography became a symbol of the new visibility of women. It was actually an extremely tiring job, made up of long shifts; numerous dismissals for disciplinary reasons: absences, delays, irreverent attitudes, lack of enforcement of fines for those who were travelling without ticket, especially kids, irregular breaks to go shopping or indulge in a little rest. In the office sector a new labour organization favoured a significant increase in female employment. Although engaged in repetitive tasks, new employees proved to be scrupulous and proud of their work. Based on a very wide range of archival sources, Curli disproved the traditional idea that the end of the war would mark the homecoming of women. In contrast, women's employment in the service sector increased, and since then this industry has been characterized by a predominantly female workforce.

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[16] Bruna Bianchi, *Salute e rendimento nell'industria bellica (1915-1918)*, in *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia dall'Unità al Fascismo*, ed. by. Maria Luisa Betri-Ada Gigli Marchetti, Franco Angeli, Milano 1982, pp. 114-122.

[17] Ivi, pp. 101-128.

[18] Almost seventy thousand young people entered the munitions industry in 1918. Bruna Bianchi, *Crescere in tempo di guerra. Il lavoro e la protesta dei ragazzi in Italia 1915-1918*, Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, Venezia 1995.

[19] Barbara Curli, *Italiane al lavoro (1914-1920)*, Marsilio, Venezia 1998. This volume considers three case studies. In addition to tram drivers and employees, women's employment at the Pirelli factory is also analysed. Since then the theme of women's work in the industrial sector seems to have been neglected by historians, both in Italy and in other countries, where the attention to working class women diminished after the eighties and nineties. Regarding Britain, after the pioneering work of Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (1989), Routledge, Abington 2013, the studies by Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munition Workers in the Great War*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1994 and Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls, Rude Girls. Women Workers in World War I* (1998), I.B. Tauris, London 2000, few studies there have appeared. Among recent studies, see the one by Bonnie White devoted to agricultural work, *The Women's Land Army in First World War Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2014; The same can be said of Germany: the study by Ute Daniel, *The War fron Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War*, Berg, Oxford-New York 1997, is today a fundamental reference point.

The new roles and new responsibilities assumed by women aroused anxieties and fears for a possible breakdown of the hierarchical order in the family and in society. Public opinion started expressing a negative image of women workers and a strong tendency to devalue any activities made outside the domestic sphere, presenting it as something exceptional and temporary. In the press, in literature, in political speeches, the youngest women were blamed for their excessive freedom, love for entertainment and luxury, while married women were criticised for their excessive indulgence towards their children. These women were held responsible for the rebellion of young people, for their transgressive and derisive behaviour towards figures of authority: guards, "gentlemen", officers. They were mostly teenagers who entered early into the labour market and found themselves suddenly turned into breadwinners. The absence of the father figure, much lamented by social observers and lawyers, favoured a new solidarity between mothers and children, who were proud of the importance of their salary to support the family and relieve their mothers[20].

An expression of these anxieties was the investigation launched in 1918, after the Turin revolt, by the Ufficio storiografico della mobilitazione (Office for the History of Mobilization) – a position of the Minister of Arms and Munitions founded in 1916 – to ivestigate the influence of war on family ties and on women's domesticity. The inquiry revealed a widespread bitterness of women of the lower classes, their desire for autonomy, and in some cases, their relief for the departure of drunk or violent husbands. While women visitors of the Unione femminile condemned women's behaviour, the Office strengthened its purposes of social and patriarcal restoration which were to be organized by Fascism[21].

Photos spread during the war portraying women in the productive and public sphere and presenting those new roles as a break in the natural order. The photos taken inside factories showed how the presence of women workers was hidden: what is promoted is the majesty of the machines and in the background stand the women[22]. This is the case on the Ansaldo, as Augusta Molinari wrote: "Women are in the factory, but it is as if they were not there"[23].

Devaluation, blame and hostility came primarily from the workplace. Industrial and department heads, particularly in the early stages of the conflict, considered women clumsy and inexperienced, fellow workers saw in their presence the possibility of losing their job. If the factory was not a human world, nevertheless it was a male world and the new labour division proved a strong concern for preserving gender hierarchies.

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[20] Bruna Bianchi, *Crescere in tempo di guerra*.

[21] Catia Papa, *La "famiglia italiana" nell'inchiesta dell'Ufficio storiografico della mobilitazione*, in Stefania Bartoloni, *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 317-339.

[22] Paola Di Cori, *Il doppio sguardo. Visibilità dei generi sessuali nella rappresentazione fotografica (1908–1918)*, in *La Grande Guerra. Esperienze, memorie, immagini*, ed. by Diego Leoni-Camillo Zadra, il Mulino, Bologna 1986, pp. 765-799.

[23] Augusta Molinari, *Donne e ruoli femminili nell'Italia della Grande Guerra*, Selene Edizioni, Milano 2008, p. 103.

Recent research examining anonymous letters written to the management by the workers of the Ansaldo engineering company offers an example of the hostility in the violent and derogatory tones against women, a hostility that went far beyond the competition for the job and that reveals a deep contempt for the female figure. "Women are inept, lazy, of easy virtue, sometimes even thieves. Their presence has a negative effect because it 'corrupts' the dignity of work and the morality of the environment"[24]. Skill and physical strength defined the superiority of men and legitimized their right to be the only sustenance of the family. "The women workers – writes the author of an anonymous letter – arrive at the factory dressed in elegant silk stockings, they come to steal a salary from the male breadwinners"[25]. The hostility of male workers and the entrepreneurs' decision not to question the sexual division of labour, also emerge in studies carried out in France, Britain and the United States[26].

This hostility would diminish during the conflict as women were willing to take charge of the collective protest, but remained fragile, as would have been evident at the time of demobilization when the female opposition to dismissal would have been nipped in the bud because of the lack of support of the male workforce and unions.

Working at home, in the countryside and near the frontline

The myth of "male breadwinner", which in the war years British feminism radically questioned[27], was not challenged in Italy, and the few voices that rose up to claim the right of women and mothers to their economic independence came from working-class and socialist women, as is clear from the debate that appeared in the "Corriere Biella", the socialist newspaper in which women wrote columns throughout the war. Those contributions are valuable resources for Italian historiography which, unlike that of other countries[28], does not have many written and oral witness accounts by working-class women workers.

On November 3, 1916 a women worker wrote an article entitled "Feminism and Socialism" in which she asked Socialists to support demands to retain allowances for mothers after the conflict:

[24] Augusta Molinari, *Donne e ruoli femminili nell'Italia della Grande Guerra*, p. 98.

[25] *Ivi*, p. 97.

[26] On the United States, see the volume by Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work. The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*, Praeger, Ithaca-New York 1980 and that by Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality. Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca-New York 1995. See also Myra Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munition Workers in the West of Scotland during the First World War*, PhD at McMaster University, 2002; Janet Frieda Davidson, *Women and the Railroad: the Gendering of Work during the First World War Era, 1917-1920,* PhD at University of Delaware, 2000.

[27] Bruna Bianchi, *Eleanor Rathbone e l'etica della responsabilità. Profilo di una femminista (1872-1946)*, Unicopli, Milano 2012.

[28] See Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls.* Based on the interviews Thom herself collected during the 1970s, the essays in the volume are today a fundamental reference point.

> You, companions, do not realize, that ever as now time has been propitious throughout Europe, because of war governments have been forced to subsidize women, and thus to recognize the social usefulness of raising children with the right of women to live independently [...] Will you?[29]

Even sufragists were scarcely committed both to the conditions of working women and to their rights. The intense work of assistance carried out by women's groups during the conflict, as will be seen later, was much more closely linked to the duties that war imposed rather than to the rights that it could help to assert. One example is the manufacture of military clothing at home, which quickly spread from North to South and involved a much larger number of women workers (600,000) than those employed in the munitions industry (190,000 in the last year of the war)[30].

The organizers of the military clothing production could not guarantee a minimum wage for workers and, contrary to what happened in other countries, especially in France – where in 1915 the first law on the minimum wage for the women homeworkers was brought in[31] – they did not act to reorganize this kind of job by abolishing the "sweatshop system", but retained its character of assistance and charity. Some women interventionists came to regard sewing as an opportunity to give back to proletarian women their "natural female virtue"[32].

The proposal made in October 1916 at the Congress organized by the pro-Suffrage association to demand guarantees for the continuity of women's work, legal and pay scale equality, civil and political rights at the end of the war, was not welcomed and was abandoned. In war – some of the participants claimed – you must give without asking[33].

Home sewing for the army gave rise among women workers to feelings of loneliness, dependency and insecurity. Long working hours in cramped spaces and a poor diet paved the way to tuberculosis, to lung disease which, in 1918-1919, were responsible for the fatal outcomes of the "Spanish" flu. The mortality rates of women aged between 15 and 40 years, in fact, were higher than in the other European

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[29] Luigi Moranino, *Le donne socialiste nel Biellese 1910-1918*, Istituto per la storia della Resistenza "Cino Moscatelli", Vercelli 1984, pp. 183-184.

[30] Beatrice Pisa, *Un'azienda di stato a domicilio: la confezione di indumenti militari durante la grande guerra*, in "Storia contemporanea", 6, 1989, pp. 953-1006.

[31] On Gabrielle Duchêne, founder of the Office Francais du travail féminine à domicile and supporter of the campaign for the minimum wage, see Emmanuelle Carle, *Gabrielle Duchêne et la recherche d'une autre route*, PhD dissertation at the University of Montreal 2005; Colette Avrane, *Ouvrières à domicile. Le combat pour un salaire minimum sous la Troisième République*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes 2013.

[32] Beatrice Pisa, *La questione del vestiario militare fra mobilitazione civile e strategie logistiche*, in *La Grande guerra e il fronte interno. Studi in onore di George Mosse*, ed. by Alessandra Staderini-Luciano Zani-Francesca Magni, Università di Camerino, Camerino 1998, pp. 203-204.

