Irma Bandiera and Maria Goretti: gender role models for communist girls in Italy (1945-56)

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> Our girls must pay great attention to the economic and social problems of female workers and students, and fight against corruption and moral decay, against the pornographic press. This fight, in a broader meaning, is a priority because it is the fight to defend and to assert the dignity and personality of Italian girls: that personality that expresses itself in the taste, the fashion, the appearance, the expectation for modern life, and that also expresses itself in the morality and spirit of sacrifice of which the Italian tradition is so full, the tradition of Irma Bandiera and Maria Goretti.[1]

These were the words of the leader of Italy's young communists, Enrico Berlinguer, when he spoke to communist girls at the First Conference of Communist Youth, held in Rome between 22 and 24 May 1947. They were part of a broader speech, in which Berlinguer touched on a variety of issues, such as youth unemployment, formal education, leisure activities, the 'love for the Homeland' and the related danger of nationalistic 'deviations'.[2] The section devoted to young women was short. Nonetheless, this comment, and its reference to the Catholic saint Maria Goretti, has become almost a journalistic cliché when referring to Berlinguer's ethical traditionalism.[3] According to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Berlinguer's speech was recently recalled by some members of the Vatican hierarchy, contrasting the morality of his views with the libertinism of Silvio Berlusconi.[4]

In order to grasp the motivations that lay behind Berlinguer's words, however, one has to consider the specific political, social and gender backdrop of Italy in the late 1940s-early 1950s. This article is an attempt to locate Berlinguer's remarks in their historical context, and to interpret the policies for girls of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from a gender studies perspective. First, the two figures to which Berlinguer pointed as moral role models for communist girls – Irma Bandiera and Maria Goretti – will be analysed. Then, the aggressive competition between the communist and the catholic youth networks to involve Italian girls will be briefly outlined. In particular, the political implications of the discourse that both the communist and the catholic movement built around the issue of the morality of young women will be discussed. Finally, the activities that the Italian Young Communist League (Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana, FGCI) organised for its female members will be assessed. Following the example of recent works by Sandro Bellassai and Maria Casalini on women, gender and family in the PCI, the overall aim of this piece is to stress how great a bearing catholic culture (with its virulent anti-communism) had in shaping – frequently in a 'defensive', traditionalist fashion – the policies of the PCI.[5]

Irma Bandiera: a female partisan hero

> The first among the women of Bologna to take up arms in the struggle for liberty, she fought like a lion. Seized by the German SS, despite being savagely tortured, she said nothing that might compromise her comrades. After being blinded, she was brutally murdered in public. The purest hero, worthy of the virtues of Italian women, she was the beacon of all the patriots of Bologna in the Liberation War.[6]

The above quote outlines the official grounds on which Irma Bandiera was posthumously decorated with the gold medal for military merits (the highest award for Italian partisans). Born in 1915 in Bologna from a well-off family, Irma became an antifascist and Resistance fighter following the outbreak of the Italian civil war in September 1943,

joining the communist-led Seventh GAP Brigade in Bologna. Caught by the Germans in early August 1944, she was tortured for a week and then killed.

In the post-war period, the PCI actively fostered (albeit to a lesser extent than the PCF) the remembrance of those partisan heroes who had died during the Resistance. In the PCI narrative, the sacrifice of the Resistance fighters bore witness to the national, patriotic character of Italian communism. An official commemoration of partisan martyrs took place on the first anniversary of the Liberation of Italy, on 25 April 1946. On that occasion, five communist partisans were mentioned in the communist newspaper *l'Unità*: Eugenio Curiel (the leader of the antifascist youth organisation Fronte della Gioventù), Giorgio Labò, Bruno Bruni, Giacomo Brunello and (the only woman) Irma Bandiera.[7] In the early post-war years, Bandiera was one of the most prominent female partisans to be commemorated in the party. Notably, the training school for female cadres established in 1951 by the women's network Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) was named after her.[8]

Thus the way in which Bandiera's life story was told can be considered indicative of the idea of womanhood that was fostered within the PCI and the FGCI. In an underground flyer aimed at women and issued by the Bologna federation of the PCI in November 1944, Bandiera was described as 'your hero'. Her martyrdom ought to inspire Italian women to 'fight united and fiercely' against Germans and fascists, and to lead the 'most daring' of them to join partisan brigades.[9] While a brutal civil war was raging in Northern Italy, women were called to bring their active contribution to the Resistance, fighting partisans after Bandiera's example.

As soon as the war was over, however, more traditional gender boundaries were re-established. In particular, the memory of the Resistance was recast so as to obliterate the more unconventional aspects of female participation (especially the existence of a minority of female partisans who carried arms), and to downgrade the role played by women as one that was purely supportive. As Patrizia Gabrielli has noted, former female partisans were 'put to the side in the parades and the marches, turned from protagonists into onlookers'. Only the UDI was at pains to commemorate the female side of the Resistance.[10]

This process of normalisation was evident in the case of Irma Bandiera. In 1953, for example, the magazine of young communist cadres, *Il Costruttore*, included several short biographies of communist heroes. Again, the only female figure who was mentioned was Bandiera. The piece touched on some aspects of her private life, for example stating that during the Second World War her fiancé ('whom Irma loved so much') had been a soldier in Greece, from where he never returned. Interestingly, no mention of any female partners was made in the articles about male partisans. Moreover, the section on Irma did not refer explicitly to her as a fighter, but was rich in detail about the physical tortures that were wreaked on her by the fascists, including the fact that 'they penetrated her body with a long and sharp item, presumably a rifle'.[11] As stressed by Alberto Mario Banti, the violation of the female body by the enemy is perceived in the nationalistic discourse as representing an insult to the national community under attack. The honour of the abused woman, however, can be saved through 'sacrificial death' as in the case of Bandiera.[12] By focusing on the brutality inflicted on Bandiera's body, the piece underlined the vicious, anti-national nature of fascism. At the same time, Bandiera was represented more as a passive victim than as an active subject.

