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MICHAEL GUARNERI - STELLA SCABELLI\*

## PAOLA OJETTI AND MARIA BASAGLIA: TWO WOMEN WORKERS IN FASCIST ITALY'S CULTURAL SECTOR

### *Abstract*

Putting into dialogue scholarly studies on Italian Fascism with a wide range of newly identified film and media history resources, the authors reconstruct and compare the career paths of Paola Ojetti (1911-1978) and Maria Basaglia (1908-2000) in the 1930s and early-1940s, with a specific focus on their cinema-related activities such as dubbing, film criticism, screenwriting and on-set assistance. By shedding light on the microhistory level of professional routines and social interactions, the article seeks to contribute to a history of women workers in Fascist Italy's cultural sector grounded in the concrete life experiences of women intellectuals. The career paths of Ojetti and Basaglia show that the mastery of foreign languages was a key requisite for women wishing to enter the field of cultural production: translation work was considered especially fitting to women because it was generally poorly paid, mostly carried out at home, held in lower esteem than authorial work, and thus perceived as less threatening to male privilege. The cases of Ojetti and Basaglia also show that no matter their talent and diligence, women intellectuals in Fascist Italy often had to put themselves under the mentorship or in the employ of male colleagues, who enjoyed greater civil liberties and career advancement opportunities than their female counterparts. The women who met these conditions accessed the cultural sector, working through the ranks of a specific branch, reaching out to one another to create useful networks of mutual support and collaboration, and eventually building an eclectic and at times non-normative career for themselves. While confirming the existence of a repressive system that exploited women's intellectual work, the article proposes that there were ways for women to partially break through the narrow boundaries of subordinate work established by the discriminatory policies of the Fascist regime.

### *Keywords*

Fascist Italy; gender history; dubbing; film criticism; Paola Ojetti; Maria Basaglia.

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### *Abbreviations in notes*

ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato

ASBN Archivio di Stato di Benevento

ASCR Archivio di Stato di Cremona

BNCF Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze

BRR Biblioteca Renzo Renzi della Cineteca di Bologna

DGPS Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza

DGS Direzione Generale Spettacolo

FAAM Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori

FMD Fondo Mino Doletti

GNAM Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to extensive archival research into the work and personal correspondence of Italian film critics<sup>1</sup>, this article reconstructs and compares the career paths, professional routines and social networks of Paola Ojetti (1911-1978) and Maria Basaglia (1908-2000) in the context of 1930s and early-1940s Italian culture, with a specific focus on their cinema-related activities<sup>2</sup>. The choice of studying Ojetti is due to her prominence: as a wealthy, upper-class woman who received the highest-quality education available in arts and humanities, she overcame many of the obstacles that hindered women's authorial recognition in Fascist Italy's cultural sector, and obtained public praise in the fields of literary translation, dubbing, film criticism and screenwriting. Since zooming in on a socially, economically and culturally privileged woman might provide too partial an account of gender and cultural labour during the regime, the Ojetti profile is followed by a study of the life and work of Basaglia, an intellectual from the small bourgeoisie who occasionally corresponded with her colleague and age-peer Ojetti but remained virtually unknown, even if she occupied positions of responsibility such as director of dubbing department and assistant director. Despite the considerable differences between the two women in terms of social, economic and cultural capital, both Ojetti and Basaglia gained access to cultural professions through their language studies and translation skills. Their eclecticism allowed them to build useful connections, open new career possibilities for themselves, and cover non-normative roles within the film labour market of Fascist Italy, one in which – according to the 1931 population census of the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica – the personnel involved in film production, development and printing amounted to 728 men and 264 women<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the personal cases of Ojetti and Basaglia are useful to show not only the repressive system that, in 1930s and early-1940s Italy, limited women's access to high-ranking, well-paid and publicly recognised work positions in the cultural sector, but also the strategies through which female creative workers could partially break through institutionalised barriers.

As documented by influential historians of gender policy in Fascist Italy such as Victoria De Grazia, the regime deployed a “multilayered politics of sexual discrimination” towards women workers by leveraging long-standing prejudices and accentuating the disadvantages and exploitation of women's labour already enforced by the legislation of the pre-Fascist liberal governments<sup>4</sup>. A 2014 article by Lorenzo Benadusi sum-

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) “Per una storia privata della critica cinematografica italiana. Ruoli pubblici e relazioni private: l'istituzionalizzazione della critica cinematografica in Italia tra Anni Trenta e Settanta”, 2017-2023, Università di Bologna (PI: Paolo Noto), Università di Udine (coordinator: Andrea Mariani) and Università di Parma (coordinator: Jennifer Malvezzi), in partnership with the Cineteca di Bologna (Anna Fiaccarini, Michela Zegna). Stella Scabelli conducted research on Paola Ojetti and wrote sections 1 and 2; Michael Guarneri conducted research on Maria Basaglia and wrote sections 3 and 4. Translations into English are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to Italian film critics' letters as historical sources, see M. Guerra, S. Martin, eds., “La cultura della lettera. La corrispondenza come forma e pratica di critica cinematografica”, *Cinergie*, 15 (2019): 1-67; S. Dotto, A. Mariani, “Il cervello di Carné”, in *Ugo Casiraghi e Glauco Viazzi. Il cervello di Carné. Letterario 1941-1943*, edited by S. Dotto and A. Mariani, Milan: La Nave di Teseo, 2021: 13-50.

<sup>3</sup> C. Mereu Keating, “Verso una nuova città del cinema. Il contributo delle donne alla produzione cinematografica in Italia tra il 1930 e il 1960: una riflessione sulle fonti”, *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed November 22, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/28-verso-una-nuova-citt-del-cinema-ilcontributo-delle-donne-alla-produzione-cinematografica-in-italia-tra-il-1930-e-1960-riflessione-sulle-fonti/>.

<sup>4</sup> V. de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, 167. See also P. Willson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; P. Willson, *Women in Twentieth-century Italy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, 4-78.

marises the intricate history of Italian women from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s, drawing from a large number of contributions on the subject: the patriarchal ideology of the regime coexisted and clashed with unprecedented opportunities and cracks in the status quo as the traditional home-bound figure of the *angelo del focolare* (angel of the hearth), who was assigned the tasks of reproduction and maternal care, began to be mobilised in the public sphere as a political activist, a worker, a consumer, or a combination thereof<sup>5</sup>. From a methodological standpoint, Benadusi points out the crucial importance of focusing on the microhistory level of women's lifestyles, which he considers the most appropriate perspective to produce an accurate historical account of gender issues in this complex and contradictory period<sup>6</sup>. Anna Ferrando's research on women translators in Fascist Italy employs archival materials, such as work and personal correspondence, to uncover the career paths taken by women in the publishing industry and the non-normative roles they sometimes managed to assume within the gender-unequal labour market of a male-dominated society<sup>7</sup>.