[33] Stefania Bartoloni, *L'associazionismo femminile nella prima guerra mondiale e la mobilitazione per l'assistenza civile e la propaganda*, in *Donna lombarda 1860-1945*, ed. by Ada Gigli Marchetti-Nanda Torcellan, Franco Angeli, Milano 1992, p. 79.

countries. They were so high that the Spanish flu was known as "the women's disease"[34].

Extreme labour conditions, low wages and lack of recognition characterized the work of women in the mountain areas near the front – Carnia, the Alps, Cadore – where they were engaged in military logistics. Between 1915 and 1917 about 12,000 temporary women workers between the ages of 13 and 50 were employed in tasks such as road maintenance, transport of materials at high altitudes and in military workshops, "a work considered to be a normal duty of women and the position of subordination of women in society came out strengthened"[35].

In the mountain areas, such as the Tuscan Apennines, women were also employed in large industries. This is the case of the three factories of the Italian Metallurgical Society studied by Laura Savelli in which the female workforce exceeded 48% of employees[36]. They employed farmers, home and seasonal workers, who travelled long distances to reach factories without dormitories and other accommodation facilities.

In the countryside, where the hardships, the requisitions, the controlled prices steadily narrowed the margins of survival, the situation was always difficult. Because of the calls to arms and the migration to urban centers of young people and adolescents, the countryside was depopulated and the whole burden fell on the shoulders of the weakest and women, who in many cases had to offer themselves as daily labourers with wages that were less than half of those of the men. In rural areas separation allowances were also lower than those handed out in urban areas and lacked direct assistance. The situation was dramatic in the South where agricultural leave and exemption were very scarce, and the distance of housing from fields made agricultural work difficult for women.

Until the 1970s research on war and the rural world had favoured the figure of the peasant soldier overshadowing completely the status of women. In 1980 the study by Anna Bravo on rural women based on oral testimonies, and a few years later the collection of the stories of farmers' lives in Cuneo by Nuto Revelli[37], gave a turn to the studies that found an initial synthesis in the volume of the "Annali dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi" (1991) entirely devoted to women in the countryside and for the first time revealing the extent of women's protest[38].

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[34] On the high incidence of disease among women, see Simonetta Soldani, *La Grande Guerra lontano dal fronte*, in *Storia d'Italia, Le regioni dall'Unità ad oggi. Toscana*, ed. by Giorgio Mori, Einaudi, Torino 1986, p. 370. On the Spanish flu, see Paolo Giovannini, *L'influenza spagnola in Italia*, *Ivi*, pp. 123-141, p. 125. See also the essay by Eugenia Tognotti, *La febbre spagnola in Italia. La storia dell'influenza che fece temere la fine del mondo (1918-1919)*, Angeli, Milano 2015.

[35] Matteo Ermacora, *Cantieri di guerra. Il lavoro dei civili nelle retrovie del fronte italiano (1915-1918)*, il Mulino, Bologna 2005, pp. 114-130; Idem, in *Women Behind the Lines: the Friuli Region as a Case Study of Total Mobilization, 1915-1917*, in *Gender*, pp. 16-32.

[36] Laura Savelli, *L'industria in montagna. Uomini e donne al lavoro negli stabilimenti della Società metallurgica italiana*, Olschki, Firenze 2006.

[37] Anna Bravo, *Donne contadine e prima guerra mondiale*, in "Società e storia", 3, 1980, pp. 843-862; Nuto Revelli, *L'anello forte. Le donne. Storie di vita contadina*, Einaudi, Torino 1985.

[38] The "Annali", 13, entitled *Le donne delle campagne nella storia d'Italia* collect the essays by Giovanna Procacci, *La protesta delle donne delle campagne in tempo di guerra*, Simonetta Soldani, *Don-*

Protest

During the conflict women became the driving force of popular struggles, point of connection between factory and society, factory and countyside. Research carried out during the 1970s had focused on the protest of the masses, already underlined the importance of women's action against the war:

> … a protest that the prefects and police superintendents described with a sexist point of view, attributing the initiative to an external male subject: young socialists, soldiers on leave, clergy members, or all these together[39].

The fact that the protesters were women, mostly peasants, led the historiography that prevailed in those years to devalue its political significance and describe it as an "instinctive" initiative of mothers and wives. The women's protest was thus assimilated to the lack of rationality and organization[40]. But what those studies of the 1970s and 80s brought out with great force was the political nature of female protest against war and social inequality.

In the early months of the conflict, the protest was mostly individual[41]: leaflets, graffiti, insulting and threatening letters addressed to the the King and Ministers signed by many women[42]. In the South, in Veneto and in Friuli female participation in the protests against food-rationing laws was particularly high because women were the first to have to deal with supply problems and unemployment[43].

The Socialist Party largely repudiated these forms of protest. Examples are the riots broke out in the city of Venice in August 1914 and in the spring of 1915, which were some of the largest and most violent of those reported to the General Directorate of Public Security. For the Socialists, the women of the lower classes who were protesting against the rise in the price of onions, the lack of bread and that also involved the workers of the local Cotton Mill, were only "an anonymous, chaotic, haggard, disorganized crowd". In the "classist" and sexist vision of Vene-

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ne senza pace. Esperienze di lavoro, di lotta, di vita tra guerra e dopoguerra (1915-1920) and Laura Savelli, *Contadine e operaie. Donne al lavoro negli stabilimenti della Società Metallurgica Italiana*.

[39] Simonetta Ortaggi, *Le donne italiane nella Grande guerra*, in Eadem, *Donne, lavoro, Grande guerra (saggi II. 1982-1999)*, Unicopli, Milano 2009, p. 206.

[40] Renzo De Felice, *Ordine pubblico e orientamenti delle masse popolari nella prima metà del 1917*, in "Rivista Storica del Socialismo", settembre-dicembre 1963, pp. 467-504; Natalia De Stefano, *Moti popolari in Emilia Romagna e Toscana (1915-1917)*, in "Rivista Storica del Socialismo", X, 32, 1967, pp. 191-216.

[41] Giovanna Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta*; on the characters of the protest: Eadem, *Le donne e le manifestazioni popolari durante la neutralità e negli anni di guerra (1914-1918)*, in this issue of DEP; Roberto Bianchi, *Quelle che protestavano,1914-1918* in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 189-209.

[42] Renato Monteleone, *Lettere al re 1914-1918*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1973.

[43] Matteo Ermacora, *Un anno difficile: Buja tra pace e guerra (agosto 1914-maggio 1915)*, El Tomàt, Buja 2000; Idem, *La guerra prima della guerra. Rientro degli emigranti, proteste e spirtito pubblico nella provincia di Udine (1914-1915)*, in *Neutralità e guerra. Friuli e Litorale austriaco nella crisi del 1914-1915*, ed. by Matteo Ermacora, Istituto L Saranz-Consorzio Culturale del Monfalconese, Trieste 2015, pp. 37-58.

tian socialism, which had its stronghold in the skilled workers of the Arsenal, there was no room for "the common people" who had invaded the town[44], a prejudice which would prove to be very harsh over the years. When in Reggio Emilia, on Sunday, April 30, 1915 – which was considered a working day because the Ministry had "granted" the civil holiday of May 1st – the workers of the Officine Meccaniche manufacturing company abstained from work, the Union deplored the suspension of shells production, street demonstrations and assemblies promoted by the workers. It was a mistake, as the Union leaders declared, due to the emotional, the irrational and the weak Trade Union consciousness of women[45].

As the war continued, living conditions worsened, the industrial centres' overcrowding was affected by massive immigration, the shortage of allowances, the shortage of food, obvious social injustice, led women to resort to a thousand different forms of protest. The women workers in the auxiliary plants, less liable to be blackmailed by military and exempted workers, stopped work to protest against the inequality of wage rates, overtime and night shifts, disciplinary penalties, the revocation of agricultural exemptions. The participation of young girls was always high, as shown by recent research conducted on the basis of legal documents. In Milan, for example, about 30% of the girls who were brought to trial in 1917-1918 were considered responsible for the violation of the Decree on gatherings, strikes and protests[46]. Protests, riots, demonstrations broke out in successive waves through all the war years. Beginning in 1915, occupations of the land happened one after another and women, alone, were left to implement the invasion of uncultivated land, to return there after the police raids, to promote strikes of farm labourers and rice weeders[47]. In Sicily from the end of 1915 to 1918 over a hundred demonstrations occurred that involved thousands of women and children and protest became even more widespread between the end of March and June 1917[48].

Gradually it became clear that only a part of the population was paying the consequences of the war, and the demonstrations against the war, from winter 1916/17, began to spread across the country, culminating in spring/summer 1917 both in the countryside and in the main industrial centers of northern Lombardy and Turin, where the August riots had an insurrectional character: attacks on shops, street fighting, erection of barricades, and then the establishment of bargaining units and factory councils. The places where the women's rebellion raged were train stations to stop military convoys, shops where women were queuing for bread, municipal

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[44] Bruna Bianchi, *Venezia in Guerra*, in *Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento e il Novecento*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 2002.

[45] Marco Fincardi, *Primo maggio reggiano. Il formarsi della tradizione rossa emiliana*, Camere del Lavoro di Reggio e Guastalla, Reggio Emilia 1990, pp. 313-315.

[46] Andrea Gessner, *La delinquenza minorile a Milano durante la prima guerra mondiale*, in "Storia e problemi contemporanei", 27, 2001, pp. 85-108.

