

POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF SLOVENE WOMEN IN VENEZIA GIULIA
AFTER WORLD WAR I AND THE RISE OF FASCISM.
FROM AUTONOMY TO SUBORDINATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses Slovene women's activities in organizations in the Julian March and opens questions associated with their political and national activity after World War I and after the rise of fascism in Italy. Attention has been paid to the transition from legal to illegal activity and the role played by women in the Slovene anti-fascist movement of the 1920s and 1930s. It is evident from police sources that women (particularly students and educated women) often appeared in lists of persons who were deemed a threat to the fascist regime. The extent and features of women's illegal activities were only partly documented by historiography, which, notably, failed to explore the extent and characteristics of women's illegal activities. The article sheds light on two remarkable antifascists, Fanica Obid and Ljudmila Rutar, whom the authorities regarded as a grave threat to Mussolini's regime.

Keywords: women, antifascism, fascism, Julian March, post-war period

L'ATTIVISMO POLITICO DELLA SLOVENE NELLA VENEZIA GIULIA
DOPO LA PRIMA GUERRA MONDIALE E L'ASCESA DEL FASCISMO.
DALL'AUTONOMIA ALLA SOTTOMISSIONE

SINTESI

Dopo la fine della prima guerra mondiale si costituirono nella Venezia Giulia numerose associazioni femminili slovene. Soprattutto a Trieste e a Gorizia l'attivismo femminile aveva una forte impronta politica e contrastava la politica di italianizzazione e fascistizzazione dell'area di confine. Al centro dell'attenzione è il passaggio dall'attività legale a quella clandestina e il ruolo svolto dalle donne nel movimento antifascista sloveno degli anni Venti e Trenta. Dalle fonti di polizia emerge che soprattutto le studentesse e le maestre venivano incluse negli elenchi delle persone pericolose per il regime fascista. La storiografia ha finora ricostruito solo in parte la loro attività in pubblico e nella clandestinità. L'articolo mette in luce due figure importanti dell'antifascismo giuliano, Fanica Obid e Ljudmila Rutar.

Parole chiave: donne, antifascismo, fascismo, Venezia Giulia, primo dopoguerra

INTRODUCTION¹

Individual political and national players strove to restore the social fabric after the end of World War I and after the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy in the territory of the former Austrian Littoral, which had been renamed to *Venezia Giulia* (the Julian March) after November 1918. The organizational impetus was palpable among the Slovene population, as was its aversion towards the Italian occupation and the military administration and, consequently, the inclusion in the new state framework. The fear that the Italian authority would take away Slovenes' national rights after the arrival of the Italian army – rights they had been granted under Austria – became the impetus for diverse political activities and social organizing. The article seeks to explore the extent of women's activity in organizations and the reasons behind its occurrence after the military occupation of the former Austrian Littoral and its integration into the Kingdom of Italy. These activities were modelled after women's bourgeois pre-war sociability; initially, they included women's emancipatory aspirations. The rise of fascism, fascistization and Italianization of the multiethnic border area saw the emergence of new demands for organizing national defence activities and abandonment of ideological leanings as well as feminist demands among the Slovene population. This transition is best exemplified by autobiographical testimonies of Slovene teachers working in Trieste.

Marija Kmet, a teacher at a Slovene school in Trieste,² described in her memoirs her enthusiasm for the formation of the new Yugoslav state at the end of the war, but also her disappointment following the Italian occupation of the Austrian Littoral:

I achieved what I had wished for throughout the war: I will be happy when I can cry out at the top of my voice in public: 'That damn Austria!' At that point I was allowed to do that. I returned to Trieste triumphantly, I wore the Slovene tricolored flag in public and was repeatedly disappointed when I was attacked by Italians, and, indeed, hit on the head with a stick by some man. We made large and small flags in classrooms for the English; looking forward to their arrival, we waited for them day after day and devised grand plans. I argued with a housekeeper who learnt from some influential Triestine magnates that Trieste would be occupied by Italians, who would go as far as Logatec. I was outraged and rejected her claims, saying that it was nothing but Italians' wishful thinking, until that unforgettable, sad day came. (Kmet, 1933, 79–80).³

- 1 The article was elaborated within the EIRENE project (full title: Post-war transitions in gendered perspective: the case of the North-Eastern Adriatic Region), founded by the European Research Council under Horizon 2020 financed Advanced Grant founding scheme [ERC Grant Agreement n. 742683]. The article is also the result of research activities in the following research project: *Oborožena meja. Politično nasilje v severnem Jadranu, 1914–1941* n. J6-7152, financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).
- 2 Marija Kmet (1889–1972) was a teacher at a private school in Trieste, which was established by a branch of the society Ciril Metodova družba (Cyril and Methodius Society), whose operation was based on the same principles as that of Schulverein and Lega Nazionale.
- 3 Marija is astonished that they did not learn beforehand “that Trieste was handed over to Italians along with the rest of Karst,” referring to the Treaty of London and adding “or did we subconsciously overhear such announcements?” (Kmet, 1933, 81).

Marija Kmet held several lectures on Slovene literature in Delavski dom⁴ (the Labourers' Hall) and was soon blacklisted by the Italian authorities for not concealing her anti-Italian sentiments.⁵ She was forced to relocate to Ljubljana and search for a new job (Kmet, 1933, 83).⁶

The despair felt by the most active amongst Slovene women upon the arrival of the Italian troops in Trieste and Gorizia was addressed in the memoirs of the Trieste-based author Marica Nadlišek Bartol.⁷ The joy felt upon the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy was followed by the sadness over the arrival of the Italian authorities.

Slovene women, who made bows, rosettes, and ribbons in Slovene national colours in Narodni dom (the National Hall) pledged to face the Entente with a Slovene threecolour. However, something heavy lay in the atmosphere among these national workers, since some of them had heard that the Slavs were waiting in vain for the Entente's arrival. Nevertheless, Slovene national symbols were sold and worn in the streets of Trieste. Those who only yesterday pretended to be our friends now looked daggers at us. We grew more depressed day by day, hearing from many sides that only Italians were coming to Trieste, without the French, the English or Americans, contrary to Slavs' hopes. [...] Already in several days' time our symbols had to disappear, they were removed by force and their bearers ridiculed. By and large, it was claimed that from that point onwards we were all Italians and that only Italian colours were allowed. In late November the schools opened; however, only Italian ones. Naive as we were, we still hoped and waited for Slovene schools to open, as promised; however, subsequently, these promises were broken. (Nadlišek, 2005, 339).