This article also engages with women's studies produced within the field of film and media history. For example, Elena Mosconi and Meris Nicoletto offer gender perspectives on Fascist cinema cultures through film analysis and an attentive scrutiny of the popular press<sup>8</sup>, while other scholars combine film industry analysis with biographical and autobiographical resources to outline a history of women in Italian<sup>9</sup>, European and American cinema from the silent era to the present day<sup>10</sup>. From a methodological standpoint, the reconstruction of Ojetti and Basaglia's career paths, professional routines and social networks specifically draws inspiration from Melanie Bell's investigation on post-World War II film criticism in Great Britain<sup>11</sup>, which makes ample use

<sup>5</sup> L. Benadusi, "Storia del fascismo e questioni di genere", *Studi Storici*, 55, 1 (2014): 183-195 (190-195).

<sup>6</sup> Benadusi cites E. Mondello, *La nuova italiana. La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987; S. Bartoloni, *Il fascismo e le donne nella "Rassegna femminile italiana" 1925-1930*, Rome: Biblink, 2012; and P. Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy. The Massaie Rurali*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> A. Ferrando, "Donne oltre i confini. La traduzione come percorso di emancipazione durante il fascismo", *Italia Contemporanea*, 294 (2020): 205-234.

<sup>8</sup> E. Mosconi, "Figure femminili tra cinema ed editoria popolare", *Comunicazioni sociali*, 20, 4 (1998): 634-651; EAD., "Donne in vetrina: immagini del femminile nel cinema italiano tra le due guerre", *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 17 (2010): 71-86; M. Nicoletto, *Donne nel cinema di regime fra tradizione e modernità*, Alessandria: Falsopiano, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> M. Dall'Asta, ed., *Non solo dive: pioniere del cinema italiano*, Bologna: Cineteca di Bologna, 2008; L. Cardone, S. Filippelli, eds., *Cinema e scritture femminili: letterate italiane fra la pagina e lo schermo*, Pavia: Iacobelli, 2011; L. Cardone, C. Jandelli, C. Tognolotti, eds., "Storie in divenire. Le donne nel cinema italiano", *Quaderni del CSCI*, 11 (2015): 12-334; D. Missero, "Titillating Cuts: Genealogies of Women Editors in Italian Cinema", *Feminist Media Histories*, 4, 4 (2018): 57-82; L. Cardone et al., eds., "Sentieri selvaggi. Cinema e Women's Studies in Italia", *Arabeschi*, 18 (2021). Accessed November 22, 2022. <http://www.arabeschi.it/collection/sentieri-selvaggi-cinema-e-womens-studies-in-italia/#sentieri-selvaggi-cinema-e-womens-studies-in-italia>; D. Missero, *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> P. Morrissey, "Documents (III): Question de genre. Regards sur les femmes au travail dans le cinéma français des années Trente", 1895, 65 (2011): 168-179; J.K. Allen, "Doing It All: Women's On- and Off-Screen Contributions to European Silent Film", in *Silent Women: Pioneers of Cinema*, edited by M. Bridges and C. Robson, Twickenham: Supernova Books, 2016: 107-130; E. Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016; S. Liddy, ed., *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; M. Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema*, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> M. Bell, "Film Criticism as 'Women's Work': The Gendered Economy of Film Criticism in Britain, 1945-65", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 31, 2 (2011): 191-209; M. Bell, "Feminism and Women's Film Criticism in Post-War Britain, 1945-59", *Feminist Media Studies*, 11, 4 (2011): 399-416.

of work correspondence and other administrative documents to shed light on women's more ordinary professions, working lives and professional dynamics, as well as on the relations between cinema and other cultural spheres. In so doing, the present article contributes new materials for the study of gender and labour in the 1930s and early-1940s Italian film industry, especially as far as the female presence in audiovisual translation and in film criticism is concerned and considering that none of the key studies on the introduction and development of dubbing in Italy approach audiovisual translation from a gender perspective<sup>12</sup>. The decisive contribution of female writers to the booming market of women's periodicals and entertainment magazines has been highlighted before<sup>13</sup>, but existing overviews of Italian film criticism in the 1930s only mention Guglielmina Setti as a woman critic<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. PAOLA OJETTI

Born in 1911, Paola Ojetti was the daughter of Ugo Ojetti, an Italian writer, art critic and journalist well connected to the cultural and political establishment of his time. From 1913, Ugo Ojetti and his wife Fernanda Gobba (a close collaborator and advisor of her husband's, an important node in the Ojetti family's social network, and a cultural mediator in her own right) settled at Il Salviatino with their infant daughter. The salon of this fifteenth-century villa, immersed in the greenery of Fiesole and renovated on the initiative of the Ojetti family, represented for artists, intellectuals and politicians an exclusive gathering place for decades<sup>15</sup>. At Il Salviatino Paola Ojetti was introduced not only to the study of arts and humanities, but also to her family's influential circle. In his memoirs, poet Marino Moretti recounts Paola Ojetti's childhood and adolescence, discussing her homeschooling, her singing exercises, her study of foreign languages and, above all, her fascination with the artists who regularly visited her parents' house<sup>16</sup>.

In her early twenties, Paola Ojetti was commissioned to translate into Italian Max Reinhardt's adaptation of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was to be performed at Giardino di Boboli in 1933 during the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. Paola Ojetti's social position and family connections certainly enabled her to ob-

<sup>12</sup> M. Quargnolo, "Pionieri ed esperienze del doppiato italiano", *Bianco e Nero*, 5 (1967): 67-79; M. Quargnolo, *La parola ripudiata: l'incredibile storia dei film stranieri in Italia nei primi anni del sonoro*, Gemona: Cineteca del Friuli, 1986; S. Raffaelli, *La lingua filmata. Didascalie e dialoghi nel cinema italiano*, Florence: Le Lettere, 1992; C. Mereu Keating, *The Politics of Dubbing: Film Censorship and State Intervention in the Translation of Foreign Cinema in Fascist Italy*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> S. Salvatici, "Il rotocalco femminile: una presenza nuova negli anni del Fascismo", in *Donne e giornalismo. Percorsi e presenze di una storia di genere*, edited by S. Franchini and S. Soldani, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004: 110-126; L. Cardone, "Lo schermo della frivolezza. Giornaliste e scrittrici nel vortice dell'editoria popolare", in *Culture del film. La critica cinematografica e la società italiana*, edited by M. Guerra and S. Martin, Bologna: il Mulino, 2020: 115-138.