[47] Giovanna Procacci, *La protesta delle donne delle campagne in tempo di guerra*, in "Annali dell'Istituto Alcide Cervi", 13, 1991, vol. II, pp. 57-86; Simonetta Soldani, *La Grande guerra lontana dal fronte.*

[48] Margherita Bonomo, *Miracoli e rivolte. Le donne per la pace*, in *Catania e la Grande guerra. Storia, protagonisti, rappresentazioni*, ed. by Giuseppe Barone, Bonanno, Catania 2014, pp. 237-246.

offices where they went to withdraw their allowances. This was always a moment of great tension. The subsidy's irregularity and its small value (just over a pound of bread) were a source of humiliation, and in rural areas women moved quickly from demanding an increase in aid to total refusal of it: the allowances were a symbol of war that represented its continuation and a tacit acceptance of the massacre.

The issue of women's conflict in factories and in the countryside, and the protest against the war that historiography had already investigated in the 1970s and 80s, continued to emerge from studies focused on local events and through the biographies of women activists. Some examples are the recent studies of the cases of Ravenna, Tuscany, Venice and the Po Delta[49]. In Romagna, Bassi Angelini writes: "At least 15 riots were surely promoted by women between December 1916 and August 1917, to which has to be added the endemic expressions of discontent"[50]. Those women – to whom the Socialists referred as "furies", and the press and the police authorities as "screaming crowds", "foolish females", and even "flocks of women", considered as politically immature by the workers' movement, devoid of national sentiment by interventionist women engaged in mobilization – showed, on the contrary, an unsuspected radicalism. This was the case of the women's protest of Vaiano in 1915. They were organized into committees and in their long appeal against the war addressed to the mothers they referred to the values of the protection of life by accusing the homeland that sacrificed their children as being "unnatural mother"[51].

Inspirer and leader of rebellions was the socialist Teresa Meroni who on July 2nd, 1917, organized a march through the towns of the Val Bisenzio to protest against the military call-up of young people born in 1899. The march, which swelled along the way, involved women workers of various factories, farmers and men returned from the front, and for a week it flooded through the valley until it reached the threshold of Pistoia[52].

> The commitment of Teresa Meroni is not an isolated case, dozens of women in that same phase expressed a decided activism and preached in factories, markets and squares the "socialist

[49] Claudia Bassi Angelini, *"I padri guerrieri". Le donne ravennati e la prima guerra mondiale*, Longo, Ravenna 1992; Ornella Domenicali, *Maria Goia…la voce che andava prima al cuore poi alla ragione*, Il ponte vecchio, Cesena 1999; Roberto Bianchi, *Donne di Greve. Primo maggio 1917 nel Chianti: donne in rivolta contro la guerra*, Odradeck, Roma 2005; Idem, *Il fronte interno alla prova. Le opposizioni alla guerra a Prato e in Toscana*, in *Un paese in guerra. La mobilitazione civile in Italia (1914-1918)*, ed. by Daniele Menozzi-Giovanna Procacci-Simonetta Soldani, Unicopli, Milano 2010, pp. 105-132; Idem, *Quelle che protestavano*; Bruna Bianchi, *La protesta popolare nel Polesine durante la guerra*, in *Nicola Badaloni, Gino Piva e il Socialismo padano-veneto*, ed. by Giampietro Berti, Minelliana, Rovigo 1998, pp. 157-188; Eadem, *Venezia in Guerra*, pp. 349-416.

[50] Claudia Bassi Angelini, *"I padri guerrieri"*, p. 83. On the activist Maria Goia see: Ornella Domenicali, *Maria Goia*; Claudia Bassi Angelini, *La protesta femminile contro la guerra nel ravennate, 1914-1917*, in this issue of DEP.

[51] Roberto Bianchi, *Donne di Greve*, pp. 116-117.

[52] Simonetta Soldani, *La guerra lontano dal fronte*, p. 444.

verb" [...] giving voice to a project that albeit with difficulty had spread, affecting lifestyles and mentalities[53].

Again in spring 1917, in the Polesine, women put into practice a form of civil disobedience by refusing to harvest the wheat destined for the front and destroying stakes and wooden racks produced in a local factory, also set aside for the war zone. It was an expression of moral rebellion and the desire to put it into a mass action of non-participation in the war and to all that made its continuation possible: to hide men, materials and nourishment from the front through a large mass movement of active resistance. The hope of hastening the end of the war by sabotaging the supply of ammunition was apparently also at the root of many strikes in industry[54].

Irresponsible actions, in the opinion of the Socialists, they were a sign of a new political consciousness, according to the historiography that has given special importance to the ethical dimension in the behaviour of women who spontaneously and simultaneously in many parts of the country expressed their protest through similar practices: refusal to receive aid and to harvest wheat, help and encourage draft dodgers. The deserters, who in increasing numbers roamed the countryside trying to reach their own towns, offered manual work for women and in return received food and shelter. In many cases, in fact, they were arrested in farmyards and barnyards where the police caught them while they were dancing and celebrating the end of the harvest[55].

In the last year of the war, after the military defeat at Caporetto, the intensification of repressive legislation and the patriotic mobilization of the middle classes, women's protest was expressed in a more indirect way and assumed millenarian tones[56]. Women derived new ways of resistance to the war from popular piety. In spring 1918, the Ministry of Interior received numerous reports from many parts of the country (Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Marche and Sicily) of girls and boys to whom the Madonna had appeared predicting imminent peace on May 24, 1918. Women were the first to give credit to the girls, to shape the story with their exhortations. It was through informal relationships between women – adults and the elderly – who gathered in homes and barns that the news of the Madonna's appearances spread and passed from mouth to mouth. Girls, with their undoubted innocence, confirmed that the war was immoral and contrary to divine will. The authorities understood immediately the opposition to the war inherent in the pheno-

[53] Patrizia Gabrielli, *Fenicotteri in volo. Donne comuniste nel ventennio fascista*, Carocci, Roma 1999, p. 123. On Teresa Meroni and other socialist pacifist women inspirers of protest actions, see in particular pp. 124-152.

[54] Giovanna Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta*; Simonetta Soldani, *Donne senza pace*.

[55] Giovanna Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta*, pp. 280-294

[56] Giovanna Procacci, *Aspetti della mentalità collettiva durante la guerra. L'Italia dopo Caporetto*, in *La grande guerra*, pp. 261-289.

menon of the "appearances" and arrested and brought to trial even girls and children aged 8-10[57].

Refugees and confinements

From the second half of the 1980s, historiographical interests turned also to the living conditions behind the lines, the traumatic experiences of people living on borders, reconstructed through diaries, memoirs, written and oral testimony, research that once again put women, who were the majority among refugees and displaced population on centre stage.

In 1996 there appeared a few collections of women's writings on war edited by the Historical Museum of Trento and the Rovereto War Museum[58]. Women from Trentino told their experiences as refugees: the trauma of leaving, the sense of shame at being chased away with a few paltry bundles, the disorientation, the anxiety about the fate of loved ones, the hostility and the difficulties of life in the places of arrival. In 2004 these themes found a place in the first issue of "DEP Journal", which set out to provide a place for reflection on the topic of "being uprooted" from a gender viewpoint[59].

The gender analysis of these events made clear the reasons for underestimations and oversights that for a long time have dominated in historiography. It was the attribution of characteristics considered feminine, such as passivity and victimization, to define exile and exodus, and to dismiss the interest for them.

In this perspective, recent historiography has investigated the exodus of October 1917 and has reconstructed the women's action to ensure their survival and that of their loved ones, by considering their inventiveness, their courage, their willingness to assert their own dignity[60]. Alone, dispossessed of their domestic spaces and of the community support, they had to organize a new life, to fight against the common prejudices of the host communities[61].

> Women who fled in fact had to prepare for departure, to face a difficult trip to the inland, to help relatives and find new accommodation, benefits and work in the reception sites; similarly, those who remained in the invaded territories had to try to avoid violence, to weave new relations with the occupier, to fight for survival. In both cases, the new and difficult tasks

[57] On the mystic appereances in Forlì, see: Bruna Bianchi, *Crescere in tempo di guerra*, pp. 171-183; on those in Centuripe, besides Giovanna Procacci, *Aspetti della mentalità collettiva*; Margherita Bonomo, *Miracoli e rivolte*, pp. 229-235.

[58] "Scritture di guerra", n. 4, n. 5, ed.by Museo Storico in Trento/Museo della Guerra di Rovereto.

[59] Luciana Palla, *Scritture di donne: la memoria delle profughe trentine nella prima guerra mondiale*, in "DEP. Deportate, esuli, profughe", 1, 2004, pp. 45-52; Daniele Ceschin, *Le condizioni delle donne profughe e dei bambini dopo Caporetto*, *Ivi*, pp. 23-44.

[60] See in particular Camillo Pavan, *L'ultimo anno della prima guerra. Il 1918 nel racconto dei friulani e veneti*, Cooperativa servizi culturali, Santa Lucia di Piave 2004; Idem, *In fuga dai tedeschi: l'invasione del 1917 nel racconto dei testimoni*, s.n., Treviso 2004. See also the numerous interviews the author made during the 1990s to those who then were children, now available on-line: http://camillopavan.blogspot.it/. See also in this issue of DEP the essay by Francesco Frizzera, *Escluse dalla narrazione pubblica. Profughe trentine nella Grande guerra,* in this isuue of DEP.

[61] Daniele Ceschin, *Le condizioni delle donne profughe*.

> were burdened by a even stronger psychological burden due to separation: children and relatives lost while fleeing, husbands called to arms or prisoners, relatives remained in the invaded territories or fled across the Piave river[62].

The failure of government allowances and the rising cost of living forced women to accept work at home or in workshops for the manufacture of military clothing or in factories at reduced wages, to replace the women who had been fired.

The condition of those who remained in the occupied territories was even harder: violence, lootings, requisitions, housebreakings contributed to an existence dominated by the worry about the need to protect children and support the elderly, and by poverty[63].