Discomfort, disappointment, and fear spread among the broader Slovene rural and urban population after the war and with the arrival of the Italian army, which is documented by memory literature. Women's and men's testimonies are similar in terms of accents and descriptions; however, they differ in terms of quantity. A memoir penned by Jožefa Lakovič Jarc, a farm woman from Doberdob, is thus particularly valuable. She depicted her experience as a refugee during World War I and her return to her war-torn hometown, where she saw the arrival of the Italian army:

In the beginning, when we were under Italy, we thought that perhaps things would be better than in Austria, that we would retain the same rights in schools, in church

4 On Slovene workers' political and cultural activities in Trieste see Regent, 1967.

5 "However, we remained hopeful that liberators would arrive and that Trieste would be a free port, at least. Some of us hardened "patriots" thus remained in Trieste until the end. What contempt I felt for Italians then, I spat in their presence, expected them to leave for good! [...] There was no school any more, but nobody was driving us away, so we stayed and devised secret plans and were even ready to die for the homeland." (Kmet, 1933, 82).

6 On conditions in Trieste's socialist circles, in which Marija Kmet was active, see: Regent, 1967, particularly 108–116; Piemontese, 1974.

7 Marica Nadlišek Bartol (1867–1940) taught in Slovene municipal schools up to 1889; she was the editor of *Slovenka*, the first Slovene-language women's periodical, which was published in Trieste between 1887–1900.

and in the village. However, that was not the case; we soon felt that Italy wanted to Italianize all Slovenes. We were told that 'si parla solo italiano' in Italy. (Lackovič Jarc & Gergolet, 2010, 53).⁸

Author Ilka Vašte also addressed problems women active in the Slovene national and socialist ranks faced when dealing with the Italian military and administrative authorities. She started working as a teacher in the Slovene-language Cyril and Methodius private school in Trieste in 1913. After the war, similarly to many other Slovene teachers and educated women who were not born in the former Austrian Littoral, she was unable to obtain Italian citizenship and was thus made to relocate to Ljubljana in 1919.⁹

I remained in Trieste for another three months. The conditions were difficult, the city was occupied by the Italians. We waited in vain for them to open our schools. The entire inventory of our school at Acquedotto was thrown to the street and burnt down. They denied me my bereavement benefit and pension after my husband's death. I had to provide for my two children with my small salary. I was in dire straits; however, I persevered for as long as I could. (Vašte, 1964, 131).

Memoirs penned by Ilka Vašte and other teachers who provided written testimonies of that turbulent period shed light on trauma experienced due to loss of employment or expulsion from Trieste. By leaving the city, many of them also left their space of social and political engagement, but also that of their emancipation. Having been forced to leave Trieste, many women teachers' autonomous public activities ceased and they relocated to areas, which were more conservative and less favourably disposed towards emancipated women.

A mere 392 schools out of a total of 540 schools in operation before the war were open in late 1919 even though the Italian military governor had promised that Slovene and Croatian schools would be restored (Andri & Mellinato, 1994, 65–95). Later on, their number was reduced and they were eventually banned and removed by the Gentile Reform of 1925 (Čermelj, 1974, 41–45). The fate and experience of Slovene teachers is known; the Italian authorities transferred a part of the teaching staff to the country's interior, while others left for Yugoslavia after the removal of Slovene schools. Specific aspects of this removal and transfer of teachers in terms of gender are yet to be examined (Lavrenčič Pahor, 1994). The question of how Slovene teachers who accepted their transfers to Italy's interior adjusted to the fascist redefinition of a woman's role and how they experienced it has not been addressed yet (De Grazia, 1992, 15).

8 Jožefa Lakovič Jarc's memoir depicts life in the Gorizian region before and after World War I. This is an extraordinarily valuable written source that bears witness to her understanding of epoch-making changes and highlights forms by means of which watershed political events cut into individuals' lives and into that of their respective rural community.

9 On the exerted pressure and the departure of the non-Italian population during the Italian military administration see Purini, 2010, 42–51.

In the uncertainty of the first post-war months,¹⁰ when the Italian authorities started to install the new institutional frameworks and introduce the Italian legislature, the Slovene population began to restore its network of societies (Hočevár, 1969, 112). Along with the restored pre-war cultural, professional, and economic societies, new ones came into being, including women's societies. It is significant that this occurred in a period when the premises of the most important Slovene organizations were demolished and targeted by fascist arsonists. The arson attack of Narodni dom in Trieste took place on 13 July 1920; the headquarters of Slovene societies, the premises of Jadranska banka and privately owned shops were attacked and ruined. The premises of Delavski dom and Ljudski oder were demolished as well.¹¹ The fascist violence in the Julian March escalated with Benito Mussolini's rise to power and the repressive policy aimed at the Slovene population – in Istria also at the Croatian population – exacerbated.

WOMEN'S ACTIVISM DURING THE RISE OF FASCISM

In the early 1920s, the chronology of the fascist violence coincided with that of women's activity in organizations and with an increased number of women's societies, which is yet to be clearly recorded by fascist and border-related historiographical studies. The society Goriško splošno slovensko žensko društvo (the Gorizian General Slovene Women's Society) was established in Gorizia in September 1922. The society Žensko dobredelno udruženje (Women's Charitable Association) was founded in Trieste on 8 November 1922¹² and was in operation up to mid-1928. Prosvetna zveza (Cultural Association), whose girls' section commenced operation in 1924, was established in Gorizia in 1920. Women's sporting sections played *hazena*, a team game similar to handball (Sardoč, 1983, 50). The main goal of the expedited formation of girls' circles throughout the Littoral was to include women in the national defence activities, which can be seen as a continuation of women's pre-war activities in organizations, but also as a completely new attempt to defend the Slovene population from fascist denationalization. The authorities regarded women's organizations as less dangerous than men's organizations; consequently, they subjected them to more severe persecution. Women's theatre groups and choirs, which spread the Slovene national sociability among the female population in urban and rural areas, were formed concurrently with the discontinuation of Slovene institutions and schools. In the 1920s and 1930s, a similar role was played by the societies

10 The border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was decided upon on 12 November 1920 in Rapallo.

11 On the destruction of the largest Slovene library and on how the dream of a multiethnic coexistence was buried see Hočevár, 1969, 111.

12 On 2 September 1933, the local authorities approved the statute of Slovensko dobredelno udruženje. A note was added that Udruženje collaborated with Šolsko društvo and that both societies were founded to replace the discontinued sections of the Cyril Methodius Society. The statute was signed by Ivanka Kapun, Marija Premerl, Felicia Ferluga, Danica Perhavec, Ana Gombač, and Marija Sancin, whom the authorities deemed morally and politically fit (ASTs, RCGC Gab., b, 125, f. 055, Associazione femminile di beneficenza, 13 October 1926).