<sup>14</sup> O. Caldiron, "Geografie della critica", in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. 5: 1934-1939*, edited by O. Caldiron, Venice-Rome: Marsilio-Bianco e Nero, 2006: 481-484 (483). At the third national convention of the Italian film press, held in Cortina d'Ampezzo in early 1940, not a single female delegate was present. Cf. S. Favre, "Giornalisti cinematografici a 18 sotto zero", *Lo Schermo*, 2 (1940): 11.

<sup>15</sup> The main source on the history of the Ojetti family is D. De Angelis, *Nanda Ojetti. La signora del Salviatino*, Rome: Gangemi, 2020. See also U. Ojetti, *Vita vissuta*, edited by A. Stanghellini, Milan: Mondadori, 1942; U. Ojetti, *I taccuini. 1914-1943*, edited by F. Gobba and P. Ojetti, Florence: Sansoni, 1954.

<sup>16</sup> M. Moretti, *Il libro dei miei amici*, Milan: Mondadori, 1960, 178-183. Paola Ojetti herself briefly wrote about her formative years at Il Salviatino in Ojetti, *I taccuini*, XI-XIII.

tain this role within such a prestigious cultural event – her father being an Accademico d'Italia since 1930 and the artistic director of the Florence-based festival<sup>17</sup>. Upon being hired, she skilfully took advantage of the assignment, establishing an important work and personal relationship with Reinhardt, for whom she translated another Shakespeare play, *The Merchant of Venice*, performed at Campo San Trovaso in 1934 during the Biennale di Venezia. On this latter occasion, Paola Ojetti undertook a significant role, organising and coordinating cultural activities that went far beyond linguistic adaptation. For instance, she worked alongside Romolo Bazzoni, the administrative director of the Biennale di Venezia, and she had a decisive influence over the choice of the musical commentaries and the recruitment of composer Victor de Sabata<sup>18</sup>. In fact, the Ojetti's correspondence recently acquired by the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze shows that several composers turned to Paola Ojetti for professional advice and help, which was not only due to the wide and influential social network of her family but also to her own inclination for and education in the music field. In 1937-1938 she co-directed with renowned musicologist Guido Gatti a collection of music textbooks for the publishing house Tumminelli<sup>19</sup>, and she published a music-themed children's novel<sup>20</sup>, further proof of her eclecticism.

At the end of 1934, Paola Ojetti's work as a translator of Shakespeare earned her the Premio Galante, an important literary prize for women writers awarded by the publishing house Bompiani<sup>21</sup>. After that, she continued to translate Shakespeare plays into Italian, including *Romeo and Juliet* (performed at Ca' Foscari in 1937, under the direction of Guido Salvini, during the Biennale di Venezia) and *As You Like It* (performed at Giardino di Boboli in 1938, under the direction of Jacques Copeau, during the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino). Because of her close collaboration with Reinhardt in the early 1930s, she was also commissioned to translate the dialogue of the Warner Bros. movie *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Max Reinhardt, William Dieterle, 1935). Filippo Sacchi's review of the film in the Milan-based national daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera* lauded Ojetti as "the heroic film translator who faced the impossible task of dubbing Shakespeare"<sup>22</sup>, and so did the monthly magazine *Lo Schermo*, which called her a "well-educated and considerate translator"<sup>23</sup>. In the wake of this growing success, Ojetti became one of the most sought-after translators-adapters in the dubbing scene of 1930s Italy, and in April 1937 she was even invited to give conference talks on film dubbing in Genoa, at the Liceo Femminile and at the Cineguf section<sup>24</sup>. However, the institution of the Italian state monopoly on foreign film importation abruptly put an end to her career

<sup>17</sup> I. Ruggiero, *Le regie di Max Reinhardt in Italia nei festival degli anni Trenta: "Sogno di una notte di mezza estate" ai Giardini di Boboli - "Il Mercante di Venezia" in Campo San Trovaso*, Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova-Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2016-2017, 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> BNCF, Carteggi vari, Nucleo Ojetti-Gatti, 563.13, P. Ojetti to I. Pizzetti, 16/10/1933.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous, "Alfredo Casella pianista", *Corriere della Sera*, December 23, 1937: 3.

<sup>20</sup> P. Ojetti, *Musica di Claudio*, Florence: Bemporad, 1938. Ugo Ojetti was the president of the publishing house Bemporad from the late 1930s to the early 1940s. Cf. Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, 213; A. Cecconi et al., *Il fondo Bemporad dell'Archivio storico Giunti Editore*. Accessed November 22, 2022, <http://www.soprintendenzaarchivistica Toscana.beniculturali.it/fileadmin/risorse/inventari/Bemporad.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, "Il 'Premio Galante' a Paola Ojetti", *Corriere della Sera*, December 16, 1934: 5. For the "invasion" of translated works in Italy's 1929-1934 publishing industry, see C. Rundle, *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, 67-111.

<sup>22</sup> F. Sacchi, "Sogno di una notte di mezza estate", *Corriere della Sera*, February 15, 1936: 3.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, "Un esempio di doppiaggio", *Lo Schermo*, 3 (1936): 36.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, "Una conferenza di Paola Ojetti sul doppiaggio cinematografico", *Corriere della Sera*, April 17, 1937: 2.



at the Warner Bros. dubbing department, as she recalled in a November-1938 letter to Alberto Cavalcanti<sup>25</sup>.