However, the final stage in the rewriting of Bandiera's story was yet to come. In the first volume of the *Enciclopedia dell'antifascismo e della Resistenza*, published in 1968 under the supervision of the prominent communist Pietro Secchia, Irma was described as 'an affectionate bride and mother'.[13] Where in previous pieces on Bandiera no mention had been made of her husband or children – and the available sources suggest she *had not* been married – the twenty years after the war saw Bandiera turned from a bold female partisan into a reassuring wife. This re-invention of her story is a striking example of how the leftist parties in the early post-war period accepted and themselves used a 'maternal register' to talk about female participation in the Resistance.[14]

On the whole, Irma Bandiera (and the way in which her story was told to young communists) can be considered an archetypal communist female martyr. Her experience was an encouragement to female political activism, although the forms that were considered 'appropriate' for it varied significantly between the Resistance and the later post-war period.

Thus, the mention of Bandiera as a role model for young communist women in Berlinguer's 1947 speech was not surprising. This, however, was definitely not the case for Maria Goretti – the catholic 'virgin martyr'.

Maria Goretti: a virgin saint for communist girls?

Maria Goretti has been one of the most popular catholic saints of the twentieth century. Born in 1890 into a devout peasant family in central Italy, Maria was stabbed to death at the age of twelve: she had courageously defended her virginity from an attempted rape at the hands of Alessandro Serenelli, a twenty-year-old man who shared the house with her family. According to her hagiography, Maria was able to remain chaste. A deeply catholic girl, on her deathbed Maria expressed her will to forgive the murderer.

It is important to point out that Maria's cult did not emerge immediately after her tragic death, but was constructed little by little over time, especially through the efforts of the catholic girls' network Gioventù Femminile di Azione Cattolica (GF) and Maria's mother, Assunta. It was under Fascism, when the repentant Serenelli was pardoned and released, that the story of the peasant maiden ascended to the heights of popularity. Among the champions of Maria's cult was Pope Pius XII, who first beatified her (27 April 1947) and then canonised her (24 June 1950), within the space of three years. As has been noted by Monica Turi, Pius XII re-interpreted Maria's story in order to emphasise not only her chastity, but more generally her (alleged) traditionalist virtues as an obedient, subservient, pious peasant girl.[15] In the speech that he delivered on the occasion of Maria's sanctification, the Pope stated:

> If it is true that in the martyrdom of Maria Goretti her purity was most glowing, with the latter also other christian virtues shone. In her purity, there was the most simple and significant assertion of the perfect primacy of soul over matter; in her pristine heroism, which one cannot extemporize, there was tender and compliant love toward her parents; the hard sacrifice in the daily toil; the poverty, evangelically happy and sustained by faith in heavenly providence.[16]

In other words, Pius XII grafted Maria's story onto his project of catholic restoration in Italy: a project that had its mainstay in the primacy of the catholic church, a top-down view of the relationship between the church and the catholic believers, the safeguarding of the patriarchal family, integral opposition to modernity, the denial of class conflicts and staunch anti-communism (whence the emphasis on Maria's 'poverty, evangelically happy and sustained by the faith in heavenly providence'). The political significance of Maria's sainthood was proven by the fact that the ceremony of canonisation was even attended by the president of the Italian Republic, Luigi Einaudi.[17]

One has to wonder why Berlinguer pointed to such a traditionalist figure as a role model for communist girls, pairing Maria with Irma Bandiera, a far more subversive character. In fact, Berlinguer's mention of Maria was probably nothing but a (fairly clumsy) opportunistic move, in all likelihood aimed at approaching young catholics. It has to be borne in mind that Berlinguer gave his speech in Rome, where less than a month earlier the ceremony of beatification of Maria had taken place. As far as we know, Berlinguer never again referred to the peasant girl – at least in his capacity as leader of the FGCI; and nor did her name appear again in the communist press for young people. Thus, to say that Maria Goretti was a key figure in communist education for girls, or even in Berlinguer's moral views, would be an exaggeration.

Nonetheless, despite the contingent circumstances in which it was delivered, Berlinguer's speech of 1947 was indicative of the influence that catholic culture had on communist policies for girls. As we shall see, Italian communists could not ignore the strength of catholic women's organisations such as the GF. More specifically, by playing on the highly sensitive issue of the possible moral degeneration of communist girls, the catholic movement was able to push the FGCI on the defensive – on to the point where Italian communists became adherents of traditionalist, patriarchal ideas of girls' education.

Communists, catholics, and girls

In early post-war Italy, there were two mass movements: the catholic and the communist. The politicisation of Italian catholicism was encouraged

by Pius XII, as part of his project of re-establishing an (anti-communist) catholic order in the country. Italian catholics had their political arm in the ruling party, the Christian Democrats (DC), led by Alcide De Gasperi. It would be mistaken to portray the relationship between De Gasperi's DC and the Vatican hierarchy in terms of the unconditional subservience of the former towards the latter. Nonetheless, at least until the mid-1950s, catholic networks and organisations were evidently the key factor in securing consensus for the DC.[18]

The mass basis of catholicism posed a terrific challenge to Italian communists. In the eyes of Palmiro Togliatti, speaking in October 1944, the post-war PCI had to be a 'national', 'popular', and 'mass-oriented' party.[19] To implement this, moreover, the PCI leadership had to take into account that the large majority of Italians (including communists) were catholic. Questioning the tenets of catholic religion or embarking on aggressive atheistic campaigns would have alienated a considerable number of potential supporters. Communist leaders – not only in Italy, but also in the USSR – were well aware of how sensitive the issue was. After Pius XII issued his decree of excommunication of communism on 1 July 1949, for example, Stalin personally instructed Togliatti that the PCI had 'not to attack the religion', but 'to illustrate how the wealth and the ruling position of integral Christianity is at odds with the Evangelical message'.[20] The challenge for the PCI was how to confront an aggressively anti-communist catholic movement without being (at least overtly) anti-catholic.

