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## Resistance Materials. Female Antagonism in the No-TAV Case

### Bionote

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I learned that a woman can be a fighter,  
a fighter for freedom [because]  
revolution has to mean also life, every aspect of life.<sup>1</sup>

1 Teardrop Explodes, "Like Leila Khaled said," *Wildier* (Chicago: Mercury Records, 1981).

### 1. Introduction

In this paper we analyze the narrative use of gender<sup>2</sup> in two political life stories.<sup>3</sup>

The reconstruction of two feminine biographies "in revolt" has the purpose of deconstructing women's representation in political space as a "born criminal" or "prostitute," never as an intense desire for social participation and government.<sup>4</sup>

2 It is useful to question the effects of the political economy produced by the sexual device knowing that it can be used to deprive the effects of truth as a political controversy. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1986).

3 From a methodological point of view, we are trying to define and delimit the speech on the role of women as antagonists in the Italian debate. The synthetic systematization of Maria Soledad Rosas and Nicoletta Dosio's biographies is part of an exploratory study. The empirical material analyzed here was partly discussed during the workshop "Revisiting the Concept of the Activist for a Post-Occupy Age" in School for Politics and Critique 2017, organized by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities - Skopje in Ohrid on June 28, 2017. Such material is to be understood as part of a more complex collection of political biographies in the following historical periods: 1926-1945; 1977-1985, and 1998-today. After a historical reconstruction of women's militancy, a mapping of emblematic cases begins.

The collected biographies are a partial result of the PRIN (Projects of Relevant National Interest) 2016-2018, entitled "Media & terrorismi. L'impatto della comunicazione e delle reti digitali sull'insicurezza percepita" ("Media & Terrorisms. The Impact of Communication and Digital Networks on the Perceived Insecurity"). The analyzed materials are part of research carried out by URiT for the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples.

4 The reference is to the hair-brained theory of Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e*

The gender in the description of the No-TAV activists Maria Soledad Rosas and Nicoletta Dosio's lifestyle will be examined as a bio-political device, capable of naturalizing or normalizing the eccentricity of social trajectories. The two activists were accused of eco-terrorism: both of them had strongly opposed to the construction of the TAV, the new High Speed railway. Maria committed suicide when she was under house arrest, while Nicoletta escaped from prison. Both stories will be considered as an example of infamous biographies.<sup>5</sup> Nicoletta and Maria represent two infamous biographies because in a specific time and space they have individually confronted with power (in this case with the law) after they had already rewritten their lives as a case of deviance or crime. Such rewriting ignores the fact that where there is power, there is

resistance.<sup>6</sup> It, as an event, shows up as an ontologically irrefutable act and an intransitive idea of freedom, since the power of *logos* is exercised on subjects and only to the extent that these subjects are potentially free.<sup>7</sup>

This is because the discussion on gender in the individual normalization processes produces a late-liberal homologation. The political story also becomes part of a more complex process of social deviance and a criminalization of social movements. It is also important to know that feminist political activism is subject to a double stigma, the effect of a double discursive register in which the female figure is represented as hysterical and in need of male care. For example, Anna Laura Bragheti,<sup>8</sup> who also described the terrorist recruiting and training process in the novel *Il prigioniero* (*The Prisoner*), is reported in the film *Buongiorno Notte* (2008) as a fragile and psychologically unstable female figure. The film director Marco Bellocchio shows her spying the politician Aldo Moro. This scene depicts her as a woman, a highly restless one, consumed by guilty feelings for the symbolic death of the father (Moro and the Italian Republic). Individual anxiety - as the director seems to suggest - does not coincide with the role of the jailer, responsible for political change.<sup>9</sup> The cinematic

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*la donna normale* (Torino: Bocca, 1923). It is no coincidence that over the years, some important national and international publishers have republished books dedicated to Cesare Lombroso. Just to name a few significant titles: *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook*, ed. by Paul Knepper and Per Jørgen Ystehede (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) and the English-language edition of *Criminal Man*, trans. by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press). Lombrosian theories have come back to life thanks to the scientific discourse produced by neurosciences, identifying the causes of complex phenomena, such as political behaviors, in genetic (and racial) predispositions.

5 Cf. Michel Foucault, "La vie des hommes infâmes," in *Dits et écrits*, Vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 237-55. These biographies have been produced following the speeches produced by four important Italian newspapers: *La Stampa*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, and *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. The materials have been monitored since the date of publicity of the offense until the end of the trial. The Soledad Rosas' case was monitored from March 5, 1998 to July 30, 1998; Dosio's case was monitored from June 22, 2016 to December 30, 2016.

6 Michel Foucault. *Storia della sessualità*, Vol.1: *La volontà di sapere*, Italian trans. by Pasquale Pasquino and Giovanna Procacci (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004), 84 ff.