Having entered the Italian film industry in the mid-1930s thanks to her dubbing experience, Paola Ojetti soon expanded her activities into other sectors of film culture. In January 1938, she co-founded the weekly magazine *Film* with journalists Giuseppe Vittorio Sampieri and Mino Doletti. Doletti, who had been working as a reporter since 1924<sup>26</sup>, took on the role of *direttore* (magazine director), while Paola Ojetti was given the subordinate role of *segretaria di redazione* (editorial secretary). This is hardly surprising: within the discriminatory framework of the period, high-ranking, well-paid and publicly recognised intellectual professions were hardly accessible to women, if only because of the difficulties women had to face in order to attend academic courses and obtain university degrees<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, due to the “belletristic” conception of the profession and its aura of lesser prestige, journalism seemed “a suitable female occupation”, to the point that the number of women journalists steadily grew from the early 1920s (the 1921 census reported 382 women journalists, equal to 7% of Italian professional writers) to the early 1930s (the 1931 census reported 991 women journalists, equal to 12% of Italian professional writers)<sup>28</sup>. However, “only a score or so of women journalists were truly *firme di successo*” with permanent employment contracts: most female writers had to resign themselves to freelancing as *pubbliciste* (occasional press collaborators), often scraping by “with occasional pieces published in the women’s press”<sup>29</sup>. Not even upper-class, well-educated Paola Ojetti could avoid this situation, as testified by the 1941-1942 issues of the yearbook *Almanacco della donna italiana*, which included her in the list of Italian *pubbliciste*<sup>30</sup>. Yet, the extensive body of correspondence preserved in the Fondo Mino Doletti of the Biblioteca Renzo Renzi della Cineteca di Bologna reveals that, from the very foundation of the magazine, her work as a member of *Film*’s editorial staff was far from ancillary or sporadic.

In a letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> April 1939, Sampieri recollected how the ideation of *Film* came to be: the spark was the friendship between Sampieri and Paola Ojetti, which developed in the mid-1930s, thanks to Ugo Ojetti; later the two friends met Doletti and the trio came up with the idea to establish a film publication<sup>31</sup>. In the letters written between the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938, Paola Ojetti enthusiastically expressed her wish to participate in the creation of a serious periodical intended for a popular audience, and to use statements by the most prestigious figures from all artistic fields to demonstrate that “cinema is a serious art”<sup>32</sup>. To fulfil her role as the magazine’s editorial

<sup>25</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943, C2 V, V/1366, P. Ojetti to A. Cavalcanti, 20/11/1938.

<sup>26</sup> Initially in the Parma-based local daily newspaper *Il Piccolo*, then in the Bologna-based local daily newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino* and in the Turin-based national daily newspaper *La Stampa*. Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A 1, unnumbered and undated typescript; M. Doletti, “Il mio mancato duello con Malavasi” [1975], in *Il Resto del Carlino 1885-1985: un giornale nella storia d'Italia*, edited by D. Biondi, Bologna: Poligrafici Editoriale, 1985: 229.

<sup>27</sup> De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 147-157.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 196, 325.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous, “Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1941”, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 22 (1941): 297-389 (311); Anonymous, “Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1942”, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 23 (1942): 293-394 (308).

<sup>31</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 S-V XXV, XXV/6971, G.V. Sampieri to P. Ojetti, 21/04/1939. For Doletti’s own memories of *Film* in the late 1930s and early 1940s, see F. Savio, *Cinecittà anni Trenta. Vol. 1*, edited by A. Aprà, Rome: Bulzoni-Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, 2021, 330-333.

<sup>32</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C3 VI, VI/1663, P. Ojetti to G. Civinini, 24/12/1937. For her specific ideas on cinema as art, see P. Ojetti, “Wagner in pericolo”, *Lo Schermo*, 10 (1937): 18.

secretary, she put to good use her knowledge of English and French, her vast culture, her practical experience in music, theatre and cinema, and, most importantly, her impressive network of professional and personal relationships in Italy and abroad. From late 1937 onwards, she contacted illustrious personalities who could, in her opinion, certify the artistic legitimacy of cinema among both the cultural elite and the general public. A key example is *Film*'s "30 righe di..." column: in the debut issue of *Film*, Ugo Ojetti shared his thoughts on cinema<sup>33</sup>; in the following issues, many prestigious personalities, all connected to Il Salviatino, responded to Paola Ojetti's invitation – among them poets Ada Negri and Angiolo Silvio Novaro, and composer Franco Alfano<sup>34</sup>. Paola Ojetti also wrote to Reinhardt, presenting *Film* as a "very serious" periodical, "not the usual movie stories that interest only house-maids"<sup>35</sup>, while to de Sabata, whom she was begging for a short article, she explained that her objective was to demonstrate that in Italy "people of high and great artistic standing" were concerned with cinema<sup>36</sup>. It is thus that, by capitalising on past collaborations such as an Italian translation of "beautiful fairy tales" published "by Bemporad in Florence"<sup>37</sup>, or by evoking memories of social events such as an "enjoyable breakfast" at Il Salviatino<sup>38</sup>, Paola Ojetti obtained written contributions from Italian and foreign composers, poets, novelists and playwrights. Evidently, her nominal role of editorial secretary did not do justice to her daily labour. Firstly, with her frequent presence in the "Sette giorni a Roma" review column, Paola Ojetti was a proper film critic, an atypical role for a woman in the context of 1930s Italy. Secondly, her duties included a wide range of activities, such as proposing columns, writing reports and interviews, translating and revising articles, maintaining good relations with established collaborators and finding new ones. Not coincidentally, in her work correspondence, she is occasionally addressed as "la direttrice"<sup>39</sup>.

The work and personal relationships between the *direttrice* and the female writers who contributed to *Film* are of particular importance to better understand gender dynamics within the cultural and creative industries of Fascist Italy. In the pages of *Film* we find several *Almanacco della donna italiana* contributors: Margherita Cattaneo, Ada Negri, Alba de Céspedes, Irene Brin and Vera Rossi Lodomez<sup>40</sup>. An in-depth study of their correspondence testifies to the existence of a network of women intellectuals whose membership provided mutual encouragement, support and collaboration, as best exemplified by the cases of Cattaneo, Negri and de Céspedes. As for the Ojetti-Cattaneo relationship, in December 1937, Paola Ojetti asked Cattaneo to contribute an article to *Film* and offered her a higher

<sup>33</sup> U. Ojetti, "27 righe di", *Film*, January 29, 1938: 2.

<sup>34</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 N-O XV, XV/4212-XV/4216, correspondence between P. Ojetti and A. Negri from 03/01/1938 to 02/02/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 N-O XV, XV/4242, P. Ojetti to A. S. Novaro, 11/02/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/10, P. Ojetti to F. Alfano, 14/03/1938. Cf. A. Negri, "16 righe di", *Film*, February 12, 1938: 2; A.S. Novaro, "29 righe di", *Film*, March 5, 1938: 2; F. Alfano, "40 righe di", *Film*, April 2, 1938: 2.

<sup>35</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/26, P. Ojetti to M. Reinhardt's secretary A. Adler, 27/11/1937 [English in the original].

<sup>36</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 D2-E, VIII/2064, P. Ojetti to V. de Sabata, 01/12/1937.