Marijina družba (Mary's Society), which were restored after the war. Their operation was obstructed by the Italian authorities to a lesser degree due to their religious nature; nevertheless, the national activities organized by the Slovene clergy were often hidden behind their religious goals.¹³

The end of World War I brought new developments to the sphere of women's journalism in Trieste and Gorizia. *Jadranka* was first published in Trieste in 1921.¹⁴ It was edited by Marica Gregorič Stepančič, who aimed to encourage women's public activities in the period when the Julian March saw the emergence of fascist politics and the introduction of the basis for the anti-Slovene policy (Vinci 2011, 5–32): “*We must start from scratch. We were degraded to the lowest point a nation can reach. Let us show them that we can rise from the lowest depths.*” (Gregorič Stepančič, 1922)¹⁵ *Slovenka* was published in Gorizia in 1922–1923.¹⁶ Both women's periodicals were discontinued in 1923 so that they would not stand in the way of a more ambitious journalistic project, i.e. *Ženski svet*, which was first published that same year in Trieste; it was a journal of the society *Žensko dobrodelno udruženje*, which was established in Trieste in 1922 and was intended for a broad female readership.

The post-war wave of women's activities in Slovene societies and in journalism is to be seen additionally as a continuation of women's charitable activities during wartime. Antonija Slavik,¹⁷ one of the initiators of *Žensko dobrodelno udruženje* and *Ženski svet*, was the heart and soul of Slovene women's charitable activities in Trieste during the war. She was active in the women's branch of the Cyril and Methodius Society and in the Triestine Red Cross, where she worked alongside Italian and German women from Trieste. Milka Martelanc also engaged in humanitarian work during wartime and was active in the Triestine Red Cross. She accompanied a group of war orphans to a 10-week holiday to Switzerland in 1918. In Geneva, she contacted Slovene emigrants and representatives of the Yugoslav Committee in Paris, and they gave her instructions for the National Council Committee in Trieste at the end of the war. After the arrival of the Italian army in Trieste, the authorities threatened her with internment; however, she relocated to Ljubljana in time, where she helmed the Office for the Occupied Territory in Trieste (Nečak, 1972).

13 On the operation of the Marijina družba societies in Slovene ethnic territory see Zalar, 2001. On the operation of the Slovene clergy in the Littoral see Pelikan, 2002.

14 “The journal of nationally conscious women in Trieste” was a monthly edited by Marica Stepančič – Gregorič. After World War I, she “committed to the idea of establishing a women's monthly that would help save national consciousness.” (Samsa, 1954, 51).

15 In her polemic with someone who signed their article in the second issue of *Jadranka* as a Woman from Idrija and supported the struggle of the “nationally conscious women” for women's right to vote, Marica Gregorič – Stepančič emphasized the importance of national defence work. She believed that Slovene women will be given the right to vote when the “rest of Italy's womanhood” will (Gregorič Stepančič, 1922, 25).

16 Edited by Gizela Ferjančič, the monthly was named after the first Slovene periodical, which was published in Trieste from 1897 to 1902 and represents the very beginning of Slovene women's movement and feminism.

17 Antonija Slavik, née Lavrenčič, (1868–1938) graduated from the teachers' training school in Gorizia. She was actively involved in the Slovene cultural life in Trieste and wrote for *Edinost*. She was a member of the women's branch of the Cyril and Methodius Society, the Red Cross, and of the Widows' and Orphans' Organization. On her activity during the war see Hočevar, 1969, 96.

She returned to Trieste in 1921 and became head of the secretariat of the political society Edinost; she left the city the following year to study journalism in Prague. Following the establishment of *Žensko dobrodelno udruženje*, she became its secretary and one of the most prominent contributors to *Ženski svet*. She became its editor-in-chief after the periodical's relocation to Ljubljana. Namely, Slovene-language press was banned and, consequently, the editorial office was forced to leave Trieste for Ljubljana, where she took refuge to avoid fascist prosecution.¹⁸

Pavla Hočevar,¹⁹ a teacher at the Cyril Method school in Trieste, was an active Slovene social democrat. In her memoir, she described the reasons behind the establishment of women's society and the periodical *Ženski svet* in the period of the increasing fascist violence and Italian authorities' obstruction: "*We must create a form of licit assistance – let us found a charitable organization! Fascists might allow that!*" (Hočevar, 1969, 121). She explained the reasons behind women's involvement in charitable work in a similar manner. In the post-war period, employment in the public sector and state benefits were granted on the basis of nationality, meaning that the Slovene population was often deprived of material support.

Many Slovenes lost their income: Our poor families do not get the same state support as the Italian ones. Schoolchildren in Sv. Jakob/San Giacomo are in need of everything, the women's branch of the school society (the successor of the woman's branch of the Cyril and Methodius Society) cannot do everything. [...] Several weeks later, on 8 November, the founding general assembly of the new society Žensko dobrodelno udruženje took place. The society was helmed by Antonija Slavik and Milka Martelanc was its secretary. (Hočevar, 1969, 121).

The society consisted of a charitable section, which gathered means for supporting families and children, and a crafts section, which saw to it that national embroidery was tailored and sewn. Hočevar maintains that their courses were "*also a delightful meeting point where only Slovene words could be heard, occasionally also a Croatian one, and where the related terminology could be learnt.*" (Hočevar, 1969, 121). These activities represented a step towards women's traditional roles and digressed from moderate pre-war and post-war ideals promoted by the circle of women who established *Slovenka*, the first women's periodical, in Trieste in 1897. However, they opened possibilities for raising political awareness of that part of the female population which would due to their class or ideological orientation remain outside the network of women's organizations.

Hočevar also argues that she was somewhat apprehensive to take on the editorship of *Ženski svet* at the invitation of Antonija Slavik, Milka Mankoč, Marica Nadlišek Bartol, and Milka Martelanc, since her view of life differed from theirs and because she did not identify herself merely in terms of national values. On account of increasing fascist pressure experienced by the Slovene population, she was prepared to put her social-

18 She retired after World War II and edited the fashion section in the women's periodical *Naša žena*.

19 Pavla Hočevar (1889–1972), a teacher and a writer.

democrat and feminist ideas aside. She gave in to “the rule of the middle ground” and agreed to stress national consciousness and foster hidden Sloveneness and Yugoslav dom. “I listened to such and similar instructions, got lost in thought and remained silent. A cold shadow fell on my horizon, which was once so daring, on my grand plans and my independent view of life. I could not contradict, our people’s position was too bleak – I had to yield” (Hočevár, 1969, 122–123). Fanica Obid and Ljudmila Rutar, who will be addressed in the further course of the paper, acted in a similar way.

Slovene women’s post-war organizational enthusiasm was also closely associated with the politicization experienced by women at the end of the war, partly also beforehand.²⁰ Many Slovene women in Trieste and Gorizia supported the May Declaration and the emergence of the new Yugoslav state. Similarly, their politically active Italian counterparts strove for Trieste to become a part of Italy. Pavla Hočevár’s efforts and those of other Trieste-based Slovene women activists aimed at organizing women’s rallies in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade in protest of the occupation and secession of Slovene and Croatian areas undoubtedly attest to the extent of women’s autonomous political operation immediately after the war and in the 1920s.²¹ Their political activity was strengthened with the general belief that only mass activism and national efforts can prevent the materialization of the fascist programme, whose goal was to Italianize the entire border area.