The catholic issue was also central to the youth policies of the PCI. In the early post-war period, the *oratorio* (catholic recreation centre) was one of the few spaces of sociability that was open to youngsters. Communists endeavoured to dent catholic hegemony by establishing their own youth and sport clubs.[21] As a result, in the late 1940s to early 1950s, the two strongest youth organisations in Italy were Catholic Action (which was divided into a male network, the GIAC, and the aforementioned GF) and the FGCI. In 1951, the GIAC and the GF taken together included some 1.6 million children and teenagers aged six or older, while the FGCI had about 438,000 adherents between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one.[22] This high participation of young people in political networks was probably a legacy of the fascist period: in 1937,

the fascist Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL) had included no fewer than 7.5 million Italians between the ages of six and twenty-one (attendance was more or less compulsory).[23]

One noticeable aspect of the membership of the catholic and communist youth networks is that the gender ratio of their adherents differed significantly. The catholic movement was far stronger among young women than among men (though it has to be borne in mind that the age range in the GF was broader than in the GIAC). In 1951, the GF claimed a membership of 1.1 million, compared with half a million in the GIAC.[24] By contrast, FGCI members were overwhelmingly male. At the end of 1950, the FGCI claimed to include 107,950 girls, out of 463,894 members – that is to say that females made up 23.2 per cent of the overall membership.[25] To sum up, whereas in the Catholic Action there were two young catholic woman for every young catholic man, among communists there were three male militants for every female.

Although the topic has rarely been addressed by historians, the strength of catholic networks geared to young women can be considered as one of the pillars of catholic hegemony in Italy. In the early post-war period, the education of Italian children was mainly regarded as a task for women. Thus, winning young women to the catholic (and anti-communist) cause meant there was a good chance of winning over a substantial number of their children, the citizens of tomorrow.

The principles that catholic girls were taught in their organisations can be easily seen by taking a look at some documents of the GF. A set of internal guidelines, for example, urged the GF members to fight against any form of 'moral relaxation' deriving from 'dances, friendship, entertainment', and to cling to 'its programme of holy maximalism and christian opposition to worldly views'.[26] Another document, after reasserting 'filial, absolute devotion to Christ's Vicar [the Pope] and the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy', went on to urge catholic girls to commit themselves 'to contribute through their lives and their deeds, inspired by the Catholic church, to the moral and social reconstruction of the Homeland'.[27] On the one hand catholic girls' networks were a vehicle for spreading traditionalist values and staunch anti-communism; on the other, they put forward new models: participation in the GF clubs was for many girls a way of breaking them away from their segregation at home.[28]

To counter the influence of the GF among girls in 1945-50, the PCI established a girls' offshoot network, the Associazione Ragazze d'Italia (ARI). But it never really took off. In 1950, when it was disbanded, the association had no more than 68,000 adherents.[29] In the ensuing years, the activities of communist girls took place mainly in the FGCI and – to a lesser extent – in the women's organisation, the UDI. But this new approach was also unsuccessful: in 1956, there were still no more than 78,000 communist girls, making up 22.1 per cent of the members of the FGCI (in the same year the GF had 1,240,000 adherents).[30] Why were Italian communists, despite all their efforts, unable to undermine catholic hegemony among young women? To answer the question, attention must shift to the most recurrent issue associated with girls' public presence: their (sexual) morality.

Girls, communism and moral perversion

'How many girls have come back healthy from communistic [sic] dances?' This rhetorical question was included among the 'ten useful questions to be raised in the electoral meeting' listed in a catholic flyer issued in the late 1940s. Other leaflets described communism as a system 'against nature', in which 'shrines will be turned into dance halls', 'young people will become the property of the State', and 'family will be sacrificed to self-interest'.[31]

The alleged perversion of communists was one of the recurrent themes of catholic post-war propaganda. Apocalyptic representations of morality and family in the USSR had been a key element in anti-communism propaganda since 1917. In the early years of the Russian revolution, bolsheviks had been depicted by the US authorities as being used to the 'socialization of women', the 'practice of free love', and the 'nationalization of children'.[32] Especially since the 1930s, catholic pundits had actively drawn on these allegations. In 1936, for instance, the magazine *Lettres de Rome* had devoted an entire issue to Soviet family laws. According to the magazine, atheistic propaganda, female emancipation and state education (including sex education) had weakened Soviet families and fostered promiscuity among young people and even children.[33] In the post-war period, such allegations were turned on the

pro-communist children organisation Associazione Italiana Pionieri d'Italia, which was accused by the cardinal of Milan, Ildefonso Schuster, of 'systematically leading children to vice'.[34] For the Vatican hierarchy, Italian communists were not simply political opponents; they were one of the main enemies in the 'battle for morality' (centred on the staunch defence of the patriarchal family) that Pius XII wanted Italian catholics to wage in Italy.[35]

Girls played a central role in this battle. In fact, the safeguarding of their virginity was considered a crucial precondition for the stability of future families, and Italian society more generally. Not only pre-marital sex, but simple flirtation with male peers was deemed highly immoral.[36] Speaking on the thirtieth anniversary of the GF in 1948, Pius XII clarified that 'feelings' could be an 'ornament' for girls, but ought never to be 'a guide': in fact, girls who were driven by them ran 'the risk of venturing themselves into the darkness, of going astray, of slipping into the abyss or of crashing into the rock'.[37] A 'course for fiancés' published by Catholic Action in 1949 pointed to a girl who 'had not allowed her fiancé to kiss her until the day of their wedding' as a role model for honest girls.[38] This emphasis on girls' chastity fitted well with the societal norms regarding female virginity that were typical of Mediterranean societies, according to which it was the duty of the male members of the family (father and brothers) to preserve the purity of their daughters or sisters. This purity was a proof of the honour of the family. As a result, female teenagers were frequently confined at home in order to forestall any possible interactions with male peers.[39]