<sup>37</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C1 III, III/735, P. Ojetti to K. Čapek, 05/03/1938 [English in the original]. Cf. K. Čapek, *Novelle*, translated by P. Ojetti, Florence: Bemporad, 1938.

<sup>38</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 C3 VI, VI/1639, P. Ojetti to F. Cilea, 19/10/1939.

<sup>39</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 R XVII, XVII/4903, S. Ricciardi to P. Ojetti, 02/01/1938; BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/100, R. Alessi to P. Ojetti, 04/04/1942. For a semi-serious self-portrait of Paola Ojetti as an overworked *Film* employee, see P. Ojetti, "Paola Ojetti: Io, cane da guardia", *Film*, February 14, 1942: 8.

<sup>40</sup> Created in 1920 on the initiative of the publishing house Bemporad and the Rome-based magazine *La donna*, *Almanacco della donna italiana* presented contradictory gender cultures, including calendars of domestic chores, appeals for women to conform to the model of (house)wife-mother for the Fatherland, and non-conformist contributions by female intellectuals. Cf. Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, 162-164.



publication fee than other male and female collaborators in view of her extraordinary cultural standing<sup>41</sup> – an invite that was reciprocated in 1939, when Cattaneo became the director of *Almanacco della donna italiana* and asked Paola Ojetti to take charge of the film column<sup>42</sup>. In 1937-1938 Negri sent Fernanda Gobba a series of enthusiastic letters about Paola Ojetti's work in dubbing and film criticism, prophesying a successful career for the young woman in the cultural sector beyond journalism<sup>43</sup>. As for the Ojetti-de Céspedes relationship, in addition to offering de Céspedes space in the 1940-1943 issues of *Film* to comment on the film adaptation of her own 1938 novel *Nessuno torna indietro*<sup>44</sup>, Paola Ojetti actively participated in the revision of the screenplay written by de Céspedes and Alessandro Blasetti<sup>45</sup>. Possibly, Ojetti's work as a translator-adapter in the 1930s helped refine her screenwriting skills, which she started practicing in 1939, when she co-authored the award-winning synopsis of the war-propaganda film *La guerra* with Doletti and Stefano Landi, alias Stefano Pirandello<sup>46</sup>.

Ojetti tried her hand at screenwriting especially during the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), which she joined with conviction, moving from Rome to Venice in the aftermath of 8 September 1943 to continue her work in the RSI-sponsored publication of *Film* alongside Doletti<sup>47</sup>. Upon her return to Rome after the end of World War II, her indisputable collaborationist status raised the indignation of anti-Fascist film journalists and screenwriters. A press campaign against her was launched by film magazines such as *Film d'oggi* and *Star*, to which she reacted by suing her former *Film* colleague Italo Dragosei who, among other things, had insinuated that Ojetti's reintegration into post-war Italy's cultural sector was due to her friendship with partisan de Céspedes<sup>48</sup>. In the immediate post-war, Ojetti resumed her career as a literary translator and began an assiduous professional partnership with the publishing house Mondadori thanks to a recommendation letter that de Céspedes wrote to Arnoldo Mondadori on 5 August 1945<sup>49</sup>. As for cinema-related activities, in the post-war Ojetti not only kept on working as a translator-adapter in Italy's dubbing sector, and as a critic in the film magazines directed by Doletti (*Film* in the second half of the 1940s and *Film d'oggi* in the 1950s), but she

<sup>41</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1943-1938 C2 V, V/1336, P. Ojetti to M. Cattaneo, 07/12/1937.

<sup>42</sup> P. Ojetti, "Le stelle stanno a guardare", *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 23 (1942): 207-211 (207).

<sup>43</sup> GNAM, Fondo Ugo Ojetti, Corrispondenti: letterati e politici, 2563, correspondence between F. Gobba and A. Negri from 22/04/1937 to 11/02/1938.

<sup>44</sup> P. Ojetti, "Il film di 'Nessuno torna indietro'. Intervista con Alba de Céspedes", *Film*, January 13, 1940: 5-6; A. de Céspedes, "Ho paura del cinematografo", *Film*, December 12, 1942: 5; A. de Céspedes, "Nel limbo dei personaggi", *Film*, January 2, 1943: 5; A. de Céspedes, "Non basta l'abito", *Film*, January 16, 1943: 7; A. de Céspedes, "Con o senza volto", *Film*, February 13, 1943: 3. See also L. Cardone, "Alba de Céspedes. Scrivere (anche) per il cinema", in *Cinema e scritture femminili*, edited by L. Cardone and S. Filippelli: 70-92.

<sup>45</sup> BRR, Fondo Blasetti, 0044 *Nessuno torna indietro*. Relazioni, P. Ojetti to A. Blasetti, 07/02/1943.

<sup>46</sup> Anonymous, "L'esito del concorso per un soggetto cinematografico", *Corriere della Sera*, April 27, 1940: 5; M. Doletti, "Cinque soggetti premiati a pari merito", *Film*, May 4, 1940: 3; Anonymous, "I cinque soggetti cinematografici premiati", *Film*, May 11, 1940: 5. Incidentally, in the late 1930s Paola Ojetti translated into Italian an English-language screenwriting handbook: S. Margrave, *Come si scrive un film*, translated by P. Ojetti, Milan: Bompiani, 1939.

<sup>47</sup> G. Ghigi, "Il cinema di Salò", in *Storia del cinema italiano. Vol. 6: 1940-1944*, edited by E.G. Laura, Venice-Rome: Marsilio-Bianco e Nero, 2011: 444-454 (450 and 452-454).

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous, "Questi sono i traditori". *Film d'oggi*, June 16, 1945: 8; I. Dragosei, "La Serenissima rasserenata. Il carnevale continua", *Star*, July 14, 1945: 2; I. Dragosei, "Paola l'inafferrabile", *Star*, September 22, 1945: 8; I. Dragosei, "Un ritorno", *Star*, November 3, 1945: 8; Anonymous, "Collaborazionisti alla riscossa", *Star*, November 17, 1945: 3; I. Dragosei, "Pezze d'appoggio", *Star*, December 22, 1945: 8.