In 1928, when the fascist authorities banned Slovene societies and the Slovene press, the *Žensko dobrodélno udruženje* society was dissolved. With more than 18,000 subscribers, its periodical was forced to find a new publisher and relocate to Ljubljana, i.e. Yugoslavia. Despite its relocation, Pavla still edited the periodical in Trieste:

The articles were sent to me via a secret route. Individual issues were paginated in a print shop in Trieste, matrices were made and sent to a Ljubljana-based print shop. Every month we feared for the periodical’s fate, dreading that the prepared materials would be confiscated and that the periodical would not be sent to our subscribers in the Littoral, which indeed happened. We received complaints that the periodical was delivered with a considerable delay or not at all, and some subscribers had to explain themselves to the authorities and thus chose to cancel their subscriptions. For a while, each issue was sent to Italy by registered mail, which was quite costly. Several issues were sent in a single sleeve in order to minimise the threat of our subscribers being prosecuted by fascists. (Hočevár, 1969, 125–126).

Italian authorities regarded the editorial team of *Ženski svet* as a dangerous political enemy, which is attested by the documents kept in the political records Casellario politico,

20 On national efforts in Trieste’s circles see Catalan, 2007; Verginella, 2006, 115–135.

21 Pavla Hočevár wrote about her trips to Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade in the spring of 1919 to organize rallies in support of the demands voiced by Slovene Littoral women. In the Slovene capital, she sought support among the refugees from the Littoral and in the Office for the Occupied Area; in Zagreb, she appealed to the well-established author Zofka Kveder. Assisted by the Slovene politician and member of parliament Anton Korošec, she came into contact with the organization Kola srpskih sestara in Belgrade (Hočevár, 1969, 108–109).

in the Central State Archive in Rome. Pavla Hočevar was subject to the Italian police surveillance even after her relocation to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, i.e. to Ljubljana, in 1929.²² Fascist police informants kept watch on her as a fervent anti-Italian and propagandist, who was active in Klub Primork (Littoral Women's Club) and in the editorial staff of *Ženski svet*.²³ They also followed Milka Martelanc for “spreading Slovene irredentist sentiments”²⁴ and for having contacts “with all persons arriving in Ljubljana from Italy, particularly from the Julian March, for keeping in touch with the well-known irredentist Maša Grom and for having an informant in Trieste, a woman named Godina, a representative of the aforementioned periodical *Ženski svet* for the Julian March.”²⁵

Maša Dolenc Grom was a member of numerous women's associations. After having relocated from Trieste to Ljubljana, she was one of the key figures in the ranks of the Littoral emigrants from the Julian March. It is stated in a notice sent by an informant of the Ljubljana OVRA to Rome in 1930 that she “helmed various associations, was decorated by Karadorđević's monarchy and acted as a mother figure to Slovene political refugees from the Julian March.”²⁶ The fascist authorities were aware that women's public activities were often less visible and underground. On the basis of their anti-Italian orientation, which was demonstrated by women intellectuals and activists in Trieste in the early 1920s, the Italian Secret Service kept track of them also outside Italy, i.e. in Yugoslavia of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The Littoral women refugees' and activists' escape, retreat, and operation in the new Slovene environment and in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was neglected by historiography. The transition of women's activity from the legal to the illegal sphere, and the forms and characteristics of Slovene women's anti-fascism in the Julian March in the interwar period after the removal of all Slovene women's societies were also poorly researched. By 1929, the Littoral illegal organization Tigr,²⁷ in Trieste also Borba, consisted of 134 cells²⁸ and was, as a rule, regarded as a men's organization.²⁹ Nevertheless, the investigation leading to the first trial before the Special Tribunal in 1930,³⁰ in which members of

22 ACS, MI, DGPS, DPP, b. 660, f. 32, Paola Hočevar, 18 August 1930.

23 ACS, MI, DGPS, DPP, b. 660, f. 32, Paola Hočevar, Lubiana, 30 December 1929.

24 ACS, TSDS, b. 790, f. 54, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale della Pubblica sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Martellanz Ludmilla, Trieste, 24 August 1928.

25 ACS, TSDS, b. 790, f. 54, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale della Pubblica sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Martellanz Ludmilla, Lubiana, 2 July 1930.

26 ACS, MI, DGPS, DPP, b. 635, f. 19, Massa Grom, Lubiana, 16 May 1930.

27 The acronym stands for Trst (Trieste), Istra (Istria), Gorica (Gorizia) and Reka (Rijeka), which is the full name of this revolutionary organization in the Julian March. This was a militant anti-fascist and insurgent organization established in response to the fascist Italianization of the Slovene and Croatian population in the Julian March. It is considered to be one of the first antifascist resistance movements in Europe.

28 The data stems from Ivan Regent's report to the KSI (Komunistična stranka Italije – Partito Comunista Italiano) directorate in Paris. Cited after Kacin Wohinz, 1990, 238.

29 Interesting insight into how an illegal movement is regarded as a male one even when women play an important role within it is provided in the study addressing women's illegal movement in the Polish Solidarity. (Penn, 2005).

30 The trial took place after members of Tigr had attacked the headquarters of the Triestine periodical *Il Piccolo* (Klabjan, 2007).

Tigr were tried, included also Sofija Frančeskin and Ljudmila Rutar. The presence of two women in the list of 101 individuals who were investigated and interrogated might be considered statistically irrelevant, but only if we do not examine in detail the documents of the trials and the related memory literature.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the investigation encompassing more than 200 individuals and led to the second Triestine trial, when 60 persons were tried by the Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State in December 1941. The bulk of people who were investigated, tried and sentenced consisted of men. They also included several young girls and women from Trieste,³¹ the majority of whom were reprimanded before the beginning of the trial and a small number of whom were sent to confinement or internment. Marija Urbančič,³² who was arrested on 18 March 1940, was the exception and had to appear before the tribunal on 2 December 1941. Being a member of Bobek's group,³³ she was charged with counter-Italian espionage in the area of Ilirska Bistrica. Silvija Boštjančič, a resident of Ljubljana and the editor of the periodical *Istra*, and Marija Gorup, who was a shop assistant in one of the shops in Ilirska Bistrica, also collaborated with the defendant. If the latter was suspected of being Bobek's associate, Marija Urbančič's activities were substantiated by OVRA's pieces of information, according to which she was in suspicious contact with other "*irredentist Slavic elements*" that she occasionally visited in Yugoslavia.³⁴ The involvement of three women in Bobek's inner circle (totalling eight members of both genders, two of whom were Italians) is not negligible, also because it attests that when choosing his associates, Viktor Bobek did not stick to domains which were according to historiography viewed as a Littoral anti-fascist conspiracy. Unlike other groups (nationalists, communists, terrorists) that were captured and tried before the Special Tribunal in December 1941, Bobek's group, which was active also in counter-espionage, allowed women to take part in its operations, this applies also to Italians, which was not a common occurrence in other groups.