These views were still upheld by a considerable number of parents in post-war Italy. It is true that since the 1920s mass culture (especially Hollywood films and photo-story magazines) had been a conduit for a new, flirtation-based kind of relationship between Italian teenagers. Nonetheless, the adult generation was hostile to these developments. According to a survey carried out in 1951 among Italian women, 35 per cent of them answered 'never' to the question: 'at what age have your daughters been, or will be, allowed to go out in the evening by themselves?'[40]

Being a communist was no obstacle to such anxieties. In fact, a number of internal documents of the PCI referred to the reluctance of

communist parents to send their daughters to the FDG, the ARI or the FGCI. During a meeting of young communists held in summer 1945, for example, comrade Novaro from Genoa explained that:

> Especially in rural areas, many female comrades have told me: 'we have many female friends, but they do not come to the FDG because their parents do not look with favour on the fact that they hang around in clubs where they mingle with boys'.[41]

By the same token, Luciana Pescante, who was in charge of the work among girls in Milan, was forced to admit that the recruitment of young women met with 'opposition among the fiancés and parents, even when comrades'.[42] And the communist militant and erstwhile partisan 'Vittoria' remembered many years later:

> Also those male comrades who were emancipated and educated, who took part in Party life, who attended meetings, any time I told them 'Comrade, why don't you bring your wife, your daughters here to the branch?', they retorted: 'Eh … are you kidding?' […] And they even did not talk about politics at home – 'Anyway, they [their female relatives] do not understand'.[43]

In fact, in order to allay the fears of Italian (and communist) parents, the leaders of the FGCI and the ARI adopted an extremely cautious approach in their girls' policies. In their speeches, Berlinguer and Marisa Musu (the leader of the ARI and, after its disbandment, the woman in charge of girls' policies within the FGCI) were at pains to underline the profound morality and respect for family of their organisations. During the First Conference of Communist Youth (during which Berlinguer mentioned Maria Goretti), for example, Musu asserted that the 'quintessential' problem for 'all' Italian girls was to marry and build a new family. According to Musu, having a family was 'the sentimental yearning', the 'ideal', the 'dream' of Italian girls.[44] In a similar vein, in a report presented by Berlinguer at the national committee of the FGCI in late 1949, he noted how communist mothers opposed the recruitment of their daughters to the FGCI 'because they think that, by adhering to the

FGCI, they [the daughters] will not find a husband'. Berlinguer tried to dispel these anxieties by pointing out that in the FGCI there were more boys than girls, and thus 'we would have enough husbands not only for our 45 thousand female members, but also for many others!'[45] Such statements implied that the future of Italian girls lay in marriage and motherhood – a view that could hardly be seen as an inducement to girls' autonomy.

Young communists did not limit themselves to underlining that their female organisations were a 'morally healthy environment' for girls (as stated in the document that led to the creation of the ARI in 1944);[46] they also tried to turn the allegations of immorality back on to their political opponents. Nonetheless, as we have seen, they preferred not to attack the catholic church directly, lest open anti-clericalism alienate catholic voters. Communist propaganda focused instead on the supposed depravation of the class enemy of Italian workers – the Italian bourgeoisie – or on the international enemy of the communist movement, the USA. An article by Luciano Gruppi, for example, clarified that, although Italian communists supported female emancipation, they firmly opposed the mistaken idea of it that was typical of the Italian bourgeoisie – the idea that 'a girl can come back home at night whenever she wants, can hang around with whomever she likes, can cheekily listen to or tell dirty jokes'. In Gruppi's words, for Italian communists, this kind of freedom had 'nothing to do with women's emancipation'.[47]

It was American cultural influences that were deemed the principal source of corruption; a moral threat hovering over Italian girls. According to Berlinguer, through the means of 'comic strips' and 'American films', Italian capitalists put forward perverted role models for young people. On the one hand, boys were led to aspire to become 'bankers and businessmen or […] bandits and gangsters, men who are well-respected in American society'. On the other, 'working-class girls' were encouraged to 'believe that their aim must be to become the paramour of their employer'. This was the reason why 'today they no longer speak of "prince charming"', he bitterly noted.[48] In the young communist press, there were often articles intended to show how harmful cultural Americanisation might be for Italian girls. These pieces portrayed American women as accustomed to profligacy and – at least implicitly –

prostitution. In *Pattuglia*, for example, an article eloquently entitled 'Amore o dollari' ('Love or dollars') explained that American women looked only at the richness of their men, who were considered no more than 'lemons to be squeezed'. The columnist also referred to surveys according to which 'only 32 per cent of American girls remain a virgin until marriage'.[49] Certainly, these anti-American pieces have to be seen in the light of the Zhdanovist atmosphere typical of the late Stalinist period. Nonetheless, by portraying girls' libertinism as the symptom of a wider social malaise, they underpinned a moralising discourse on women's sexuality.

To sum up, young communists did not question the patriarchal mentality that lay behind catholic attempts to wield the issue of girls' sexual morality (and its possible perversion) as a political weapon. Instead, they resorted to the same kind of language and representations, while pointing to other causes and subjects as a threat to girls' moral health. In this respect, we cannot but agree with Silvio Lanaro's observations regarding the 'occasional convergence' of communists and catholics 'on a set of prescriptions and prohibitions' in early post-war Italy.[50] What is more debatable is the real impact of these statements on the lives of communist girls. The extent to which these traditionalist views affected (or not) the activities of girls within the ARI and the FGCI will be discussed below.