<sup>49</sup> This letter was published in S. Ciminari, ed., *Lettere all'editore: Alba de Céspedes e Gianna Manzini, autrici Mondadori*, Milan: FAAM, 2021, 242. For Mondadori, in addition to revising existing translations, Paola Ojetti translated authors such as William Faulkner, Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw and John Dos Passos. Cf. V. Armanni, ed., *"Fra cultura e vita". L'editore Alberto Mondadori*, Milan: FAAM, 2014, 20-25.

also co-wrote melodramas, comedies and adventures, and in 1961 she even collaborated in the screenplay of Luchino Visconti's unrealised film project *La monaca di Monza*<sup>50</sup>. Finally, true to the eclecticism that had distinguished her career trajectory since the 1930s, in the early 1960s Ojetti was hired by the record label Istituto Internazionale del Disco<sup>51</sup>, where she directed the literature-themed vinyl-record series "Collana culturale a cura di Paola Ojetti".

### 3. MARIA BASAGLIA

Maria Basaglia was born in Cremona on 12 June 1908. Her father, Mario Basaglia, was a glassworker; her mother, L. B., was a seamstress and laundrywoman who quit her job after marriage<sup>52</sup>. It is likely that, as an only child, Maria Basaglia had a comfortable infancy: her father was an esteemed professional who owned a busy shop in the town centre<sup>53</sup>; her maternal grandparents ran a thriving tailoring business<sup>54</sup>. Mario Basaglia died in September 1917, at the age of forty-five, and L. B. suddenly became the head of a small middle class family that had lost its main source of income. In spite of the financial difficulties, Maria Basaglia did not quit her studies: after middle school, she enrolled in the accountancy course of the Istituto Tecnico di Cremona for the school year 1921-1922<sup>55</sup>. Meanwhile, her mother started a relationship with N. C., a traveling salesman from Tuscany. The three of them moved to Sanremo in November 1921, and Basaglia completed her first year of high school there. Then, in the summer of 1922, Basaglia returned to Cremona alone to finish her studies at the Istituto Tecnico di Cremona. From the school year 1922-1923 she lived with the family of a classmate and studied with good results, especially as far as French was concerned (she also studied German, but not as successfully). In October 1925, Basaglia obtained a diploma in accountancy and, shortly after, she moved to Alessandria with N. C. and her mother. In Alessandria, it is likely that Basaglia put her studies to good use and worked in commercial firms, perhaps thanks to N. C.'s business connections.

The relocation of Basaglia and her mother from Alessandria to Rome dates to sometime between the 1931 census and the 1936 census<sup>56</sup>. In Rome, Basaglia probably exploited her excellent command of French to make a living as a translator for both literature and cinema – the home-based nature of translation work undoubtedly making it a socially acceptable career choice for a young woman of the petite bourgeoisie living in the capital with her aging mother and no male guardians. It is currently unknown

<sup>50</sup> Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1950-60 N-O; FAAM, Archivio Alba de Céspedes, Corrispondenza scrittori 1961, Busta 29, Fascicolo 6; ACS, Fondo Ministero Turismo e Spettacolo - DGS - Archivio Cinema - Lungometraggi. Fascicoli per opera (CF 16-5000), Busta 321. Between 1948 and 1950 Paola Ojetti contributed to the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia's magazine *Bianco e Nero* too, as both author and translator: P. Ojetti, "Shakespeare sullo schermo", *Bianco e Nero*, 5 (1948): 41-47; J. Leyda, "Arte e morte di D.W. Griffith", *Bianco e Nero*, 10 (1949): 7-13; J. Agee, "L'epoca d'oro della commedia cinematografica", *Bianco e Nero*, 4 (1950): 52-70; E. Irving, "La musica per film in Inghilterra", *Bianco e Nero*, 5-6 (1950): 122-125; L. Jacobs, "King Vidor", *Bianco e Nero*, 7 (1950): 25-34.

<sup>51</sup> De Angelis, *Nanda Ojetti*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> All personal data about the Basaglia family come from ASCR, Stato Civile. Personal names have been anonymised by the author.

<sup>53</sup> E. Santoro, "La casa Liberty del salumiere Brusati", *La Provincia*, October 9, 1974: 6.

<sup>54</sup> Author's interview with Maria Basaglia's relatives Luciano and Andrea Panvini (in person, 2022).

<sup>55</sup> All school data come from ASCR, Fondo Istituto Tecnico Eugenio Beltrami.

<sup>56</sup> Author's correspondence with Ufficio Anagrafe di Alessandria (e-mail, 2016).

which literary and film works Basaglia translated from French into Italian at the very beginning of her career. However, a 1980s oral history of Italian dubbing credits her with having worked for Paramount on the Italian version of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1938), released in Italy in spring 1938, which suggests that she also mastered English<sup>57</sup>. It was probably around this time that Basaglia met Marcello Albani, a “playwright, film translator, screenwriter, dubbing director and dialogue writer”<sup>58</sup> with whom she started a romantic and professional relationship that lasted for decades. In March 1938, Albani and “X. Y.” (Basaglia? Paola Ojetti?)<sup>59</sup> wrote an article in *Film* to denounce the unsatisfactory working conditions experienced by film dubbers, and especially by *riduttori/dialoghisti* (film translators) and *direttori di doppiaggio* (dubbing directors)<sup>60</sup>. Albani and X. Y. complained that the work of those who translate, adapt, and dub the foreign films imported to Italy was not given the consideration it deserved. Firstly, in the opening credits, the names of the *riduttori/dialoghisti* and of the *direttori di doppiaggio* were never mentioned. Secondly, in the Italian press, film critics hardly ever discussed dubbing, and never credited the people responsible for the Italian-language versions. Finally, the *riduttori/dialoghisti* were normally paid 130 Italian Liras per reel, which amounted to a sum that would range between 1,000 and 1,300 Italian Liras for a whole movie – merely 1% of the total cost of dubbing a feature film<sup>61</sup>.

Although our focus is Basaglia, it is worth providing some information about her life and work partner Marcello Albani, as the two climbed up the film industry ladder together, from dubbing to film direction. Marcello Albani was the pen name of Giorgio Marchetto, born in New York on 3 May 1902 to an Italian couple who had emigrated to the USA at the turn of the century (his father, Carmine Marchetto, was a copper artisan from San Giorgio la Molara)<sup>62</sup>. Giorgio Marchetto returned to San Giorgio la Molara with his parents in 1905 and attended military school at the Collegio Militare di Roma during his teenage years. Upon being drafted by the Regio Esercito, he joined the Bersaglieri and, in the summer of 1923, he became second lieutenant<sup>63</sup>. Around the same time, he enrolled in the Fascist Party and worked in the Benevento-based press office of the Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale. His career in the Fascist Party didn't last long, though: during a 1925 purge, he was expelled due to his unruly private life<sup>64</sup>. Then, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he began to roam around Italy, Greece and Egypt, often using false credentials. In this period, Marchetto started to call himself Marcello Albani and attempted a career in journalism and theatre. Although he never acquired a professional qualification as a journalist, he still managed to publish four dispatches from the Balkans in Roberto Farinacci's Cremona-based national daily newspaper *Il Regime Fascista* in 1934-1935<sup>65</sup>. His career in theatre is equally

<sup>57</sup> C. Camerini, C. Biarese, “Alla ricerca del dialogo perduto. 13 filmografie di dialoghisti”, *Segnocinema*, 22 (1986): 40-41 (40).