In a lengthy memorandum added to the remaining body of evidence in the second Triestine trial, Viktor Sosič, a university student and member of the so-called nationalist group, confirmed that women were in the group of nationalists for decorative purposes only. They were said to have served merely as "choreography".³⁵ This statement could be considered exculpatory if it did not contain an additional remark stating that Tigr members who worked in espionage and sabotage tolerated women as treasurers or librarians at best. They shared the opinion that only men were suitable for the most dangerous

31 The trial records include, inter alia, documents about Vojka Šmuc, Milena and Danila Sila, Ada Bolčič, and Darinka Veljak, secondary-school students active in the Slovene anti-fascist movement in Trieste.

32 Marija Urbančič (1907–1988) worked as a clerk with the company Zanzi, which supplied military posts along the Italian-Yugoslav border in the area of Ilirska Bistrica. She was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. She spent three years and nine months in Italian prisons; she was kept in solitary confinement for a total of 15 months. She was released in December 1943 following an intervention by the Ljubljana-based Red Cross (Bobek, 2017, 46.)

33 On Viktor Bobek and his group Verginella, 2008, 280–287.

34 On the harsh regime in prison and in solitary confinement see Bobek, 2017, 41–47.

35 ACS, TSDS, b. 760, f. IV, Esami testimoniali, Pro memoria Vittorio Sossi, Tomasi Giuseppe et al. See also Čermelj, 1972, 149.

operations. They had to be unmarried, support the cause and be some sort of missionaries or priests (Sardoč, 1983, 54).

Milica Kacin Wohinz, an eminent researcher of the fascist period and the Slovene anti-fascist resistance in the Littoral, argues that Tigr did not consist merely of single men, since “*a number of women were mentioned in memoirs, particularly in the area of Gorizia and Pivka. Sometimes they were friends of members of the organization; they were entrusted with carrying books and notices also because they were believed to be less suspicious*” (Kacin Wohinz, 1990, 239). A footnote published in her text provides the names of the most active women: “*Fanica Obid, Jelinčič’s wife, was among best known ones, she worked in the press and was in June 1930 confined for a year; Fanica Ažman emigrated and was afterwards active particularly in emigration; the teacher Ljudmila Rutar, who was confined alongside Fanica Obid, Albert Rejc’s sisters in the Tolmin area, Kati Lenar, Roza Obleščak, the poetess Ljubka Šorli, in the Bistrice area Marija Urbančič, Marija Valenčič.*” (Kacin Wohinz, 1990, 239).³⁶ In the footnote included in the updated reprint of the text in 2008, she mentioned alongside the aforementioned women also Justina Kacin, Terezija Klinkon, “*in Gorizia sisters of Avgust Sfiligoj, Jelinčič’s mother and sisters, Sličič’s mother, Dr. Potrata’s sisters, in Bistrice Marija Valenčič, and a number of girls’ and mothers’ names.*” (Kacin Wohinz & Verginella, 2008, 110).³⁷ That their names were listed below the footnote separator is indicative of historiography’s attitude towards women’s illegal and anti-fascist activity in the Littoral.

The list of people who were tried and sentenced before the Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State (1927–1943) indicates that the circle of politically active Slovene anti-fascist women in the Julian March was a large one. It includes names of girls and women who were either accused of collaborating with the national liberation movement that came into being after Italy’s occupation of Yugoslavia or of being active in the communist ranks (Renko, Kenda & Vilhar, 1970, 103).³⁸ Documents from regional archives throughout the Apennine Peninsula provide additional names to the list of Slovene women from the Julian March who were either confined or interned due to their abundant anti-fascist activities. An in-depth analysis of documents produced by the fascist authorities in the interwar period is required for a more comprehensive overview of Slovene women’s anti-fascist activity in the Julian March of the 1920s and 30s. It is evident from the intelligence gathered by the Triestine police about the lawyer Dr. Boris Furlan that the authorities also monitored the activity of his wife Ana Černigoj, who was considered to be a more dangerous activist than her husband, even though the former held an important position among the Slovene political representatives. Unlike her husband,

36 Andrej Gabršček lists Marija Tul, whose death on 16 May 1921 was the result of violence, among the first victims of fascism. Gaberšček, 1934, 597.

37 This list should also include Kati Lenar and Marija Majnik. The former hosted an illegal circle of students of the teachers’ training school, who secretly taught children from the area of Tolmin to read and organized courses for girls who would teach children Slovene; the latter was an active member of the organization Tigr (Cenčič, 2002, 49–50).

38 See also: Dal Pont, Leonetti, Maiello & Zocchi, 1976.

Ana did not hold any posts; however, she was active in the Triestine women's association and in Slovene charitable circles.³⁹

Photographs taken during many illegal youth rallies in the 1920s and 30s also bear witness to women's involvement in the illegal anti-fascist movement (Cenčič, 1997, 141–145). They were mentioned in individual testimonies and memoirs, from which can be gathered that it was not only men who adhered to the culture of boldness⁴⁰ but also women, particularly young girls, students, and educated women. This is, inter alia, confirmed by the correspondence between Bruno Trampuž and his fiancée Marija Babič. The intimate bond between them that was formed in 1941 stemmed from their activities in the illegal movement of Trieste's young people, but also from Marija's intention to stay in touch with Bruno after his arrest and confinement (Verginella, 2015, 28–48). Nationally active Slovene girls from Trieste wrote letters of encouragement to friends and acquaintances in fascist prisons, internment, and in camps. Their correspondence was reminiscent of that kept by women during World War I, who aimed to instil courage and bravery into the minds of soldiers on the front, which was typical of other insurgent movements as well.

TWO EDUCATED AND DANGEROUS SLOVENE ANTIFASCISTS

Let us take a closer look at two prominent women who were shunned by the historiographical limelight; they were mentioned in memory literature, but not in a manner that would be anticipated on the basis of archival sources and correspondence. They were both from the area of Tolmin, where they attended the Slovene teachers' training school. They were active in the Slovene anti-fascist movement and collaborated with the illegal organization Tigr. They were under police surveillance and, eventually, experienced imprisonment and internment.