Although in Italy the occupation lasted for a shorter period than in other countries, cases of death among the population were very high: according to calculations made by Giorgio Mortara on the basis of data provided by the Commission were 43,562 which means 26,756 more than the average of the years immediately preceding the conflict[64]. The children and the elderly were those who suffered most from famine, and women had to ensure their survival by hiding food and animals, gleaning, and stealing[65].

And yet, with the passing of time, the sharing of difficult living conditions in an impoverished area favoured the rise of feelings of compassion towards the invaders, who were hungry too, and also anxious about the fate of their families[66]. The sense of autonomy and freedom that women experienced in those months, including relations with the foreign soldiers, led to later accusations of collaboration or prostitution.

Rape and "the children of the enemy"

During the last year of the war the most traumatic experience was sexual assault, a subject on which some studies have focused their attention only in the last decade[67]. Based on the documentation of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on the

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[62] Matteo Ermacora, *Le donne italiane*, pp. 20-21.

[63] There were almost 900,000 civilians who remained in the occupied territories. On women's experiences in occupied territories see Teresa Fava Thomas, Occupation, *Hunger, and Disease. The Great War as Experienced by the Women of Revine Lago in Italy and America*, in this issue of DEP; Matteo Ermacora, *Nei tribunali dell'occupante. Donne e giustizia militare austriaca nel Veneto invaso (1917-1918)*, in this issue of DEP*;* Idem, *Inside the Storm. The Experieces of Women during the Austro-German Occupation of Veneto 1917-1918,* in *Living War, Thinking Peace (1914-1924). Women's Experiences, Feminist Thought, and International Relations*, ed. by Bruna Bianchi-Geraldine Ludbrook, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016, pp. 26-43.

[64] Giorgio Mortara, *La salute pubblica*, p. 79.

[65] Matteo Ermacora, *Donne e giustizia militare austriaca.*

[66] Gustavo Corni, *La società bellunese nell'ultimo anno di guerra*, in *La memoria della Grande Guerra nelle Dolomiti*, Gaspari, Udine 2001, p. 96, 129.

[67] Antonio Gibelli, *Guerra e violenze sessuali: il caso Veneto e friulano*, in *La memoria della Grande Guerra nelle Dolomiti*, pp. 195-206; Laura Calò, *Le donne friulane e la violenza di Guerra durante l'occupazione austro-tedesca 1917-1918. Alcuni esempi per la Carnia*, in *Carnia invasa 1917-1918. Storia, documenti e fotografie dell'occupazione austro-tedesca del Friuli*, ed. by Enrico Folisi, Arti Grafiche Friulane, Udine 2005, pp. 111-131; Daniele Ceschin, *"L'estremo oltraggio". La violenza*

violation of human rights committed by the enemy, Daniele Ceschin has reconstructed the extent and mode of rapes in occupied areas. Committed in a premeditated way by individuals or, more often, by groups of soldiers, accompanied by other forms of violence and humiliation, regarded with absolute indulgence by commands, rapes were numerous: 375 women suffered violence in which 53 were killed[68]. In one case, in Oderzo, a mass rape of 180 young women was reported, after which 40 children were born, but we will probably never know the number of children born from rape, nor the number of abortions and cases of infanticide.

As happened in other countries, rapes had great resonance in the propaganda which put emphasis on the humiliation of men, often portrayed as helpless witnesses of the outrage, unable to defend their wives and daughters from the aggression of the enemy, a representation which aimed to preserve traditional concepts of gender roles; the men were urged to act as men and to defend women, passive victims[69]. After Caporetto the demonic and bestial image of the enemy became more marked, more and more frequently it was associated to the figures of unarmed women and children, as the contrast between the chivalrous defender and the brutal militarist was stressed[70].

Reaffirming a model of hierarchical family headed by the man and an image of women as weak creatures to dominate and protect, propaganda was operating an indirect devaluation of new roles and new responsibilities that during the conflict women were taking, both at home and in the society at large.

The experience of raped women, and in particular of those who gave birth to "the children of the enemy", was hushed up. The theme of the children of the enemy, already addressed by British and French historiography, has been studied on the basis of publications and archival sources[71]. Barbara Montesi retraced the debate on the decriminalization of abortion that took place in Italy from the early stages of the war, specifically on the right of the State to suppress the "German bastard",

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alle donne in Friuli e in Veneto durante l'occupazione franco-germanica (1917-1918), in *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Grande guerra. Deportati, profughi, internati*, ed. by Bruna Bianchi, Unicopli, Milano 2006, pp. 165-184; Bruna Bianchi, *"Militarismo versus femminismo". La violenza alle donne negli scritti e nei discorsi pubblici delle femministe durante la Grande guerra*, in "DEP. Deportate esuli profughe", 10, 2009, pp. 94-109. On the children's enemy, see also Laura Guidi, *La mobilitazione dell'infanzia, La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 213-227, an essay which lays the foundations for a social history of childhood during the war, a still neglected field of research.

[68] Daniele Ceschin, *L'estremo oltraggio*, p. 169; Idem, *Dopo Caporetto. L'invasione, l'occupazione, la violenza sui civili*, in "Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa", XXVIII, 2013, pp. 167-185; Elpidio Ellero, *Le donne nella prima guerra mondiale. In Veneto e in Friuli*, Gaspari, Udine 2015.

[69] Nicola Della Volpe, *Esercito e propaganda nella Grande guerra*, Ufficio storico SME, Roma 1989; Enrico Sturani, *La donna del soldato. L'immagine della donna nella cartolina italiana*, Museo Storico della Guerra, Rovereto 2005.

[70] Barbara Bracco, *Il corpo e la guerra tra iconografia e politica*, in "Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa", XXVIII, 2013, pp. 303-320.

[71] Ruth Harris, *The "Child of the Barbarian": Rape, Race and Nationalism in France during the First World War*, in "Past and Present", 4, 1993, pp. 170-206; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'enfant de l'ennemi 1914-1918*, Aubier, Paris 1995; Nicoletta Gullace, *Sexual Violence and Family Honour: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War*, in "American Historical Review", 2, 1997, pp. 714-747.

otherwise destined to swell the ranks of criminals and "deficient". This was a debate characterised by the culture of degeneration, the conception of a biologically inferior enemy, and worry about juvenile crime. The possibility that mothers could love "the children of the enemy" was put forward only by female voices. After the invasion, the State opted for removing of the unwanted children. To free families from "intruders", the so-called *tedeschetti* (little Germans), in December 1918 the Institute San Filippo Neri was founded in Portogruaro, in the province of Venice. It was home to 42 children resulting from rape and 69 illegitimate children born from relations with German and Austrian soldiers. Based on the records kept at the Institute, a unique source at international level, Andrea Falcomer noted the very high mortality of infants hosted at the Neri Institute and gave voice to the pain of mothers forced by their husbands, families and communities to abandon their children, a real "stolen childhood"[72].

Traumatized women, prostitutes, widows

Psychological and mental consequences of women's experiences during the conflict are still very little studied. In the history of the madness related to the Great War men have a central place and only very recently has historiography felt the need to also dwell on the traumatic experience of women, those who year after year saw gradually decrease hopes, food, affections, always waiting for news that, when it arrived, was almost always bad. Yet it was feminist historiography that in the mid-1980s, decoding the symptoms of hysterical soldiers, showed how gender issues are crucial to understanding the history of the experience of men as well as of women[73].

The traumatic experience that led a growing number of women to mental hospitals[74], therefore, remains still largely closed in the archives of the psychiatric hospitals that, unlike what happens in other countries, hold extensive, well-preserved and almost always accessible records. As revealed by a study dedicated to the asylum internment of Reggio Emilia[75], the hospitalized women were sunk into a state of despair at the news of the departure or death of their husbands or sons. Although the psychiatrist of the mental hospital, Dr. Maria Del Rio, did not move away from the current interpretation of the neuroses induced by war, or from the idea that they reveal a congenital mental weakness, her remarks open an insight on the lives of

[72] Andrea Falcomer, *"Gli orfani dei vivi". Madri e figli della violenza nell'attività dell'Istituto S. Filippo Neri (1918-1947)*, in "DEP. Deportate esuli profughe", 10, 2008, pp. 76-93.

[73] On the feminist anlysis, see Bruna Bianchi, *Il trauma della modernità. Le nevrosi di guerra nella storiografia contemporanea*, in *Dalle trincee al manicomio*, ed. by Andrea Scartabellati, Marco Valerio, Torino 2008, pp. 21-24.

[74] On the growing number of hospitalized women, see Francesco Paolella, *"Solo un'immensa fonte di dolore". Appunti per una ricerca sulle donne in manicomio durante la Grande guerra*, in "E-Review Dossier", 2, 2014, http://e-review.it/paolella-solo-un-immensa-fonte-di-dolore.

[75] Marisa Azzolini, *Donne tra guerra e follia. L'esperienza di Maria Del Rio a Reggio Emilia*, in *Dalle trincee al manicomio*, pp. 331-362.

women of the lower classes[76]. The medical records of elderly women contain annotations on a succession of pregnancies, abortions, the death of young children, the daily struggle against poverty. The worries related to the war appear the last link in a long chain of sufferings, deprivations, losses. For the youngest (19-20 years), it was the trauma of a life suddenly broken by the death of their husbands in the war or the anguish for their siblings that was the cause of their hospitalization.

In her essay *Da fronti opposti. La guerra delle donne in manicomio* (From opposite fronts: women's war in the asylum) Annacarla Valeriano writes that anguish, fears, hunger, displacement "were primarily a women's affair". For many of them anxieties of responsibility became fears; they were haunted by visions of wounded soldiers, bombing, enemies ready to attack, obsessed by ravings of ruin. Others had visions of the Virgin Mary who predicted the imminent peace[77].