7 Judith Butler, *La vita psichica del potere. Teorie del soggetto*, Italian trans. by Federico Zappino (Milano: Mimesis, 2013).

8 Anna Laura Bragheti and Paola Tavella, *Il prigioniero* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003).

9 On the morning of the slaughter (March 16, 1978), the Government of Andreotti would gain confidence with the votes of the PCI (the Italian Communist Party), thus beginning the season of the Historic Compromise. Aldo Moro was kidnapped by Brigate Rosse and killed 55 days later. His body was found, in the trunk of a Renault 4 parked in via Caetani, a side street

version of Anna Laura Bragheti's image responds to a goal of individual self-reliance used to confirm the accusatory system. In this sense, the film did not have a rehabilitative intent but responds to a paternalistic view of the criminal justice system and the judicial system. In it, the offender is subject to a paradoxical process of victimization that validates the representation of the terrorist woman as a female with a weak persona in search for male protection.

As a political phenomenon, female terrorism in Italy has been a form of insurrection and revolution that has seen women act militantly in the physical and discursive space of struggle. As a matter of fact, the aesthetics of violence has always been practiced and justified by some in the women's movement. There were women-soldiers in Russia in the nineteenth century, as there were in the Irish Republican Army, in the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and lately in the Kurdish liberation war. Mass media selected and systematized the "legitimate illegitimate" position of such women in relation to their military act. The official version only sees them supporting the resistance and/or war, in the roles of nurses, couriers or spies. This happens because traditional female roles in society apply even within the limits of militancy. Audrey Alexander<sup>10</sup> and Marta Serafini,<sup>11</sup> two *feminine terrorism* scholars state that women are often a recruitment incentive for men. Moreover, it is a common belief (but not always proven by facts) that terrorist organizations employ women when

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of Botteghe oscure, the PCI headquarters, and Piazza del Gesù, the national headquarters of the Christian Democracy (DC).

10 Audrey Alexander, "A Year After San Bernardino, the Number of Women Jihadis Is Growing," *Lawfare*, December 18, 2016.

11 Marta Serafini, *Maria Giulia che divenne Fatima. Storia della donna che ha lasciato l'Italia per l'Isis* (Milano: Corriere della Sera, 2015).

they are in trouble because their presence amplifies the propaganda message, making homicide more horrible and more unnatural, precisely because it is committed by a female hand. We can also say that using women is convenient. Infiltrating a woman, introducing her through a man-guarded checkpoint, hiding weapons or bombs on her, making her look pregnant or making her spy on is easier and quicker than entrusting these tasks to a man.<sup>12</sup> In brief, also in the field of guerrilla fights and terrorism, women are positioned as unable to organize their political desire. This description is the result of a phallogocentric view that activates the rewriting of female biographical trajectories into *inferiorized* objects in need of care and social redemption.

## 2. The No-TAV Movement (The Mother of All Battles)

The No-TAV (TAV stands for "high-speed trains"<sup>13</sup>) movement is a new kind of political struggle. The people of Valle Susa have spontaneously started to protest, after having known the effects that the hypothetical building of a rail tunnel on the Turin-Lyon link could produce on those towns. This matter has to be understood as a resistance practice, produced by the local population to defend the territory. Michel Foucault held a course

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12 With regard to the representation of female terrorist, see: Maria Alvanou, "Criminological Perspectives on Female Suicide Terrorism," in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?*, ed. by Y. Schweitzer (Tel Aviv: JCSS, 2006), 91-106; Ruth Glynn, *Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," in *Daedalus*, Vol. 136 (2007), 94-102.

13 The project assumes a steady increase in goods transport on the Italy-France route; in fact, Fréjus railroad is subject to a steady decrease. In 2009 (last available data) the goods were 2.4 million tons. The year before were 4.6 million, in 2000, 8.6 million.

at the Collège de France<sup>14</sup> on the territory and people of Val Susa. The subject of the course was a discussion on new forms of government through a system of organized control and security. The movement is made up of civic committees and local institutions that act to protect the natural environment, but also work as a political and cultural opposition to economic globalization. In geographic terms, the new railway line should travel the Piedmont area for 50 kilometers. The starting point of the construction was located in the peripheral area of the city of Turin, while the point of arrival was found in the Piedmont valleys bordered by the French state. The portion of the land affected by this urban planning is in the north area with 13 towns and approximately 13,000 inhabitants<sup>15</sup> and, in the southern area, with 24 towns and 64,000 inhabitants.<sup>16</sup> The No-TAV struggle is described in the current language of resistance and/or civic struggle as “the mother of all political battles”, and with the expression “a sarà dura.”<sup>17</sup>