Ljudmila Rutar (1903–1979), much like her three brothers and two sisters (Rutar, 2000, 234), was a trained teacher. "*After the rise of fascism, she and her sister could have escaped across the border to Yugoslavia, but the general principle was that we had to persevere in the Littoral. This was a difficult time for our entire family, with devastating consequences for all brothers,*" wrote Ljudmila's sister, Marija Rutar, in her memoir (Rutar, 2000, 223), where she speaks about her sadness about the annexation of the Littoral by Italy in 1921: "*we wore black ribbons on our shirts and jackets, and numbly observed the celebration at the present-day Trg 1. maja square; only Oskar could not refrain from making a derogatory gesture.*" (Rutar, 2000, 239).

Ljudmila's first arrest took place on 18 October 1929 on a bus ride from Tolmin to Spodnja Tribuša. Her fiancé Slavko Bevk and Ciril Kosmač, both of whom were members of Tigr, were arrested that same day. After her second arrest, on 15 March 1930, the Gorizia Prefecture confined her for two years, even though five years were planned

39 ACS, Prefettura Gab., b. 103, On. Regia Prefettura, 13 October 1926.

40 On K. Jug's and Jelinčič's boldness see *Požrtvovalnost, tovarištvo in drznost dr. Klementa Juga*, in: Rovšček, 2011, 33–34.

initially. She was charged with collaborating with Slavko Bevk, who in turn was charged with working in a secret anti-Italian organization and military espionage for Yugoslavia. Having been accused of exchanging letters with Bevk, she replied that they had engaged in friendly correspondence.⁴¹ “*All I have to say is that I am blameless and hence innocent. Please, allow me to return to my people.*”⁴²

In her personal folder, which is kept in the Central Archives in Rome, she is referred to as a Slavic irredentist, *irredentista slava*, but also as an intelligent, young, educated woman from a family of workers. Although fascist authorities could not prove her participation in anti-Italian propaganda, they were convinced of her involvement in Slavko Bevk’s attempted escape from prison in Tolmin. and his counter-espionage activities. It is mentioned in one of the preserved documents that she was the only Slovene teacher who managed to stay in the Tolmin area, specifically in Cerknò, after other Slovene teachers had been either laid off or transferred to Italy’s interior. During her employment as a teacher she was able to get support from her superiors, which was regarded as a great skill by the fascist authorities.⁴³ “*She managed to win everyone over,*” says a communication dated to 15 July 1930 and sent by the Gorizia Prefecture. She was no beauty, yet the police believed that she could charm anyone with her smiles and feminine ways. The fascist authorities continued to regard her as a mysterious and suspicious figure since they could not justify her contacts with “*members of a secret society that was named on several occasions, i.e. persons who demanded a homeland, the soil that was “redeemed” with the blood of its many sons, and spread hatred of Italy and the regime [...].*”⁴⁴ Statements issued by representatives of the police are marked by ambivalence towards women’s charm and beauty, which are, on the one hand, perceived as a plus and as a deceiving feature that inhibits the discovery of illegal and counter-state activity in the Julian March, i.e. a politically and nationally sensitive territory, on the other.

The evidence used against Ljudmila Rutar and other members of Tigr by the fascist police consisted of confiscated files, statements written by detainees in their own writing or by the police, but also memoranda, observations written by police informants and investigators’ findings. It would be wrong to deem this comprehensive investigation material to be thoroughly unreliable and false. It was, in fact, produced for the benefit of the repressive fascist apparatus and the highest military judicial body operating under the top fascist authority and Mussolini himself; nevertheless, it has preserved the significance of the substantive material, from which the Special Tribunal drew its sentences. Despite the totalitarian features of this fascist judicial body’s operations we cannot make a priori claims that the investigation material is unreliable and, historiographically speaking, irrelevant. In terms of historiography, its use calls for a critical analysis and detection of its

41 ACS, CPC, b. 4503, f. Rutar Ludmilla, Interrogatorio di Rutar Ludmilla, Rome, court prison, 10 May 1930.

42 ACS, CPC, b. 4503, f. Rutar Ludmilla, Interrogatorio di Rutar Ludmilla, Rome, court prison, 10 May 1930.

43 ACS, CPC, b. 4503, f. Rutar Ludmilla, Prefettura di Gorizia, Riservata, 15 July 1930. Her sister Marija was transferred to Trivio di Ripatransone (Ascoli Piceno), where she worked as a teacher for five years, her brother Mirko to Sardinia, and Štefanija, her other sister, to Lombardy (Rutar, 2000, 223).

44 ACS, CPC, b. 4503, f. Rutar Ludmilla, Riservata, Prefettura di Gorizia, 15 July 1930.

credibility, and, consequently, for the identification of instances in which the investigators falsified testimonies to their own benefit or coerced detainees into giving false testimonies.

The writing of Ljudmila's sister Marija is in several places complementary to police reports. For instance, she states that on 15 March 1930 her sister had been pushed into a car by agents and taken to Trieste and, later on, to a prison in Koper, where she had spent 45 days in solitary confinement and had been interrogated on several occasions. She was transferred to Rome, placed in solitary confinement, further interrogations followed. In the period when Trieste saw the first trial between 1 and 5 July where Ljudmila Rutar was among the 87 accused, Ljudmila was imprisoned in Gorizia. After having spent six months in prison, she was confined to the island of Ponza; she was the youngest detainee there and the first political confinee from the Julian March (Rutar, 2000, 253). There were 400 confinees on the island, including Tigr members Roman Pahor from Trieste and Rudi Uršič from Kobarid, etc.

We learn from her sister's writing that her fiancé was sent to the island of Ventotene and that they married in Rivello, Calabria, in early May 1937. They were relocated to Matera in 1938 and to Nocera near Salerno in 1939 (Rutar, 2000, 258). Marija Rutar maintained also that Ljudmila and Fanica Obid met in prison in 1930, when Milka was sentenced to two years in confinement on Ponza, while Fanica, who had her one-year-old Rada with her, was sentenced to one year in confinement in Matera (Rutar, 2000, 252).

It could be concluded from the documents concerning Fanica Obid (1903–1940)⁴⁵ which are kept in Rome that her prosecution was linked to her husband's activities; namely, Zorko Jelinčič, was the leading representative of the secret Slovene anti-fascist movement (Rovšček, 2005, 13). However, if we dig deeper into her biography, we realize that her political activities had begun before she met Jelinčič, which can cast doubt also on Ljudmila Rutar's political activity, which is in the police records brought in connection with that of her fiancé. The fascist authorities would not have been so persistent in their prosecution of Ljudmila and would not have subjected her to rigorous imprisonment if they had not held her responsible and deemed her to be a dangerous individual.