Experiences of humiliation and violence that have been completely forgotten are those related to prostitution, "a theme that continues to be seen as an indicator of male sexuality"[78]. Sexual slavery, in fact, was considered an inevitable part of the severing of ties, a need to release the tension of life in the trenches, a reward for the soldiers, not a form of violence, an aspect of the degradation of relations between sexes accentuated by the conflict. The military hierarchy carefully organized the degradation of women and regulated in detail the exploitation of their bodies[79].

The presence of the soldiers behind the lines, the poverty and precariousness of women's lives gave a strong impetus to clandestine prostitution, common among girls who as servants, ironers, street vendors, homemaids, went to the large cities like Venice, Vicenza, Bassano, Udine, Belluno[80] to work. Women affected by prejudice and repression, object of contempt and moral reprobation, excluded from assistance, once arrested in many cases were interned. Internment in fact did not affect only political dissidents, but also prostitutes, hotel keepers, dealers, hostesses, and generally women who enjoyed relative autonomy, who held a job that brought them into contact with the public and therefore were considered capable of exerci-

[76] A recent study has revealed that Dr. Giulia Bonarelli at the Neurological Centre of Ancona, unlike most psychiatrists, did not resort to painful therapies, but to treatment methods based on dialogue and persuasion. Maria Grazia Salonna, *Gli "Scemi di guerra". I militari ricoverati al Manicomio di Ancona durante la Grande Guerra*, Edizioni ae, Ancona 2015, pp. 60-62.

[77] In this issue of DEP. See also the essay by Anna Grillini dedicated to the asylum internement of Pergine Valsugana and Bologna focused on refugees: *Follia e psichiatria vicino e lontano dal fronte*, in this issue of DEP.

[78] Anna Bravo, *Lavorare in tempo di guerra*, in *Operaie, serve, maestre, impiegate*, ed. by Paola Nava, pp. 397-421, p. 397.

[79] Based on Army's official sources, the degradation of women was reconstructed by Emilio Franzina, *Casini di guerra. Il tempo libero della trincea e i postriboli militari*, Gaspari, Udine 1999; Idem, *Le fabbriche dell'amore castrense: Case e Casini del soldato*, in Luciana Palla et alias, *La memoria della Grande Guerra nelle Dolomiti*, Gaspari, Udine 2001, pp. 151-173.

[80] Bruna Bianchi, *Venezia in guerra*; Matteo Ermacora, *Udine, "una capitale al fronte". Vita quotidiana, militarizzazione, spirito pubblico 1915-1917*, in *Fronti interni. Esperienze di guerra lontano dalla guerra 1914-1918*, ed. by Andrea Scartabellati-Matteo Ermacora-Felicita Ratti, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Napoli 2014, pp. 109-127.

sing wide influence[81]. Also the wives of enemy aliens, who by law had taken their husbands' citizenship, were interned and often considered dangerous, suspected of collaborating with the enemy[82].

As has happened with women refugees, and even more for women who suffered violence, the memory of the interned has been relegated to an individual, perhaps familiar, dimension; it did not become an autonomous and recognized public memory.

Another page of history yet to be written is the one that concerns the 200,000 war widows[83]. In the mid-1990s Francesca Lagorio outlined a first picture of their condition and their associations. The letters and petitions widows sent to the authorities reflect the mood of women whose life was marked not only by loss, but also by serious and persistent economic difficulties. The wage gap, in fact, did not decrease with the war; it therefore condemned single women to poverty, a condition that the low level of State allowances could not in any way relieve[84]. There followed the later study on the widows in the province of Padua[85] and the research by Anne Wingenter that focuses in particular on the political and symbolic use of the figure of widow-mother, always showed off in public celebrations like a sore figure, and especially a quiet one[86].

Patriotic mobilisation and political interventionism

The theme that in recent years has been object of particular attention both in Italy and abroad[87], and that is still at the centre of women's history and gender stu-

[81] Matteo Ermacora, *Le donne internate in Italia durante la Grande Guerra. Esperienze, scritture e memorie*, in "DEP. Deportate esuli profighe", 7, 2007, pp. 1-32.

[82] Daniela Luigia Caglioti, *Tra la Sardegna e Katzenau. Donne e uomini al confino e nei campi di concentramento*, in *La Grande guerra delle italiane,* pp. 249-270.

[83] On this topic in European historical studies see: Peggy Bette, *Veuves françaises de la Première guerre mondiale: Statuts, itinéraire et combats*, thèse de doctorat Université de Lyon, 2013; Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out. How Two Million British Women Survived without Men after the First World War,* Oxford University Press, New York 2007; Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of Nation after the Great War*, New York University Press, New York 2012; Angela K. Smith, *Discourses Surrounding British Widows of the First World War*, Bloomsbury, London-New York 2013.

[84] Francesca Lagorio, *Appunti per una storia sulle vedove di guerra italiane nei conflitti mondiali*, in "Rivista di storia contemporanea", 1-2, 1994-1995.

[85] Alessandro Bau', *"I figli miei che non son più miei". Note sulla condizione delle vedove di guerra a Padova nel primo dopoguerra (1923-1927)*, in "Venetica", 5, 2002, pp. 79–104.

[86] Anne M. Wingenter, *Le veterane del dolore: Mothers and Widows of the "Fallen" in Fascist Italy*, PhD thesis from Loyola University Chicago, May 2003.

[87] On women's nationalization process, see Allison Scardino Belzer, *Women and the Great War*; Emma Schiavon, *Interventiste nella Grande guerra. Assistenza, propaganda, lotta per i diritti a Milano e in Italia (1911-1919)*, Le Monnier, Firenze 2015.

dies, is the involvement of women in patriotic mobilisation, as a sign of a new historiographical attention to the women's nationalization processes[88].

Research focused on nurses, teachers, activities of many middle-class women in committees of civil mobilization and support, and on women's organizations[89], have revealed the dimension and nature of a long-neglected and overlooked activism, and have stressed its importance for women's emancipation process.

In addition to describing the varied universe of female interventionism, these studies have also analyzed the forms of mobilisation, focusing on some significant examples: the aid activity carried out by women's associations in the North, working together with the Socialist administrations of Milan and Bologna, and that of the Roman women's associations, which were more closely tied to a charitable logic and practice of patronage[90]. At the national level Catholic women, well organized in Unione donne of the Azione cattolica, assumed a leading role in the assistances of war, a commitment for a Christian reconstruction of society[91].

These studies, helped by the affirmation of contemporary feminism in Italy and abroad that has emphasised women's self-realization and their aspirations to act as protagonists in the public sphere, have filled a gap in historiography, and shed light on the urban life[92], highlighting the weakness of feminist pacifism in Italy. However, they have also revealed the fragility of an emancipation project based on the reception of nationalist values that was unable to see the connection between war, militarism, state organization and oppression of women.

Most of these studies move from criticism to the historiographical interpretation initiated by Franca Pieroni Bortolotti and Annarita Buttafuoco[93], which saw in the

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[88] See also *Di generazione in generazione. Le italiane dall'Unità ad oggi*, ed. by Maria Tresa Mori-Alessandra Pescarolo-Anna Scattigno-Simonetta Soldani, Viella, Roma 2014.

[89] On the Consiglio Nazionale delle donne italiane (Cndi, National Council of Italian Women), see: Daniela Rossini, *Nazionalismo, internazionalismo e pacifismo femminile alle soglie della Grande Guerra: il CNDI e il Congresso dell'International Council of Women del 1914 a Roma*, in "Giornale di Storia Contemporanea", 2009, n. 2, pp. 57-89; Eadem, *Il Consiglio nazionale delle donne italiane: affinità e contrasti internazionali*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 113-129. On the Unione femminile, see: Graziella Gaballo, *Il nostro dovere. L'Unione femminile tra impegno sociale, guerra e fascismo*, Edizioni Joker, Novi Ligure 2015, pp. 157-255 and the essay by Francesco Scomazzon, *Concordia parvae res crescunt, discordia maximae dilabuntur: l'Unione Femminile nazionale in tempo di guerra (1915-1919)*, in this issue of DEP.

[90] Alessandra Staderini, *Combattenti senza divisa. Roma nella Grande guerra*, il Mulino, Bologna 2005; Beatrice Pisa, *La mobilitazione civile e politica delle italiane nella Grande guerra*, in "Giornale di storia contemporanea", 1, 2001, pp. 79-103. On the mobilization in a region in the vicinity of the frontline, see Nadia Maria Filippini, *Nei territori del fronte: L'area veneta*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 229-247.

[91] Beatrice Pisa, *La guerra delle donne cattoliche (1908-1919)*, in "Percorsi storici. Rivista di Storia contemporanea", 2, 2014, http://www.percorsistorici.it/numeri.html?layout=edit&id=105.

[92] For a review of the studies devoted to urban life, which until recently focused on the development of the war industry, see Alessandra Staderini, *Le città italiane durante la prima guerra mondiale*, in "Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa", XXVIII, 2013, pp. 249–264.

[93] Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *La donna, la pace, l'Europa: l'Associazione internazionale delle donne dalle origini alla prima guerra mondiale*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1985; Annarita Buttafuoco, *La filantropia come politica. Esperienze dell'emancipazionismo italiano nel Novecento*, in *Ragnatele di rap-*

war an event that put an end to the emancipationist project, distorting the moral principles – namely pacifism and internationalism – on which it was founded. For interventionist organizations, war was seen as a unique opportunity to affirm women's citizenship, a citizenship based on the values of care and motherhood at the service of the nation. It was not therefore a concession to warmongering pressure, but a precise strategy aimed at recognizing the inclusion of women in the nation and the state[94], an attempt to keep alive and strengthen their organizations after the war or support the training of professional social workers[95].

Aware of the link between citizenship and military service, the intellectuals who led the women's movement sought to be included in the nation on the base of activities that had the same value as military service. Patriotism seemed to be the only legitimate form through which women could access politics, and they walked the path of fidelity to the nation.