In social sciences, activism is described as the effect of an institutional crisis that slows down symbolic ties with deregulating effects on the population. Following Girard,<sup>18</sup> antagonism represents an answer to justified

uncertainty through aggression as the strong adaptability of this population. That is why people animating the riot are historically considered “politically irregular.” Let us keep in mind that the mountains surrounding the area have a history of struggles, having hosted and hidden dozens of young anti-fascists reversing the Nazi-fascist war, the animators of the Partisan Brigades, as well as guerrilla warfare organized by groups of unionized workers. In this regard, the No-TAV case is attached to a collective memory animated by important political and democratic processes of national scope. According to Della Porta and Diani,<sup>19</sup> the No-TAV phenomenon is the result of an action produced by an epistemic community as a counter-discourse and they undermine the traditional economic knowledge that had supported the need for the extension of the railroad. On the basis of the political tradition that exists throughout the area, the struggle is not regarded as an effect of a NIMBY [“Not in My Back Yard”] idea, but a process of sociality produced by collective conflicts and self-government practices involving all committees. They actively participate in “the protest speech beyond the defense of the environment, overcoming the local context and becoming global.”<sup>20</sup> It is useful to clarify that initially the protest was powered exclusively by the militants of the social centers in the city of Turin. Speeches focused exclusively on the design impact. Only in the mid-1990s, the issue became common sense. The consensus around the work quickly faded, as it was considered too expensive in financial and urban terms. During the 2000s, a new ecological issue arose: a further investigation showed that in the mountains

14 Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population. Cours au Collège de France 1977-1978* (Paris: Hautes Etudes, Gallimard et Seuil, 2004).

15 Mostly employed in tourist and agricultural activities.

16 Many of which are used in industry and agriculture. The bottom part is crossed by two state roads, a toll motorway and the Dora River. The Val Susa area, 2 kilometers from the TAV site, is already afflicted by the Fréjus motorway, an international railroad and several dams.

17 It is a Piedmontese word that means “It will be hard,” with the sense of resistance, warning those who want to build the 18 km. long galleries that they will have to conquer them one by one.

18 René Girard, *La violenza e il sacro*, trans. Ottavio Fatica and Eva Czerkl (Milano: Adelphi, 1980).

19 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction* (second edition) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

20 Donatella della Porta and Gianni Piazza, *Voice of the Valley. Voice of the Straits. How Protest Creates Community* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

where they were going to build the tunnel there were plenty of uranium, radon and asbestos. In the winter of 2005, the valley was militarized (more than 2000 police officers tried to protect the bulldozers). Following the militarization of the area, the committees launched a general strike (more than 80,000 people marched in support of Turin), the “permanent” mob forced the antagonists to regain the sites affected by perforations. Today people have organized permanent persecutions against militarization. They are real garrisons that became more and more socializing places where people still meet today, eating and playing cards together.

### 3. The Cases of Sole and Nicoletta<sup>21</sup>

The life stories described below as a fragment of reality represent a discourse that reflects and multiplies the power effects produced by dominant groups. In this respect, the biographical material collected on Soledad and Nicoletta allows for a counter-discourse on the repressive strategies implemented against the No-TAV movement. The media impact on the resistance of women who take organizational word during assemblies, presidencies, and blocks, produces multiple narrative strings. On the one hand, such narratives reinforce the dominant consensus, and on the other one, they exalt the resistance elements produced in the model of militancy. Indeed, the narration of their lives had also the effect of shaking the power of fake, cracking the discursive *sécurité*.<sup>22</sup> Methodologically, the human trajectory of Maria Soledad Rosas (known as Sole) was rebuilt through the press during the days of their arrest and suicide: Nicoletta Dosio’s judicial persecution has been the subject of a long conversation. The meeting

took place during “The Case Dosio. Reflections on the Right to Dissent in Italy,”<sup>23</sup> a seminar on the right to dissent organized by the University of Salerno. It is good to know that an excerpt from Sole’s legal case has been described in the Italian translation of *Manufacturing Consent*. The article examines the story of Maria Soledad Rosas, Eduardo Massari (Baleno) and Silvano Pellissero as a media criminalization of the squatting phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> The facts are well known: on March 4, 1998, Sole Eduardo and Silvano were accused of armed robbery and subversive association. The three were the subjects of a media campaign that saw them as eco-terrorists. Sole had arrived in Italy just few months earlier (in July 1997), and she had toured the world before. She participated as an anarchist in the occupation of Casa okupada in Collegno (Turin) for the presidencies organized by the Group against TAV. Political antagonism was a novelty in her life, though she had always been strongly concerned with it since childhood. She had left an important bourgeois family in Buenos Aires and her studies in administration at the age of 23. Her arrest had dramatic effects on her life.