The experience of being girls in the FGCI

After the end of the Second World War, communist girls were asked to join female-specific groups that were kept separate from those of young male militants. More precisely, communist girls were expected to participate in the ARI and, within the party, so-called girls' cells. After 1950, they had to constitute 'separate clubs and groups' within the young communist league, as article 13 of the statute clarified.[51] This organisational norm remained in force until the FGCI statute reform was introduced in 1957. The new statute still envisaged the possibility of creating girls' groups but, unlike in the past, this was not compulsory.[52]

In Italy, the principle of gender separation between girls and boys had a long tradition, having been implemented in both catholic and fascist

youth organisations. It stemmed from the idea that young women had to learn specific feminine skills and qualities, and, in particular, that they had to be prepared to fulfil the maternal role later in their lives.[53] But why did gender separation also become a guiding principle in the communist movement? According to the 1953 statute of the FGCI, the constitution of girls' groups rendered it possible 'to undertake specific initiatives and activities, that correspond better to the expectations of the masses of girls in every town and village, to improve the prestige of the organisation among girls and their parents, and to enhance their working skills'.[54] However, in a very indirect way, the piece referred to two main reasons for the decision: on the one hand, the necessity to take into account parental fears about girls being part of mixed groups with male peers; and, on the other, the idea that most girls lacked the basic skills and knowledge needed to take part in mainstream (male) politics.

There is no doubt that the communist approach was due also, if not mainly, to tactical considerations, for the purpose of countering catholic allegations and reassuring the parents of girls. Talking to the PCI central committee in 1949, for instance, Longo justified gender separation in the FGCI not as a matter of principle, but rather in the light of the fact that catholic organisations were separated along gender lines.[55] Furthermore, it has to be stressed that formal separation did not imply gender segregation. Looking at the accounts from local FGCI branches sent to magazines such as *Pattuglia* or *Avanguardia*, it appears evident that communist boys and girls intermingled frequently, especially as far as leisure activities were concerned. Pictures of events or Sunday trips organised by FGCI clubs involving both young women and men were published regularly in the communist magazines.[56] These social events also featured dance evenings – an important difference with the catholic movement, in which dancing was rejected out of hand as 'a risk to sin', a 'libidinous satisfaction', and a source of 'promiscuity between sexes'.[57] Thus to represent the formal separation of boys' and girls' groups within the FGCI as a sort of gender apartheid would be mistaken. In spite of the parental anxieties, interactions, friendships and even affairs between communist female and male teenagers were quite common.

Nonetheless, there was also a second, deeper reason to constitute separate girls clubs. Many communist leaders – including women, for

example Musu – believed that the majority of young women lacked the political qualifications required to take part in proper political activities. Being used to spending most of their time at home, and having corny photo-stories as their favourite reading, Italian girls had to be enticed into politics in a gradual way. As Musu said at the Third Organisational Conference of the PCI (6-10 January 1947), the communist hyper-politicised vocabulary was an 'incomprehensible and boring jargon' for most Italian girls. Hence, instead of conferences 'on democracy' or 'on the high cost of living', the ARI ought to promote 'exhibitions of patterns for young tailors', 'to invite young female students to write to young people in foreign countries', or 'to stage a competition for the quickest typist of the town'.[58] As a result, the main campaign that was launched by the ARI in 1948 was for the introduction of marriage loans for young couples, to be funded by both the state and employers.[59] To support this campaign, the ARI even set up a 'trousseau lottery'. Among the prizes to be distributed were an electric hob, with four plates, five sets of aluminium pots, five linen sheets, ten cotton sheets, and three sets of china for six people.[60] These prizes suggested once again that the future life of girls lay first and foremost in marriage and the household.

This approach, which may be defined as 'gradualist', had its pros and cons. On the one hand, being part of female-only groups could help girls to overcome their shyness and fears about expressing their views in public. As Lilia Turci, an ARI activist in Modena, recalled many years later, at that time for a girl 'it was an improvement even just to say "I go out, I speak, I speak in public, I express my views and maybe give my contribution to this or that campaign"'.[61] The public sphere was perceived by many left-wing girls as an alien space, with which they would become familiar only gradually, under the supervision of more experienced comrades. In this sense, the creation of separate female groups could contribute to raising their political awareness: talking to a female-only audience, girls did not have to worry about being judged (and rebuked) by male militants. As a female party member put it:

> since our cell was female-only, women felt at ease, and each one of them could have her say, free from the presence of the husband or

> other men, also because – we must acknowledge this – some of them were still entirely dominated by their husbands.[62]

At the same time, there was a danger that such girls' clubs would turn into a sort of female ghetto, especially since their members were never really considered mature enough to step into 'real' politics. Looking at the documents of the ARI and the female clubs of the FGCI, it is evident that their activities never went much beyond the aforementioned 'trousseau lottery' – or the organisation of a baking contest for the best 'cake of peace', as happened in Arezzo in 1953.[63] It is hardly a surprise that some of the most engaged young women preferred to work within the party or other left-wing organisations rather than in the ARI. In January 1948, for instance, Albertina Baldi wrote to Musu explaining that she had stopped working among girls because 'I did not understand them and they did not understand me'. Thus, she had decided to focus mainly on her militancy within the party.[64]

Whereas elite communist women (e.g. Togliatti's wife Rita Montagnana, or his later partner Nilde Jotti) were able to make their way into high politics and parliament, it seems that the majority of communist girls were kept in a condition of minority, of tutelage, from which they were not considered able to emancipate themselves. Remarkably, communist men did not miss a chance to put the blame for this situation on the girls themselves. In 1955, talking to an audience of communist girls at the Second Conference of Communist Women, the PCI MP Edoardo D'Onofrio directly confronted the issue of the patronising attitudes of male militants, stressing the supposed co-responsibility of girls:

> You complain that sometimes within the party girls are treated as children. This is true, and those comrades who behave this way deserve to be reproached and corrected. But does this not depend on the fact that some of you or your clubs renounced from the beginning their autonomy, their personality? […] In reality you are the main cause of your inferiority, of your subjection. You have to search, without arrogance but with increasing awareness, for the help, advice, supervision, support of the party, but not for tutelage.