The Gorizia Prefecture described Fanica as “*young, intelligent, vibrant, smart,*” adding that she “*was respected and highly esteemed in the Slovene milieu.*”⁴⁶ The police sources claimed that she dressed elegantly, belittled everything Italian and praised everything that was Slovene. Similarly to her husband, she devoted her body and soul, *anima e corpo*, to Slavic nationalist propaganda. The police authorities also knew that she initiated antifascist circles, spread propaganda literature, exchanged letters with informants from many centres, and was a correspondent for *Edinost*. In short, she was believed to have been a sworn opponent of the regime, a communist agitator and thus posed a threat to the public order and the state.⁴⁷ She was reprimanded, inter alia, for being a subscriber of the periodical *La confederation Balcanique*, which was banned in fascist Italy. She organized women's sections of the cultural society Prosvetno društvo, she was active in the Gorizia

45 ACS, CPC, b. 3576, f. Obid Francesca, detta Faniza.

46 ACS, CPC, b. 3576, f. Obid Francesca, detta Faniza, Prefettura di Gorizia, Riservata, 24 August 1929.

47 ACS, CPC, b. 3576, f. Obid Francesca, detta Faniza, Prefettura di Gorizia, Riservata, 6 March 1931.

Hills, in the area of Idrija, the Vipava Valley, the Soča Valley, and had friends among students abroad.

It is stated in Slovene memory literature that she was very well-read, had a strong sense of national awareness and socially just education, which is believed to have been encouraged by the village teacher Jože Močnik, for whom she did housework as a young girl. During her stay at Francesco Scodnik's educational establishment, who aimed to enthuse students of the teachers' training school with the Italian culture, and during her years at the Slovene teachers' training school in Tolmin, which was established in 1920, she joined the secret communist circle and encouraged her fellow students to revolt. She published *Pika in britev* together with her classmate Ivanka Iva Volarič⁴⁸ and the illegal bulletin *Naše delo* with some of her other classmates.⁴⁹ Later on, she also published *Šolski list*, but also poems and prose in women's periodical *Jadranka*.

She was one of the organizers of the student strike in 1923 and left school in protest just before her secondary school final exams, i.e. *matura*. She returned home to Bukova, where she organized a women's circle in order to spread Marxist ideas. Her friendship with Vladimir Martelanc, the future communist representative in the Italian parliament, and poet Srečko Kosovel was very intense⁵⁰ in this period (Kosovel, 1977, 356), which is, inter alia, also documented by Kosovel's extant correspondence. Meeting Zorko Jelinčič on the one hand, and the escalated denationalization and fascistization of the Slovene society on the other, played an important role in her increasing closeness to the national-defence circle. This is evident also from a letter sent by the insightful Srečko Kosovel: "*Different people are needed to take the edge off the unnecessary fights when our common cause is at stake. We need men whose word will be valuable again and whose ideal will be selfless work. I think that many a good young man or woman will come from the Tolmin teachers' training school, with willingness to work and zest for life, for we cannot give in, we want to live*" (Kosovel, 1977, 370).

Similarly to Pavla Kočevar, Fanica responded to this appeal. She grew close to Jelinčič after he took on the post of secretary of the association of cultural societies in Gorizia in the autumn of 1924. In 1925, she participated in an illegal meeting on Krn and became an informant of Tigr. She relocated to Gorizia, where weekly and biweekly meetings were held in her flat in the winter of 1926 (Jelinčič, 1994, 133–134). Fanica and Zorko got married on 18 July 1929, and their daughter Rada was born on 15 September 1929 in Bukovo. The couple was summoned to the Gorizia Prefecture two days before the birth of their daughter. In his memoir, Jelinčič stated that after the attack on Bergant (Verrocchio, 2003) in 1929 they were under constant police surveillance for two years (Jelinčič, 1994, 143). Additionally, their illegal activities were made difficult by their daughter's birth, wherefore Fanica's sister Viki took over some of their contacts (Jelinčič, 1994, 143). Even though

48 She was born in Kobarid and attended elementary school in Ljubljana and teachers' training school in Tolmin. *Pika in britev* was a hand-written bulletin. (Rutar, 2000, 238).

49 Šavli, Kogoj, and Krašna were also involved in the publishing of this cyclostyled bulletin, which was edited by Fanica (Rutar, 2000, 239).

50 She engaged in correspondence with Srečko Kosovel from 1922 to 1925.

some of Zorko's writings are extraordinarily interesting in terms of evaluating Fanica's illegal activities, attention should be drawn to his claim that Fanica "*was not allowed to be a member of Tigr according to the rule book*"; however, her "*innocent explanations to the unbidden*" helped save the day in many a threatening situation and for that reason danger could be avoided. This applies also to her selfless sister Viki in Bukovo, who also "*had a nose*" for danger regardless of where it came from (Jelinčič, 1994, 167).

The allocated space does not allow me to address Fanica's biography in detail. It was marked by her one-year-long confinement in Tricarico, in Basilicata, and her being away from her husband, who was confined in Civitavecchia from the spring of 1934 onwards. In the autumn of 1934 Fanica and her daughter Rada made an illegal move to Yugoslavia; for a short while she stayed in Jesenice, where Zorko's siblings Milena, Nada, Slavko, and Ljubo lived. Her experience at the time was marked by her discomfort and aversion to Zorko's family. Fanica Obid was too independent and emancipated to submit to her husband's family and, in particular, to her mother-in-law. As maintained by Žarko Rovšček, "*despite her kind-heartedness, willingness to help others and her social sensitivity*" she did not meet her mother-in-law's criteria for a wife who was expected to "*do the housework and bring up children*" (Rovšček, 2005, 17). Fanica did not allow Zorko's mother, Josipina Trebše, to interfere with her daughter's upbringing. She wrote the following in a letter to her sister Viki about her mother-in-law: "*I say 'no, thank you' to her upbringing! To produce a puppet like her own, unable to find a husband!*" (Rovšček, 2005, 17).⁵¹

She relocated to Celje, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where she experienced loneliness and distance from her husband, which probably resulted in her insistence on high-risk pregnancy and, consequently, her untimely death:

Jasna, in whom the family could have found solace, was born in this situation. But to us, this was a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. I believe that we will never understand the secrets of Fanica's noble soul. Due to the necessary operation doctors prohibited Fanica to fall pregnant again. And yet she did not allow them to perform an abortion. She was hospitalized in Celje, and I was not even aware of it – otherwise, hopefully, I would have made her have an abortion. Even though I am not convinced of that, she was stubborn with things that touched her very core. Anyway, who would understand a woman's soul? Even in the period when we were still deciding on the form of our cohabitation, only one thing mattered to her – having a child at any cost; to her, that was the meaning of life. (Jelinčič, 1994, 202).

However, Zorko's interpretation of Fanica's final days cannot be refuted without Fanica's words. They cannot be confirmed or contradicted, not even by means of an extensive personal folder kept in the Central Archives in Rome. It is evident from the fascist authorities' political records that the fascist police regarded her as a dangerous

51 She refused to leave Rada in the care of the Jelinčič family, who relocated to Jesenice, when she did not have a permanent employment (Rovšček, 2005, 17).

enemy of Mussolini's Italy, who was capable of independent activity but was due to her arrest, her separation from her husband, and as a new mother weak and, consequently, considered to be less dangerous.