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, *Almanacco del cinema italiano*, Rome: Società Anonima Editrice Cinema, 1939, 263.

<sup>59</sup> The latter reviewed said article before publication and, in her correspondence, called Albani “my colleague in dubbing”. Cf. BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A.I, I/68, P. Ojetti to A. Alberti, 11/03/1938.

<sup>60</sup> M. Albani, X. Y., “Questioni. Doppiaggi”, *Film*, March 26, 1938: 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> All personal data about the Marchetto family come from ASBN, Stato Civile.

<sup>63</sup> ASBN, Ruoli Militari.

<sup>64</sup> For Marchetto's political profile and criminal record, see ACS, Fondo Ministero dell'Interno - DGPS - Divisione polizia politica - Fascicoli personali, Busta 777; ACS, Fondo Ministero dell'Interno - DGPS - Divisione affari riservati - Categoria B, Busta 228.

<sup>65</sup> M. Albani, “Il teatro di stato e la cinematografia in Grecia”, *Il Regime Fascista*, November 28, 1934: 3; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (1)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 8, 1935: 5; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (2)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 15, 1935: 5; Id., “L'organizzazione dei trafficanti d'armi (3)”, *Il Regime Fascista*, February 20, 1935: 5.

unsubstantial: in 1932, he tried to set up a theatre company in Milan by taking advantage of his wife's resources (in June 1931, Marchetto had married the daughter of a wealthy widow who owned a brothel) and those of industry magnate E. R. (the lover of actress M. F.). In February 1935, his wife, M. M., obtained legal separation from Marchetto due to his mishandling of her family assets, and he moved to Rome, where he founded the production company San Giorgio Film for the making of a movie titled *Verso l'azzurro*. The portrait of Marchetto that emerged from the May-1936 correspondence between the police and the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia (DGC) was far from flattering: according to the investigators, he knew nothing about filmmaking and, as a businessman, he was untrustworthy<sup>66</sup>. The *Verso l'azzurro* project was thus halted by the DGC and Marchetto's directorial debut was postponed indefinitely for his lack of experience and reliability.

The work partnership with Basaglia fulfilled Albani's need for experience and reliability. In the second half of the 1930s, Basaglia built a good professional reputation for herself as a translator-adapter from French and English to Italian, to the point that, after 1938, she occupied the prominent position of director of the dubbing department at Scalera Film<sup>67</sup>. At the same time, the partnership with an unscrupulously ambitious aspiring director like Albani provided Basaglia with many opportunities to divert her career from the obscure, poorly paid ancillary work of *riduttrice/dialoghista* to much more prestigious and remunerative authorial work. At Scalera Film, Basaglia and Albani worked on three movies shot in both Italian and French versions: *Papà Lebonnard* (Jean de Limur, 1939), *Ultima giovinezza* (Jeff Musso, 1939) and *Rosa di sangue* (Jean Choux, 1940)<sup>68</sup>. In all three cases, Basaglia worked as screenwriter, while Albani was credited as *direttore artistico* and presumably took care of coaching the Italian actors<sup>69</sup>. Whether it was Basaglia who got Albani hired on Scalera Film's Italo-French triptych or the other way around remains open to debate. Curiously, for her screenwriting debut in *Papà Lebonnard*, Basaglia chose to credit herself as "Maria Basaglia-Albani", although the two were never married<sup>70</sup>. It could be supposed that she wished to be strongly associated with the *direttore artistico* for reasons of professional prestige, since the important Italo-French cooperation *Papà Lebonnard* was likely to put Albani on the map of high-end Italian (and European) cinema. The fear that her screenwriting contribution could be overlooked due to her being a woman might also have played a part in Basaglia's decision to present herself as 'the wife of' an emerging talent. Or, more simply, it was a way for Basaglia to declare her love for Albani (by the early 1940s the two were living together in Rome). It is currently impossible to provide a definitive answer. Whatever the case, she would not use the name "Maria Basaglia-Albani" again in her screen credits, although in a letter to Paola Ojetti dated 6 September 1939 Basaglia referred to Albani as "my husband" and signed herself "Maria Basaglia Albani"<sup>71</sup>.

Surname aside, the letter mentioned above is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it

<sup>66</sup> The May-1936 institutional correspondence can be found in the Busta 777 mentioned in Note 64.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Cinema italiano (estratto dall'Almanacco del cinema italiano)*, Rome: Società Anonima Editrice, undated [1942-1943], 151.

<sup>68</sup> *Papà Lebonnard* is based on Jean Aicard's 1889 drama *Le père Lebonnard*; *Ultima giovinezza* on Liam O'Flaherty's 1926 novel *Mister Gilhooley*; *Rosa di sangue* on Pierre Benoit's 1937 novel *Les compagnons d'Ulysse*.

<sup>69</sup> According to Máximo Barro, who worked for Albani and Basaglia in São Paulo in the late 1950s, Albani could speak only Italian and a little ancient Greek. Author's correspondence with Máximo Barro (e-mail, 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Her nubile status was confirmed by the documents of the Ufficio Anagrafe in Cremona, where she died on 12 June 2000.

<sup>71</sup> BRR, FMD, Film 1938-1943 A I, I/66, M. Basaglia to P. Ojetti, 06/09/1939.

represents an interaction between women workers struggling to make a career in Fascist Italy's cultural sector. As such, it is worth noting that the relationship between colleagues was far from equal: Basaglia addressed Ojetti as "Gentile e cara Donna Paola", an obsequious salutation that immediately marks the difference between the two women in terms of economic, social and cultural capital (the expression "Donna Paola" alludes to an aristocratic heritage that the Ojettis didn't have). As a matter of fact, Basaglia wrote to the "dearest" Ojetti in order to thank her for having written a *Film* article that "sheds light on our [Albani and Basaglia's] obscure work as dubbers", so it makes sense that Basaglia stressed her own 'inferiority' to Ojetti, who – as a prominent figure in *Film*'s editorial staff – held the power of conferring fame and prestige to film workers among the artistic community and the general public alike. Yet, the letter evidently exceeds the aims of a simple thank-you note, including as it does elements of strategic network-building. In fact, in spite of the subservient tone, Basaglia was undoubtedly trying to fraternise with Ojetti, as the former praised the latter for being "very chic" – a clever way to highlight the Francophone background that they shared, perhaps in view of a future friendship between Rome-based, educated, cosmopolitan women active in Italy's cultural sector.