> You are comrades, you are communists: you have to put yourself across as such.[65]

Rather than considering girls' sense of inferiority to be the result of an unequal system of gender relations, D'Onofrio blamed young women for not emancipating themselves from their feminine subjection. In his view, girls' shyness could be overcome by embracing a militant – and somehow asexual – communist identity, not by putting into question the patriarchal fabric of the party.[66]

Conclusions

Amedea Zanarini was a young communist from Bologna who had been a dispatch rider in the Resistance. After the end of the war, she wanted to be an active party militant, but met with the opposition of her boyfriend, who believed that women should not be interested in politics. This attitude led Zanarini to think more deeply about the widespread 'prejudices' against women's activism and, more generally, women's role in Italian society. She developed the belief that women had to overcome such taboos, and wanted to campaign among Italian women to dispel a sexist mentality. Nonetheless, in her emancipatory efforts, she always had to bear in mind that the 'enemies' of the communist movement aggressively attacked the party on issues such as 'morality' and 'free love'. As a result, the topic had to be approached in a very cautious way: it could be raised just 'with some female comrades, not with all of them'.[67]

Zanarini's story is a good example of how communist policies for girls have to be understood in the light of catholic hegemony among Italian young women. In the late 1940s to early 1950s, not only was the catholic church able to attract a far larger number of girls into its ranks. More importantly, Italian catholics also put forward an aggressive moralising discourse about girls' sexuality that was wielded against the communist movement. This latter was depicted as a threat to the moral (sexual) health of Italian young women. This kind of representation was all the more forceful because it played on the widespread anxieties of Italian parents about the sexual behaviour of their daughters. For their part,

Italian communists did not question the patriarchal essence that underlay this line of reasoning; they rather resorted to similar ideas to set upon their 'enemies' (but not directly catholics). Berlinguer's reference to Maria Goretti was the most striking example of how prone young communists were to make use of ideas and myths typical of catholic traditionalism.

At the same time, it would be mistaken to equate the policies of Italian communists towards girls with those of catholics, as most of the literature surreptitiously does. Maria Goretti was by no means the only (nor the main) polar star of communist girls. In his notorious speech, Berlinguer paired her with a far more subversive figure in the antifascist fighter and hero Irma Bandiera. The life story of the latter, however posthumously reshaped in a feminine guise, was still exemplary of an active, resistant, alternative type of womanhood. In a similar vein, young females in the PCI could find inspirational figures in politically active women such as Montagnana or Jotti. Finally, there is some evidence that, in spite of statutory rules, gender separation was implemented in quite a relaxed way in the FGCI. Communist girls and boys might even dance together – a form of slightly promiscuous interaction that was impossible among young catholics. In other words, the communist movement also put forward alternative and empowered role models for communist girls; there was less bigotry in its branches than in the catholic networks.

Nonetheless, the role that was assigned to communist girls was marginal, liminal, compared with male militants. Apart from the most tenacious and emancipated of them, the majority of communist girls were considered too naïve to take part in proper politics. Thus the latter remained an overwhelmingly male arena, in which only a handful of outstanding communist women could participate, and most communist girls were confined to feminine, supportive activities. It is true that the UDI offered Italian women and girls a female-only space where they could discuss their problems and develop their own ways to political activism. Nevertheless, in the late 1940s to early 1950s, the patriarchal structure of the communist movement was never called into question, nor even talked about.

In the longer term, the male hegemony in the PCI was not to remain unquestioned by female militants. In the late 1950s, as a result of both

the line of 'renewal within continuity' adopted in the PCI after 1956, and the social change triggered by the 'economic miracle', a new, younger generation of UDI leaders took a bolder and more autonomous approach to their policies. The organisation put forward a vast programme of social demands for women and became more vociferous in its calls for female emancipation. In other words, the UDI raised its profile as a pressure group campaigning for women's rights within the Italian labour movement, although without explicitly referring to the patriarchal structure of the latter. It was only later on, in the 1960s, that a new wave of Italian feminists overtly stressed the linkages between female subjection and male power in the PCI, and the relational, intertwined nature of female and male gender roles in Italian society.

Notes

1. E. Berlinguer, speech given at the First Conference of Communist Youth (22-24 May 1947), republished in M. Musu, E. Berlinguer, *La lotta della gioventù per la democrazia*, Rome: Uesisa, 1947, p44.
2. Ibid, p31.
3. Cf. for example P. Guzzanti, 'La diversità degli ex DS? Incassare soldi da Mosca', in *Il Giornale*, 27 July 2011; V. Messori, 'Dopo Padre Pio, l'ora della santa bambina più amata', in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 22 June 2002.
4. Cf. C. Tito, 'Berlusconi tenta il contropiede: "Incontro il papa dopo il G8"', available online at http://www.repubblica.it/2009/07/sezioni/politica/berlusconi-divorzio-12/premier-incontro-papa/premier-incontro-papa.html.
5. Cf. S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista: Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI (1947-1956)*, Rome: Carocci, 2000; M. Casalini, *Le donne della sinistra (1944-1948)*, Rome: Carocci, 2005; M. Casalini, *Famiglie comuniste: Ideologie e vita quotidiana nell'Italia degli anni Cinquanta,* Bologna: il Mulino, 2010.
6. Quoted in L. Arbizzani, 'Irma Bandiera, "Mimma"', in *Museo virtuale della Certosa*, http://certosa.cineca.it/2/partigiano.php?ID=478043&img=7.
7. Cf. R. Colozza, *Repubbliche rosse: I simboli nazionali del Pci e del Pcf (1944-1953)*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2009, pp109-46. The five communist partisans are mentioned in '34 Medaglie d'oro', in *l'Unità*, 25 April 1946.