Baleno, her partner, was found dead in his cell after 25 days in prison. Sole, after a few days of hunger strike, was finally given the permission to attend his funeral for just few hours. Baleno’s private funeral was subjected to the gaze of television cameras and journalists, just to interview and photograph Sole in handcuffs. On July

21 The count shows that 25 of the activists are placed under preventive custody for offenses related to the sabotage of the high-speed train line (TAV).

22 Alessandro Arienzo, *La governance* (Roma: Ediesse, 2015).

23 The event was held in Fisciano (Salerno) on April 6, 2017. During the seminar, they simulated Nicoletta Dosio’s criminal trial. Luigi De Magistris, Mayor of Naples, participated as sitting Judge. The writer Erry De Luca, also involved in a trial for inciting the railway block, attended as witness too.

24 Alberto Leiss and Letizia Paolozzi, “Lo specchio a pezzi,” in *La fabbrica del consenso. Ovvero la politica dei mass media*, eds. N. Chomsky and E.S. Herman, Italian trans. by Stefano Rini (Milano: Marco Tropea Edizione, 2014), 420-22.



11, 1998, when still under house arrests, she committed suicide, the same way and at the same time as Baleno. The fact was reported in the main newspaper as a response to guilt and victimization, pointing out that during the funeral she had yelled several times: “Bye Baleno, come take me soon.”<sup>25</sup> Over time though, news reports were found to be false and the allegation of eco-terrorism was resolved with Silvano Pelissero’s complete acquittal. Absolution did not, however, erase media guilt. In particular, activists have always rejected the journalist’s hypothesis by pointing out that Sole’s suicide has been a state murder; the result of a media campaign for which the damage to the rail line by the three activists was only represented as an act of institutional war and not as an action of political dissent.

Nicoletta Dosio’s evasion must also be considered as an act of political dissent. Rewriting Nicoletta’s legal biography was the result of another paradoxical tribulation. Her transformation into a deviant criminal happened at the age of 70, after being sentenced to eight months in prison. The punishment was severely aggravated because of the civil disobedience practices engaged by the communist militant and her former Greek teacher. With 17 others, she was first sentenced to imposed hearings and then to home arrest. She was accused of devastation, looting and resisting arrest after a garrison she participates in (June 28, 2015), in which she cut the fence around the construction sites in Val Susa.

Nicoletta responded to the attack with a political tour. To the cry of “I am with those who resist against unfair impositions” she publicly denounced the risks of high speeds on health and the environment. The practice of the political tour allowed her to violate rules that

for others meant “the gates of the prison, a tool of repression that aims to bend and divide us.”<sup>26</sup> On the November 2, 2016 hearing, Nicoletta reappeared at the law enforcement, and was arrested in flagrant crime. However, the request of the prison was rejected by the Judge of the Supreme Court of the same Attorney because the application of punishment, rather than harming the conduct of the woman, could increase her personal notoriety. In reality, this absolution represents a paradoxical legal sanction for the activists because of the violation of the communicative strategy used by the communist militant to stir up media clash and positively influence public opinion.

### Conclusions

These female stories show that, including in the No-TAV affair, the rewriting of women’s biographies oscillates depending on discursive utility, between the description of resistance practice as hysteria or deviance. Although the two activists were never really defined as abnormal, they have been literally victimized and in a sense deprived of recognition of their act of resistance. In a judicial discourse narrating Sole and Nicoletta as victims and criminals, the two activists reply opposing an extreme strategy: a suicide and a jailbreak. Over a power that does not want to describe them as subjects, these female activists had no other means but to rely on acts of resistance that are apparently self-defeating but that are perhaps the only way to be heard.

It can also be said that the return of the two biographies, as an example of subtraction of the *self* to judicial repression has also fueled a counter-talk in defense of the No-TAV Movement (and of all the territorial disputes).

25 Meo Ponte, “Squatter, ancora un suicidio,” *La Repubblica*, Torino, July 12, 1998

26 Andrea Giambartolomei, “No-TAV, otto mesi per la pasionaria Nicoletta Dosio: ‘Disposta ad andare in carcere con gioia, sono nel giusto,’” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, December 14, 2016.

Over time this has powered a network of political relations, one that has managed to give a voice to other women engaged in struggles that return to “places the sense of living and cherishing a concrete hope.”<sup>27</sup>

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27 Nicoletta Dosio, “*la legge non è uguale per tutti*” [“the law doesn’t apply to everyone”], December 13, 2016, [www.nicolettadosio.it](http://www.nicolettadosio.it). Concerning the judicial repression on other No-TAV activists, Nicoletta Dosio explains: “It isn’t new to us that the law doesn’t apply to everybody, but I feel the need to emphasize it from my obstinate and apparently invisible escape. I am aware that my condition is the exception that proves the rule, a rule that is systematically applied to those who violate precautionary measures and oppose the harassment of the so-called Justice. It isn’t a step back, and it’s not for ‘heroism,’ but for decency!” Dosio, “*la legge*.”