> On several occasions, women's groups demanded that the work done in committees of assistance was considered equivalent to military auxiliary service, and publicly recognized through uniforms, badges and decorations: these requests were always carefully rejected[96].

Their reward would be neither suffrage nor inclusion in public memory and gratitude, but simply not to be subject to censure, and if during the war there were signs of recognition, they would soon be revealed as formal as they were ephemeral. Yet, despite the failure of the inclusion strategy, the effort of many women involved in the mobilization and assistance deserves careful consideration. For example, the genuine patriotic sentiment common among women who suffered the charm of the heroic deeds of the Risorgimento kept alive both by the irredentism and the thought of Mazzini cannot be ignored. The sense of duty to the nation and to the most vulnerable sectors of the population spread by contagion from one place to another throughout the country, and also involved many of those who did not welcome the war enthusiastically, but in alleviating suffering they found relief from isolation and helplessness. They were middle-class women whose efforts gave

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porti. Patronage e reti di relazione nella storia delle donne, ed. by Lucia Ferrante-Maura Palazzi-Gianna Pomata, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1988, pp. 166-187.

[94] Emma Schiavon, *L'interventismo femminista*, in "Passato e presente", 54, 2001, pp. 59-72; Eadem, *Interventismo al femminile nella grande guerra. Assistenza e propaganda a Milano e in Italia*, in "Italia contemporanea", 234, 2004, pp. 89-104; Eadem, *Interventiste nella Grande Guerra. Assistenza, propaganda, lotta per i diritti a Milano e in Italia (1911-1919)*, Le Monnier, Firenze 2015. On the town of Reggio Emilia, see Elda Paterlini Brianti, *La mobilitazione femminile. Le donne reggiane e le associazioni di volontariato civile durante la Grande Guerra*, in *Piccola patria. Grande Guerra. La Prima guerra mondiale a Reggio Emilia*, ed. by Mirco Carrattieri-Alberto Ferraboschi, Clueb, Bologna 2008, pp. 205-219.

[95] Augusta Molinari, *Una patria per le donne. La mobilitazione femminile nella Grande guerra*, il Mulino, Bologna 2014. Eadem, *Operatrici sociali per la patria*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 151-166. On the identification of women as wives, sisters and mothers of soldiers see also: Augusta Molinari, *La buona signora e i poveri soldati. Lettere ad una madrina di guerra (1915-1918)*, Scriptorium, Torino 1998; Eadem, *Da donne a italiane: il patriottismo femminile nella Grande Guerra*, in *Guerre e culture tra età moderna e contemporanea*, ed by Susanna Delfino, Pierangelo Castagneto, Genova 2002, pp. 85-101.

[96] Emma Schiavon, *Interventismo al femminile*, p. 93.

them a state of "temporary citizenship" and that was for many "an indirect recognition of rights"[97].

Nevertheless we still know very little about their mood, thought, and sense of identity. Brought together into hundreds of associations, they worked hard for the care of children and widows; through news offices they kept connections between the front and families, they facilitated the distribution of subsidies and the processing of clothing for the army. Although to a much lesser extent than in the Northern cities, they were also active in the South and the Islands; in Palermo at the end of the war there were 70 childcare facilities that could accommodate 3,500 children[98]. In most cases, however, these associations did not go beyond the traditional practice of charity.

Ethics of sacrifice, obedience and duty, but also an attempt to combine the idea of homeland with new spaces of freedom encouraged the volunteers who went to the front, as was documented by Stefania Bartoloni in her monograph on the Volunteer Nurses Corps[99]. Bartoloni reconstructs the history of the Corps and retraces its activities, filling a gap in Italian historiography.

The commitment of the Italian nurses in the post-war years enabled many young women to approach politics, giving an important contribution to the reform of the nursing sector[100]. However, many of those who "went to war" to meet ambitions too long denied, changed their attitude during the conflict. Their closeness to suffering, made unbearable by the shortage of military doctors, developed in them a sense of intimate disgust for war, and the pride that shines through their memories is a result of being able to cope with fatigue and mental attrition. Bartoloni invites us to reflect on the cancellation of the figure of the military nurses and of their testimonies from the official representation of war. Perhaps this happened because their image evoked the vulnerability of the soldier or because often from their writings emerged the same bitterness, the same impatience with the patriotic rhetoric that characterizes the writings of many soldiers. The myth of the experience of war, built and defended at the ideological, political and social level had to remain a male myth designed to give self-confidence to men and urge a rapid return to normality. "Without the movement noticing", women were imprisoned "in the role of assistant, nurse and grieving mother"[101].

The nurse's image, animated by the desire to establish herself as an expert practitioner to later become a witness of the destructiveness of war – the female equivalent of the embittered veteran – is also reflected in international studies that in re-

[97] Augusta Molinari, *Una patria per le donne*, p. 11.

[98] Augusta Molinari, *Una patria per le donne*, p. 180.

[99] Stefania Bartoloni, *Italiane alla guerra. L'assistenza ai feriti 1915-1918*, Marsilio, Venezia 2003. See also, edited by Stefania Bartoloni, the rich photographic volume: *Donne al fronte. Le infermiere volontarie nela Grande Guerra*, Jouvence, Roma 1998.

[100] On women and the project of nursing care reform see Eadem, *"Due milioni di senza-marito": occupazioni femminili e politiche sociali*, in Eadem, *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 341-364.

[101] Maria Cristina Angeleri, *Dall'emancipazionismo all'interventismo democratico: il primo movimento politico delle donne di fronte alla Grande guerra*, in "Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica", 1, 1996, pp. 199-216, p. 211.

cent years have focused on the daily work of nurses, on their traumatic experiences and those of soldiers they took care of[102].

Another female part of society that was mobilized for the country were teachers. Inclined to identify themselves with the myth of the fourth war of independence, most of the teachers adapted themselves to times and demands the authorities made on them under pressures and threats of dismissal[103]. Overall – as Simonetta Soldani wrote – the war strengthened the teachers' inclination to present themselves as guardians of a social order founded on obedience and respect for the hierarchy. Only some outstanding personalities had the strength to express their beliefs against the war, such as Abigaille Zanetta, Rita Majerotti, Emma Montagnani Rossi, Maria Giudice, Alda Costa, activists who were persecuted, imprisoned and repeatedly interned[104]. Also for teachers the war was an opportunity to leave the subordinate and precarious role to which they were confined, and many of them, particularly in 1917, eventually converged in the bellicose Unione Generale degli Insegnanti Italiani (UGII; General Union of Italian Teachers). Many teachers worked hard on the propaganda activity of UGII, but they also played a part in every initiative that had charitable purposes by offering their full cooperation to the social reformist administrations of Milan and Bologna. Even teachers who were moderately neutralist devoted themselves to charitable activities, especially in childcare and news offices, on which recent historiography has shed light. The Ufficio Notizie (News Office), organized by Countess Lina Cavazza, inaugurated its activities in Bologna in June 1915. The task of the Central office as well as of the peripheral offices, was to gather information about soldiers killed, wounded or missing from military units and health structures thus relieving the waiting agony of families. In

[102] On war nurses the bibliography is extensive. Some recent studies that have focused on the issue of trauma: Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2010, which highlights the complexity of the daily work of nurses, from the surgery to all the practices of "containment" of physical and psychological trauma, to empathy. The research of D. J. Poynter is dedicated to the theme of trauma: *"The Report on Her Transfer Was Shell Shock": A Study of the Psychological Disorders of Nurses and Female Voluntary Aid Detachment Who Served alongside the British and Allied Expeditinary Forces During the First World War, 1914-1918*, PhD dissertation, University of Northampton, 2008. See also the collection of essays edited by Alison Fell-Christine E. Hallett, *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, Routledge, New York 2013. Even this collection devoted to the Allied countries did not take into account the case of Italy. The study by Peter Rees, *The Other Anzacs: Nurses at War, 1914-1918*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, N.S.W. 2008, is dedicated to the nurses' traumatic experience on the edge of the horrific battlefront of Gallipoli.

[103] Simonetta Soldani, *Al servizio della patria. Le maestre nella Grande Guerra*, in *Un paese in guerra*, pp. 183-211, p. 195.

[104] On Abigaille Zanetta, see: Bruno Fortichiari-Mario Malatesta, *Abigaille Zanetta (1875-1945)*, Officine Grafiche A. Saita, Milano 1948; Angela Stevani Colantoni-Carlo Antonio Barberini, *Una figura di militante internazionalista. Abigaille Zanetta maestra a Milano tra guerra e fascismo,* Pantarei, Milano 2016; on Alda Costa: Marco Cazzola, *Alda Costa. Scritti e discorsi (1905-1921)*, Spazio libri, Ferrara 1992; Patrizia Gabrielli, *Fenicotteri*; on Rita Majerotti: *Rita Majerotti, Il romanzo di una maestra*, ed. by Lucia Motti, Ediesse, Roma 1995; on Maria Giudice: Vittorio Poma, *Una maestra fra i socialisti. L'itinerario politico di Maria Giudice*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1991.

total, 25,000 women, many of whom teachers and students, worked in 16 offices in cities where the army command corps were placed[105].

Activism as vast in terms of care and propaganda, however, was not accompanied by a reflection on the reasons for joining the conflict, the meaning of homeland and nation, nor the character of modern warfare. "Just War", "fight against German militarism" and the image of war as a producer of civil progress were recurring formulas more declaimed than analyzed.