8. Cf. M. Ombra, 'Introduzione', in *Guida agli Archivi dell'Unione Donne Italiane,* Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2002, p14.
9. Flyer of the Bologna federation of the PCI, 12 October 1944, reproduced online in *Museo virtuale della Certosa*, http://certosa.cineca.it/2/Blob.php?ID=1378.
10. Cf. in particular P. Gabrielli, *La pace e la mimosa: L'Unione donne italiane e la costruzione politica della memoria*, Rome: Donzelli, 2005, pp131-48 (quot. from p137).
11. 'VIII anniversario della morte di Curiel', in *Il Costruttore,* 13, 1, 1953.
12. A.M. Banti, 'Corpi e confini nell'immaginario nazional-patriottico ottocentesco', in *Confini: Costruzioni, attraversamenti, rappresentazioni*, ed. by S. Salvatici, Soveria Monnelli: Rubbettino, 2005, p210.
13. 'Bandiera, Irma', in *Enciclopedia dell'antifascismo e della Resistenza*, Vol 1, *A-C,* Milan: La Pietra, 1968, p231. The same sentence still appears in the biography of Bandiera that is published in the webpage of the partisan network Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia: http://www.anpi.it/donne-e-uomini/irma-bandiera/.
14. Cf. in particular A. Bravo, A.M. Bruzzone, *In guerra senz'armi: Storie di donne (1940-1945)*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995, pp202-6.
15. On Maria Goretti's popular devotion, and its construction, cf. M. Turi, 'La costruzione di un nuovo modello di comportamento femminile: Maria Goretti tra cronaca nera e agiografia', in *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 10, 3, 1987, pp223-36; Ead, 'Il "Brutto peccato": Adolescenza e controllo sessuale nel modello agiografico di Maria Goretti', in *Bambini santi: Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici*, ed. by A. Benvenuti Papi, E. Giannarelli, Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1991, pp119-46; D. Forgacs, S. Gundle, *Cultura di massa e società italiana (1936-1954)*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2007, pp355-7.
16. Quoted in Turi, 'La costruzione di un nuovo modello di comportamento femminile', p233.
17. Cf. Turi, 'Il "Brutto peccato"', p139.
18. Cf. G. De Luna, 'Partiti e societa negli anni della ricostruzione', in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, 1, *La costruzione della democrazia*, Turin: Einaudi, 1991, pp719-76; G. Miccoli, 'La Chiesa di Pio XII nella società italiana del dopoguerra', in ibid, pp547-52.
19. The speech is reprinted in P. Togliatti, *Opere*, 5, *1944-1955*, ed. by L.

Gruppi, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1986, pp81-108 (quotation from p86).

20. The decree is published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 41, 1949, p334. Stalin's words are quoted from A. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Turin: UTET, 1996, p373.
21. Cf. for example F. Archambault, 'Il calcio e l'oratorio: Football, Catholic Movement and Politics in Italian Post-War Society (1944-1960)', in *Historical Social Research*, 31, 1, 2006, pp134-50.
22. The data on catholic youth is taken from G. Poggi, *Catholic Action in Italy: The Sociology of a Sponsored Organization*, Stanford: University Press, 1967, p34; the data on the FGCI from D. Ronci, *La FGCI dalla Liberazione al 1957*, Rome: Elengraf, 1980, p75.
23. On the continuity between fascist and post-fascist youth organisations cf M. Ridolfi, 'Giovani e generazioni politiche nel secondo dopoguerra (1945-1962)', in *Dalla trincea alla piazza: L'irruzione dei giovani nel Novecento*, ed. by M. De Nicolò, Rome: Viella, 2011, p288. The data on the GIL is taken from *Annuario Statistico Italiano,* 19, 1941, p342. On fascist youth organizations cf. P. Dogliani, 'Propaganda and Youth', in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. by R. Bosworth, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp185-202.
24. Poggi, *Catholic Action in Italy,* p34.
25. The data are reworked from *VII Congresso nazionale del Partito comunista italiano: Forza e attività del Partito: Dati statistici*, ed. by the commissione centrale d'organizzazione, [n.p.]: [n. publ.], 1951, pp13, 18, 76.
26. Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ISR), Rome, *Fondo Vittorino Veronese*, b10, f78, *Gioventù femminile*, 'Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica nel momento attuale. Suggerimenti e direttive generali' [n.d., but probably 1946].
27. Ibid; Report on the plenary session of the central committee of the GF, June 1947, attached to the letter by the central president of the GF, C. Rossi, to V. Veronese, 3 June 1947.
28. On the coexistence of 'traditional values' and 'new models' in the catholic female networks during the post-war years cf. M. C. Giuntella, 'Virtù e imagine della donna nei settori femminili', in *Chiesa e progetto educativo nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1945-1958*), Brescia: La scuola, 1988, pp274-82 (quotation from p282).
29. Cf. Istituto Gramsci Rome (IGR), *Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano,*

Fondo Mosca, Comm.ne Giovanile e FGCI 1948/1953, mf233, f16, letter by B. Bernini to the secretary office of the PCI, 24 August 1950.