CONCLUSION

The national and political operation of Slovene women's organizations in the Julian March of the 1920s and 1930s has been neglected by Slovene and Italian historiography until recently not only due to modest amount of documentation but mostly due to lack of attention paid by historiography to women's organizations and political activity. The illumination of women's illegal activities brought up by women and occasionally also by men in their testimonies is particularly deficient. Further exploration of causes associated with the gradual subordination of women's organizations to the male-run movement, which was roughly outlined in this article, is required to obtain a more systematic and in-depth overview of women's anti-fascist activities. The escalation of the anti-Slovene fascist policy in the Julian March led to the loss of autonomy maintained by publicly active Slovene women up to the late 1920s. The fascist politics associated with the redefinition of the public and private sphere will have to be taken into consideration as well, which applies also to the promotion of fascism's "new woman" (De Grazia, 1992, 1–2), which was felt also in the Slovene segments of the society in the border area. Historiographical insufficiency resulting from deficient historicization of women's anti-fascist activities in the Julian March prior to the beginning of World War II is to be ascribed to fragmentary documents but also to the long-lasting historiographical belief that women's political operation in the interwar period was a minor phenomenon, unworthy of close historiographical attention. This belief was upheld also by former activists who often retreated to the private sphere once they got married and became mothers.

POLITIČNI AKTIVIZEM SLOVENK V JULIJSKI KRAJINI PO KONCU PRVE SVETOVNE VOJNE IN VZPONU FAŠIZMA. OD AVTONOMNOSTI DO PODREJENOSTI

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POVZETEK

Po koncu prve svetovne vojne in razpadu habsburške monarhije so si na ozemlju nekdanjega Avstrijskega Primorja, preimenovanega v Julijsko krajino (Venezia Giulia), posamični politični in nacionalni akterji prizadevali za hitro obnovo družbenega tkiva. Posebno velik je bil organizacijski zagon med slovenskim prebivalstvom, ki je z nenaklonjenostjo sprejelo italijansko vojaško zasedbeno upravo in z njo vključenost v nov državni okvir. Po prihodu italijanske vojske je bojazen, da bodo italijanske oblasti odvezle Slovence pod Avstrijo pridobljene nacionalne pravice, postala vzvod za razvejano politično aktivnost in družbeno organiziranost. V pričujočem članku so osvetljeni obseg ženske organiziranosti in vzroki za njeno pojavljanje po vojaški zasedbi nekdanjega Avstrijskega Primorja in njegovi priključitvi h Kraljevini Italiji. Gre za žensko delovanje, ki je sledilo predvojnemu vzorom meščanske ženske sociabilnosti in je sprva vključevalo tudi ženske emancipatorne težnje. Z vzponom fašizma, fašizacijo in italijanizacijo multietničnega obmejnega prostora pa se je podredilo novim potrebam organiziranja narodnoobrambnega dela, kar je povzročilo opustitev tako ideoloških razhajanj kot feminističnih zahtev. Gre za prehod, ki ga najboljše ponazarjajo avtobiografska pričevanja slovenskih učiteljic, aktivnih v Trstu, ki dokumentirajo razočaranje ob italijanski zasedbi Avstrijskega Primorja, narodnoobrambno aktivnost, a tudi izgubo učiteljskega mesta in prisilno izselitev, ki je za mnoge pomenila izgubo avtonomnega javnega delovanja in preselitev v bolj konservativna ter emancipiranim ženskam manj naklonjena okolja.

Na začetku dvajsetih let je kronologija fašističnega nasilja sovpadala s kronologijo ženske organiziranosti in povečanim številom ženskih društev, kar obmejne in fašistične zgodovinopisne študije doslej niso dovolj jasno zabeležile. V Gorici je bilo leta 1922 ustanovljeno Goriško splošno slovensko žensko društvo, v Trstu pa je istega leta nastalo Žensko dobrodelno udruženje, ki je delovalo do sredine leta 1928. Glavna namera pospešenega ustanavljanja dekliških krožkov po vsej Primorski je bilo vključevanje ženskega članstva v narodno obrambno delo. Leta 1928, ko so fašistične oblasti prepovedale slovenska društva in slovenski tisk, je bilo razpuščeno tudi Žensko dobrodelno udruženje. Njegovo glasilo, *Ženski svet*, ki je imelo 18.000 naročnic, je moralo najti novega izdajatelja in je premestilo najprej upravo, potem pa tudi uredništvo v Ljubljano. Zaradi odločne protiitalijanske usmerjenosti, ki so jo nekatere izobraženke in aktivistke pokazale v Trstu na začetku 20. let, so jim italijanske tajne službe ostajale na sledi tudi zunaj italijanskih meja. Zgodovinopisje je zelo pomanjkljivo preučilo delovanje primorskih begunk in aktivistk v novem slovenskem okolju v Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Podobno so tudi slabo raziskani

prehodi ženskega delovanja iz legalne v ilegalno sfero in nasploh oblike in značilnosti slovenskega ženskega antifašizma v Julijski krajini med obema vojnoma po ukinitvi vseh slovenskih ženskih društev. Čeprav so nekatere posameznice sodelovale s TIGR, jih moška memorialistika obravnava kot manj pomembne, slovenska historiografija pa jih omenja v opombah pod črto. Iz policijskih in sodnih virov pa je razvidno, kot dokazujeta primera Ljudmile Rutar in Fanice Obid, da so jih fašistične oblasti obravnavale kot nadvse nevarni sovražnici Mussolinijeve Italije.

Zaostritev fašistične protislovenske politike v Julijski krajini je nedvomno prispevala k izgubi avtonomije, ki so jo v javnosti aktivne Slovenke vzdrževale do konca 20. let. Podobno bo potrebno v večji meri upoštevati fašistično politiko redefiniranja javne in zasebne sfere kot tudi njegovo promocije »nove ženske« (De Grazia, 1992, 1–2), ki ni ostala brez učinkov niti v slovenskih segmentih obmejne družbe. Zgodovinsko manko, ki se je zgodil zaradi pomanjkljivega zgodovinjena ženskega antifašističnega delovanja v Julijski krajini pred začetkom druge svetovne vojne, je treba pripisati ne le fragmentarni dokumentarni bazi, temveč tudi dolgotrajnemu zgodovinsko prepričanju, da je bilo politično delovanje žensk v času med obema vojnoma minoren pojav, nevreden večje zgodovinske pozornosti.

Ključne besede: ženske, antifašizem, fašizem, Julijska krajina, poveljno obdobje

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