Teresa Labriola and Rosalia Gwis have both been studied from a theoretical point of view. Beatrice Pisa focused on reconstructing the intellectual and political path of Rosalia Gwis. She was first a pacifist close to Teodoro Moneta – the Italian voice of a patriotic pacifism that advocated a "Europe of nations" and "ended up being involved in the rampant warrior and patriotic ideology of the times"[106]. Then, after the war, she became a Socialist. Teresa Labriola's experience was different. From the beginning of the century she began a process of justifying war that would lead her to approach Giovanni Gentile and, later, Fascism. She saw in the struggle a manifestation of life and in the state a spiritual entity capable of transcending its nature, that is of representing the rules of privileged classes. From her point of view, nationalism could be reconciled with feminism; the separation of family life from the public life could be overcome by the war that would bring women out of their lower life, "all nature and no history", to which they had been relegated[107].

After the defeat of Caporetto all associations slid progressively towards anti-democratic ideas and projects, and also the practice of care ended up rallying to the nationalist content of ideological interventionism with its exaltation of domesticity. It was the result of the contradiction inherent in wanting to present women as a "landmark of civil society, wondering at the same time at the exaltation of military values"[108].

Overall it can be said with Perry Willson that the work associated with the war transformed the attitude of the feminists. Through the work in the committees many feminists came into contact with the nationalist and anti-socialist right-wing, and this helped to undermine their commitment to democracy[109].

If historiography has shed light on the motivations and activities of various women's associations in support of their country, we still know little about daily activism, the relationship between women of different social classes, cultures and

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[105] Elisa Erioli, *L'ufficio per le notizie alle famiglie dei militari. Una grande storia di volontariato femminile bolognese*, in "Bollettino del Museo del Risorgimento di Bologna", 2005, pp. 75-89; Jacopo Lorenzini-Giacomo Bollini, *Bologna e l'Ufficio per le notizie alle famiglie dei militari. Note introduttive*, in *Fronti interni*, pp. 185-199.

[106] Beatrice Pisa, *Modelli e linguaggi del pacifismo femminile tra vecchia Europa e Nuovo mondo: Rosalia Gwis Adami e Jane Addams (1911-1919)*, in *Le americane. Donne e immagini di donne fra Belle Epoque e fascismo*, ed. by Daniela Rossini, Biblink, Roma 2008, p. 63.

[107] Fiorenza Taricone, *Teresa Labriola. Biografia politica di un'intellettuale tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1994, pp. 163-184; Sara Follacchio, *"L'ingegno aveva acuto e la mente aperta". Teresa Labriola. Appunti per una biografia*, in "Storia e problemi contemporanei", 17, 1996, pp. 65-89.

[108] Beatrice Pisa, *La mobilitazione civile e politica*, p. 103.

[109] Perry Willson, *Italiane*, p. 84.

living conditions. Much remains to be explored of messages, behaviours and ways of thinking beyond the political speeches, either patriotic or charitable. What were the feelings with which the women of the lower classes welcomed aid? How did they receive the propaganda messages that were instilled through assistance? What the current state of the studies, and in particular the analysis of the social conflict, allows us to state is that women of the lower classes did not accept to sublimate their suffering and their bereavements on the altar of the homeland.

Anarchists, socialists, pacifists

Even socialist and anarchist women were not united in opposition to the war. Those who remained faithful to the ideal of internationalism, as Angelica Balabanoff[110], were a minority.

In recent years historiography has pledged to rebuild the intellectual and political path of anarchists focusing on the individual personality of anarchists[111] and socialist women who moved toward interventionism, such as Margherita Sarfatti[112], Maria Rygier[113] and Regina Terruzzi[114].

Socialists were among the first to abandon the idea of neutrality, a position that led the Socialist party to the appointment of a commissioner for their journal "La Difesa delle Lavoratrici" that came under male editorship for the duration of the war. As early as January 1915 Giselda Brebbia welcomed the idea of a defence war in the journal's pages. Internationalism, she wrote, goes beyond the concept of home, but does not destroy it[115]. The idea of the nation in its dealings with the ideal of internationalism, the insidious distinction between defence wars and aggression wars, the unresolved ties into pre-war socialist and pacifist thought, all together increased the confusion even among socialist women and prepared the path for interventionism.

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[110] On Angelica Balabanoff, see: Amedeo La Mattina, *Mai sono stata tranquilla*, Einaudi, Torino 2011.

[111] Elena Bignami, *Le schiave degli schiavi: la questione femminile dal socialismo utopistico all'anarchismo italiano (1825-1917)*, Clueb, Bologna 2011; Eadem, *"Se le guerre le facessero le donne": l'opposizione delle anarchiche italiane alla guerra (1903-1915)*, in this issue of DEP.

[112] Simona Urso, *la formazione di Margherita Sarfatti e l'adesione al* fascismo, in "Studi Storici", 1, 1994, pp. 153-181; Lia Levi, *La pacifista che si innamorò della violenza*, in Marta Boneschi et alias, Introduzione di Dacia Maraini*, Donne nella Grande Guerra,* il Mulino, Bologna 2014, pp. 115-136; Stefania Bartoloni, *Margherita Sarfatti, una intellettuale tra nazione e fascismo,* in *Di generazione in generazione*, pp. 207-220.

[113] Barbara Montesi, *Un'anarchica monarchica: vita di Maria Rygier (1885-1953)*, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Napoli 2013. Among recently published biographies of anarchists who remained true their anti-militarist positions, I remember: Francesca Piccioli, *Virgilia D'Andrea. Storia di un'anarchica*, Centro Studi Libertari "Camillo di Sciullo", Chieti 2002; Edda Fonda, *Posso sempre pensare. Quando le italiane non votavano. Storia di Leda Rafanelli*, Cromografica, Roma 2013.

[114] Federica Falchi, *L'itinerario politico di Regina Terruzzi: dal mazzinianesimo al fascismo*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2008.

[115] Maria Casalini, *I socialisti e le donne. Dalla "mobilitazione pacifista" alla smobilitazione postbellica*, in "Italia Contemporanea", 222, 2001, pp. 6-41.

During 1915 and 1916, "La Difesa" led a smear campaign against women as involuntary accomplices of the war. They were found guilty of passivity, lack of organization, of failing to prevent war, to be slaves of clericalism, of being selfish, to not knowing how to fight, but only cry or pray and, above all, to cultivate a maternal sentiment that would not go beyond their children. Casalini writes:

> In no other cultural tradition has female thought come out of the conflict so annihilated and degraded. That woman who earlier bravely took on the job, the place of her husband to support her loved ones, not only seems to be primarily responsible for sending so many young people to the front, but also being the cause of the inevitable degeneration of her own family. There is no an article in the Socialist women's newspaper which has a word of praise for the commitment of women in wartime[116].

Women, denied social and political rights, held in legal and economic inferiority, were considered responsible for the actions of men; in the opinion of Casalini, they became the scapegoat of socialist immobilism, and of the Socialist party's inability to understand and guide the women's protest, in the opinion of Bassi Angelini[117]. Even in the opinion of Argentina Altobelli, secretary of the National Federation of Land Workers, women, "who had not opened their minds to the free thinking", did not challenge the recruitment of their sons, so they had a responsibility for the outbreak of war. On the issue of empowerment of women this was Altobelli's "obsession"[118]. In the articles published by socialist women one can perceive even the will to oppose the idealization of motherhood that was attributed to the pacifists.

In some local areas, however, the pacifism of socialist women and the will to make their voices heard within the party was strengthened by the war. This is confirmed by research on Ravenna, where between 1911 and 1919 the numbers of socialist women committed to peace could be counted in their thousands and where the socialist women's section "Aurora" was closed by authorities for antimilitarism. This trend is also confirmed by studies on Prato as well as those on individuals such as Maria Goia, Teresa Meroni, and Teresa Noce[119].

In the Biella area, cradle of the Italian industrial revolution, the war was a powerful stimulus to political organization; between 1916 and 1918 nearly a thousand women founded dozens of women's sections and contributed to their own column in the "Corriere Biellese"[120] through which they posed the question of equality with men, claimed the right to decide within the Socialist party and to have their own organization. They criticized the male power within the family and in the war they saw the ultimate violation of motherhood.

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[116] *Ivi*, p. 23.

[117] Claudia Bassi Angelini, *"I padri guerrieri"*, p. 98.

[118] Silvia Bianciardi, *Argentina Altobelli e la buona battaglia*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2013, p. 266.

[119] Alessandro Cintelli-Annalisa Marchi, *Teresa Meroni e la marcia delle donne*, CDSE, Prato 2007. On Teresa Noce and the soscialist women in Biella areas, see Simonetta Ortaggi, *Testimonianze proletarie e socialiste sulla guerra*, in *La Grande guerra*, ed. by Diego Leoni-Camillo Zadra, pp. 577-604.

[120] Simonetta Ortaggi, *Le donne italiane nella Grande Guerra*; Luigi Moranino, *Le donne socialiste*.

The link maternity-peace is at the center of the pacifist thought. Studies on female interventionism that, in the wake of Jean Bethke Elshtain's work[121], intended to revise the so-called "maternalist" formulation of feminist pacifism – or the idea that women are pacifist by "nature" – with some exceptions[122], do not deal with this school of thought. A careful analysis, in fact, would show that the meaning pacifist women attach to maternal role is rarely deterministic. When they appeal to motherhood, and even when they use the term "nature", they refer to the female experience of life that has its foundation in the body, not pure biology, but rather a source of knowledge, a particular concreteness with which women observe the world. It is an ethic linked "to the tangible reality of existence"[123] for which death is always a source of pain and not one for abstract considerations, the idea that what is central is birth not death. It is a call to care work and to the knowledge connected to it, which knows how to expand itself beyond the domestic sphere. It is a cultural heritage that has produced a political awareness different from that of men, alien to the idea of strength, competition, domination, victory and defeat[124]. Although they were in a minority, pacifists, who had always maintained the impossibility to distinguish between war of aggression and war of defence, who never had believed in a non-aggressive patriotism, they revealed a proactive inventiveness and an originality of thought that would be the basis of a new pacifism after the war.