30. The data on the FGCI is reworked from IGR, *APCI, FGCI, 1958*, mf045, 'Le condizioni della gioventù italiana', attached to the letter of R. Trivelli to the secretary office of the PCI, 3 November 1958, c1455. For the GF cf. Poggi, *Catholic Action in Italy*, p34.
31. The flyer is republished in *C'era una volta la DC: Breve storia del periodo degasperiano attraverso i manifesti elettorali della Democrazia Cristiana,* ed. by L. Romano, P. Scabello, Rome: Savelli, 1975.
32. R. Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States (1919-1943)*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000, pp144-6 (quotation from p144).
33. Cf. A. Mariuzzo, *Divergenze parallele: Comunismo e anticomunismo alle origini del linguaggio politico nell'Italia repubblicana,* Soveria Monnelli: Rubbettino, 2010, p84.
34. Quoted from S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista*, p329.
35. Cf. M. Barbanti, 'La "battaglia per la moralità" tra Oriente, Occidente e Italocentrismo (1948-1960)', in *Nemici per la pelle: Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. by P.P. D'Attorre, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1991, pp161-98.
36. Cf. B.P.F. Wanrooij, 'Pro aris et focis: Morale cattolica e identità nazionale in Italia', in Ivi, pp207-8.
37. Pius XII, speech for the Thirtieth anniversary of the GF, Rome, 5 September 1948, published online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/speeches/1948/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19480905_azione-cattolica-femminile_it.html.
38. *Bollettino dirigenti*, 11, 5, 1949, 5, p6.
39. Cf. J. Schneider, P. Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily*, New York-London: Academic Press, 1976, pp89-91. This does not mean, however, that women did not benefit from some autonomous agency: cf. the critical review by S. Busatta, 'Honour and Shame in the Mediterranean', in *Antrocom*, 2, 2, 2006, pp75-8.
40. The survey is quoted in S. Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio: Il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni Cinquanta*, Rome: Carocci, 2006, p42.
41. IGR, *APCI, Fondo Mosca*, mf254-5, f9, *Giovani*, minutes of the meeting of the young cadres of Northern Italy, 23 July 1945.

42. IGR, *APCI, 1951 – Milano,* mf334, minutes of the meeting of the federal committee of the PCI of Milan, 27 October 1951, c1064.
43. Memory by N. Benissone Costa, in *La Resistenza taciuta*, pp58-9.
44. M. Musu, speech given at the First Conference of Communist Youth (22-24 May 1947), p50.
45. E. Berlinguer, *Una forte FGCI per la pace, l'avvenire, l'unità della gioventù. Rapporto presentato al Comitato Costitutivo Nazionale della FGCI (Roma, 8-9 Novembre 1949)*, Rome: Gioventù Nuova, [1949?], pp24-5.
46. IGR, *APCI*, *Fondo Mosca*, mf271,'L'Unione Ragazze d'Italia' [corrected by hand in 'L'Unione Ragazze Italiane'], attached to the minutes of the meeting of the PCI secretary office with female comrades, 29 July 1944.
47. L. Gruppi, 'L'emancipazione della donna e la morale sessuale', in *Gioventù Nuova*, 1, 2-3, 1949, pp13-18.
48. E. Berlinguer, *All'avanguardia della gioventù italiana: Discorso pronunciato il 6 luglio ai giovani operai di Torino,* Rome: Uesisa, [1948?], p13.
49. 'Amore o dollari?', in *Pattuglia*, 15 April 1948.
50. S. Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana: L'economia, la politica, la cultura, la società dal dopoguerra agli anni '90*, Venice: Marsilio, 1992, p203.
51. *Statuto della Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana approvato al XIII Congresso,* Reggio Emilia: Gioventù Nuova, 1953, p7.
52. *Statuto della FGCI approvato al XV Congresso Nazionale della Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana*, Rome: La Stampa Moderna, 1957.
53. Cf. P. Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010, pp79-82, 91-4.
54. *Statuto della Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana approvato al XIII Congresso*, p7.
55. Cf. IGR, *APCI, Comitato Centrale, 1949*, mf39, minutes of the meeting of 29-31 March 1949, report by Luigi Longo, cc. 853-1015.
56. Cf. for example the picture of the mountain hike organised by boys and girls from Parma published in 'Vita e battaglie della gioventù', in *Pattuglia*, 7 October 1951; or the picture of the group of sellers of *Pattuglia* of the FGCI branch of Casale Monferrato, comprising both boys and girls, published in 'Vita e battaglie della gioventù', in *Pattuglia*, 22 July 1951.
57. Quoted from A. Tonelli, *E ballando ballando: La storia d'Italia a passi di danza (1815-1996)*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1998, p141.
58. IGR, *APCI, III Conferenza di organizzazione*, mf. 085, speech by Marisa

Musu, cc 1448-52. Cf. also M. Musu, 'Le ragazze sognano', in *Vie Nuove*, 18 May 1947.

59. Cf. IGR, *APCI, Fondo FGCI*, mf41, 'Progetto di legge sui prestiti matrimoniali presentato in Parlamento dal Gruppo Parlamentare Giovanile Democratico su proposta dell'Associazione Ragazze d'Italia', 15 September 1948. Cf. also Casalini, *Le donne della sinistra*, p194.
60. Cf. Archivi del 900, Ravenna, *Fondo Partito Comunista Italiano, Federazione di Ravenna, Catalogo settore FGCI*, b9, fD, 1948, circular letter of the ARI direction, 23 October 1948.
61. Memory by L. Turci, quoted from *'Volevamo cambiare il mondo': Memorie e storie delle donne dell'UDI in Emilia-Romagna*, ed. by C. Liotti, R. Pesenti, A. Remaggi and D. Tromboni, Rome: Carocci, 2002, pp248-9. Casalini also speaks of a gradual approach toward women: *Le donne della sinistra*, p139.
62. *Comunisti: I militanti bolognesi del Pci si raccontano*, with preface by R. Imbeni and introduction by G.C. Pajetta, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1983, p104.
63. D. Tani, 'Le ragazze aretine per il più bel dolce della pace', in *Il Costruttore*, Vol3 (1953), No 6. Similar initiatives were also staged elsewhere: cf. Gabrielli, *La pace e la mimosa*, p59.
64. Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana (ISRT), *Carte Baldi*, b1, f2, Letter by A. Baldi to M. Musu, 8 January 1948.
65. E. D'Onofrio, Speech to the girls' commission at the Second National Conference of Communist Women, republished in *Informazioni e direttive*, Numero speciale dedicato all'attività delle ragazze, 11, December 1955, copy available in IGR, *APCI, 1955, FGCI,* mf431, c1899.
66. On the loss of feminine identity as a hallmark of communist female cadres cf. Casalini, *Le donne della sinistra,* p129.
67. *Comunisti: I militanti bolognesi del Pci si raccontano*, pp124-125.