The mass deaths in the trenches, the suffering of the weakest part of the population, particularly women and children, the denial of civil liberties in the country, led to new theoretical elaborations on the relationship between civil and military power, on the character of modern warfare, on the link between militarism and subjection of women, and they gave new meaning to women's suffrage. Italian historiography on feminine and feminist pacifism lags behind the international historiography, although signs of a new interest are not lacking[125].

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[121] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Donne e guerra*.

[122] Beatrice Pisa, *Modelli e linguaggi*, compares the thought and action of two pacifists, the Italian Gwis Adami, fervent interventionist during the war, and the American Jane Addams, influential figure of pacifism at an international level.

[123] Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War*, Macmillan, New York 1922, p. 97.

[124] On this topic, see Anna Bravo, *Simboli del materno*, in Eadem, *Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1991, pp. 103-115. Bibliographies about feminist pacifism during the war are extensive; for a brief framework, see Bruna Bianchi, *Towards a New Internationalism: Pacifist Journals Edited by Women (1914-1919)*, in *Gender*, pp. 176-194; Eadem, *Il militarismo, la maternità, la pace. Voci dal femminismo italiano (1868-1918),* in *Parlare di pace in tempo di guerra. Bertha von Suttner e altre voci del pacifismo europeo,* ed. by Paola Maria Filippi, Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Edizioni Osiride, Rovereto 2015, pp. 9-46.

[125] The works by Italian scholars on international organizations that make extensive reference to international historiography are: Maria Grazia Suriano, *Percorrere la nonviolenza. L'esperienza politica della Women's International League for Peace and Freedom fra le due guerre mondiali*, Aracne, Roma 2012; Elda Guerra, *Il dilemma della pace. Femministe e pacifiste sulla scena internazionale, 1914-1918*, Viella Roma 2014; Eadem, *Il dialogo con la Società delle Nazioni*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane,* pp. 99-112. See the monographic section of "DEP. Deportate, esuli, profughe", 18-19, 2012, *Una biografia collettiva di singole. Ipotesi per una rilettura femminista della storia europea degli anni Venti e Trenta*, ed. by Maria Grazia Suriano. See also *Living War, Thinking Peace (1914-*

The debates that took place at the International Congress of Women at The Hague in 1915, a congress attended by over 1,000 women from various countries at war, was a major event for international pacifism. Chaired by Jane Addams, the most "venerable" feminist and reformer in America, it laid the foundations for the birth of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an organization still alive today, which would later engage in the development and practice of non-violence based pacifism.

Resolutions affirmed the need for permanent mediation, participation of women in all rights and all civil liability, and they defined the democratic principles that were supposed to inspire domestic and foreign policy of the states, the organization of the economy and education and the future peace conference. Compliance letters and greetings messages from Italian personalities – including Paolina Schiff –, associations and committees were numerous and a circular letter of support collected in Italy 24,000 signatures[126].

Rosa Genoni, the only Italian delegate at the conference, recalled the danger represented by the rhetoric of the liberation of the oppressed nationalities that was dragging Italy into the war and called upon the democratic principle of the plebiscite to resolve the issue of annexations[127]. She was among the five delegates who went to the European heads of state to present them with the Congress resolutions and, along with Anita Dobelli Zampetti and Elisa Lollini, was part of the Italian section of WILPF[128]. From January 1915, through a Manifesto against the war published by "L'Avanti!"[129], Rosa Genoni had argued that pacifism of women was based on the values of respect and preservation of life and invited those who recognized themselves in her words to join the Committee "Pro Humanitate" she founded in Milan[130].

1924); Maria Susanna Garroni, *Peace, Reform, and Democracy: U.S Wilpfers, Transnational Dialogue, and the Birth of a Gendered Political Discourse,* in *Beyond the Nation: Pushing the Boundaries of U.S. History from a Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. by Ferdinando Fasce-Maurizio Vaudagna-Raffaella Baritono, Otto, Torino 2013, pp. 91-116: Eadem, *Lo sfilacciarsi della rete: pacifiste femministe tra Europa e Stati Uniti*, in *La Grande Guerra delle italiane*, pp. 75-97.

[126] Maria Grazia Suriano, *Donne, pace, non-violenza fra le due guerre mondiali. La Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: l'impegno per il disarmo e l'educazione*, PhD dissertation, University of Bologna, 2007.

[127] International Women's Committee of permanent peace, *International Congress of Women*, Amsterdam 1915, p. 175.

[128] Among recent studies on Italian pacifists: Maria Grazia Suriano, *Itinerari pacifisti. La sezione italiana della Wilpf negli anni Venti*, in *Non solo rivoluzione. Modelli formativi e percorsi politici delle patriote italiane*, ed. by Elena Musiani, Aracne, Roma 2013, pp. 203-222; Bruna Bianchi, *"L'ultimo rifugio dello spirito di umanità". La Grande guerra e la nascita di un nuovo pacifismo*, in "Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa", XXVIII, 2013, pp. 81-100. See also Maria Susanna Garroni, *La Women's International League for Peace and Freedom tra le due guerre: un percorso tra istituzioni e società*, in "Giornale di Storia contemporanea", 2, 2009, pp. 116-140.

[129] Mirella Scriboni, *Abbasso la guerra! Voci di donne da Adua al Primo conflitto mondiale (1896–1915)*, BFS, Pisa 2008.

[130] Rosa Genoni, *Le donne contro la guerra*, riprodotto in Mirella Scriboni, *Abbasso la guerra*, pp. 144-145. For a brief profile of Rosa Genoni, see: Marta Boneschi, *Da pioniera della moda a militante pacifista. Rosa Genoni,* in Eadem et alias, *Donne nella Grande Guerra,* pp. 207-220.

The Italian pacifists represented a small group and among them many moved to interventionism, as Paolina Schiff and Teresita Pasini Bonfatti (Alma Dolens) did[131]; repression that befell those who would continue to work for peace favoured the abandonment of activism[132]. After Italy's entry into the war, in fact, pacifists were considered subversive and supporters of the enemy and kept under strict surveillance. Yet, despite the repressive actions, prohibitions, house searches, Rosa Genoni was able to launch a campaign for the release of all prisoners of war, Anita Dobelli managed to carry on her commitment to obtain State aid for illegitimate children, and Elisa Lollini Agnini, who was also engaged in this campaign, was able to open an office which worked for the legal recognition of children born out of wedlock[133]. It was an activity that would stand out from the narrow-minded work of nationalists and that proposed to change the laws that kept women and children in an inferior position in civilian life.

At the end of the war, after a brief period during which it was possible to renew ties internationally, the Fascist repression hit pacifists, offices were searched and their passports withdrawn, the threat of imprisonment and exile was constant; armed groups prevented any activities and the Italian pacifists soon found themselves isolated even within their own organization.

Final note

Overall, in addition to the historiographical gaps reported in this review – among which I would particularly highlight the paucity of studies on the South and the Islands[134], on urban life and demographic changes – it is precisely the difficult years after the war that must still be investigated. We know that in those troubled years, the aspirations to citizenship and civil rights were dashed, and the experience of the front became significant in the memorial reinterpretation of the war, but the process of reaffirmation of patriarchal relations in public life and especially in the family remains to be reconstructed.

We know little about women's mood before the contrast between their own experience and the official memory that was silent or downplayed their suffering, of those who took care of their traumatized and disabled husbands or sons, who wor-

[131] On Alma Dolens and Paolina Schiff's pacifism, see Bruna Bianchi, *Il militarismo, la maternità, la pace,* pp. 15-21.

[132] This is the case of Fanny Dal Ry, collaborator of the Journal "La Pace" suppressed in 1915 by a police measure. On Fanny Dal Ry: Lidia Magnani, *Fanny Dal Ry. Una maestra elementare tra femminismo e pacifismo*, in "Storia e Problemi Contemporanei", 4, 1989, pp.89-107; Bruna Bianchi, *Il militarismo, la maternità, la pace*, pp. 21-24; Simona Tagliaventi, *Socialista, femminista, antimilitarista. Fanny Dal Ry* in Marta Boneschi et alias, *Donne nella Grande Guerra*, pp. 193-205.

[133] On these themes, see the biography by Silvia Mori, *La dama del quintetto*, Tufani, Ferrara 2012.

[134] Some recent studies have begun to fill this void especially as regards women's protest. In addition to the volume of Giuseppe Barone about Catania already mentioned, see: Giancarlo Poidomani, *La Sicilia contro la guerra. Le manifestazioni per la pace e il "disfattismo" (1915-1918),* in "Giornale di Storia Contemporanea", 28, 1, 2015, pp. 107-132; Giovanni Sole, *Shrapnel e Schwarzlose. La Grande guerra in una provincia calabrese*, Rubettino, Soneria Mannelli 2015. This book includes chapters on women's conditions and internement in the mental hospital of Girifalco.

ked to reconstruct ties and communities much more difficult than material reconstruction. Generally, we do not know very much about the "return home", the so-called "back to normal" as well as little known is the change in relations between men and women and the difficulty they met to share their experiences. Numerous studies on the soldiers' experience of the war drew a picture of a frail veteran, mute or hardened, in a state of painful isolation, but they failed to analyze how male frailty echoed in family life.

For women, as for many soldiers, the powerful work of an ideological construction to find a justification for so much death and suffering was the most powerful form of censorship, an obstacle to the development of individual and collective memory. It is the task of historians give voice to their subjectivity and their work by analyzing new sources and questioning those already explored bringing out the diversity of experiences and memories.

These in-depth analyses, if they took regional differences into consideration and were conducted in comparative terms with other countries, could investigate the women's experience of the war in a broader perspective, looking at the long journey that since the Great War, through the years of fascist dictatorship, resulted in the Second World War.