Secondly, by comparing the content of the letter to that of the *Film* article about Albani and Basaglia's dubbing work, it is possible to shed light on the professional routines and gender dialectics of the Albani-Basaglia couple. The article is devoted to the work done at Scalera Film to dub Italian movies into Greek: "having received the dialogues [translated into Greek by Georgios Theodorou Zoras], Marcello Albani and his faithful companion and collaborator [Basaglia] worked at the moviola to verify, with incredible patience, that the synchrony of the dialogue was perfect also from a technical point of view"<sup>72</sup>. Not only is Basaglia not even mentioned by name, but the fact that she was Albani's superior at Scalera Film's *reparto doppiaggio* is also omitted (as already said, she directed the dubbing department, he was one of the *riduttori/dialoghisti* and *direttori di doppiaggio*). Indeed, the article has the chain of command turned upside-down, with the higher-ranking and more competent worker Basaglia ending up portrayed as Albani's faithful companion and collaborator. For this misrepresentation, Basaglia thanked Ojetti with great deference: arguably, any mention in a popular magazine was better than nothing for a woman working in Fascist Italy's cultural sector.

After the apprentice period at Scalera Film, Albani must have appeared to the DGC as a stronger candidate for a film-director position. From 1940 to 1944, he directed five features: *Il bazar delle idee* (1940) and *Divieto di sosta* (1941), two romantic comedies produced by Andros; the Venus-Scalera production *Boccaccio* (1940), an adaptation of the homonymous 1879 operetta by Franz von Suppé; the Marfilm-Artisti Associati production *Redenzione* (1942), based on the homonymous 1927 propaganda play by Farinacci, glorifying 1919-1922 *squadrismo*; and the seduced-and-abandoned melodrama *L'ultimo sogno* (1947), produced by Felsinea, shot and edited between Budrio and Venice in 1944, but released only in the post-war. For these five films, Basaglia appeared as 'help' or 'assistant' to Albani in planning and managing the shooting, which presumably allowed her to gather the necessary on-set experience to step up and direct the comedy *Sua Altezza ha detto: no!* (1953) and the drama *Sangue di zingara* (1956) in Italy, and the drama *O pão que o diabo amassou* (1957) and the comedy *Macumba na Alta* (1958) in Brazil. In the 1940-1944 period, Basaglia also authored film treatments (*Il bazar delle idee* and *L'ultimo sogno*), co-authored screenplays (*Il bazar delle idee*,

<sup>72</sup> Y. X., "Si 'doppia' in greco", *Film*, October 7, 1939: 10.



Boccaccio, *Divieto di sosta* and *L'ultimo sogno*)<sup>73</sup> and acted as the legal representative of the film production company Marfilm.

In spite of her multifaceted talent and hard work, Basaglia did not achieve visibility in film magazines with wide circulation such as *Lo Schermo*, *Cinema* and *Film*. However, she was credited alongside Franca Luchini as *assistenti alla regia* (literally 'assisting the direction', rather than the more authoritative 'assistant directors') in an early-1942 article about the Cremona-set shooting of *Redenzione*, published in *Il Regime Fascista*<sup>74</sup>. As for the rest, the only sources that go into any depth about Basaglia's work during Fascism are to be found at the local-press level, namely in a spring-1942 issue of the monthly magazine *Cremona* (published by the homonymous town's Istituto di Cultura Fascista) and in an early-1946 issue of the weekly newspaper *Oggi* (published by the Cremona-based section of the Partito Democratico del Lavoro). In addition to featuring a portrait of Basaglia in her prime, *Cremona* offers a rare glimpse of her specific on-set duties during the shooting of *Redenzione*:

Those assisting the direction advise the actors on the best way to perform their lines and on the movements and the gestures that would best fit within the prearranged camera takes [...], they organise the extras and inform them of what to do [...], they check this and that to avoid [...] inconsistencies [...]. In front of us, the director Albani, followed by the two assistants Maria Basaglia and Franca Luchini who are holding and keep checking the script, [...] briefly explains the starting positions, the entries, the gestures, the lines, the movements. The assistants specify what is written in the script [...]. And they start rehearsing. The assistants follow the actors as mobile prompters. [...] - *Quiet on set! Roll camera!* The assistants, notebook in hand, are ready to note down the lines spoken, the length, the characteristics of every single take<sup>75</sup>.

*Oggi* instead focuses on Basaglia's public-relations skills and sense for business, making her one of the instigators of the *Redenzione* film project, whose genesis apparently had more to do with financial speculation than with politics. It all began in early 1941, with a reception organised in Rome by Scalera Film. At this promotional event, Basaglia got acquainted with a film exhibitor from Cremona and learned that her childhood friend Angelo Milanese had become a wealthy industrialist and a top politician in Farinacci's realm. Thence came the idea of setting up a company for a movie to be shot in Cremona with financing from Milanese and his business associates. The Cremona-based funders agreed to help upon hearing that an initial investment of only 600,000 Liras was needed and, in order to make the future shooting in Cremona as smooth as possible, they chose to adapt Farinacci's play *Redenzione*<sup>76</sup>.

Since *Oggi* was an anti-Fascist publication, its report on *Redenzione* exuded disdain for Albani and Basaglia, who were not only Fascist propagandists but also RSI adherents (after 8 September 1943, Albani reprised his officer rank in the Esercito Nazionale Re-

<sup>73</sup> The 1941-1942 issues of *Almanacco della donna italiana* included Basaglia in the list of Italian *scrittrici*. Cf. Anonymous, "Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1941", 318; Anonymous, "Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti - 1942", 316.

<sup>74</sup> F. Ghilardi, "Il film *Redenzione* di Farinacci. Il primo giro di manovella", *Il Regime Fascista*, February 17, 1942: 3.

<sup>75</sup> P.M. Trucco, "Mentre al Ponchielli si gira *Redenzione*. Sguardo profano al mondo del cinema", *Cremona*, 3-4 (1942): 107-118 (113-117).

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, "Storia di un film. Pavolini e *Redenzione*. Farinacci autore fischciato", *Oggi*, January 13, 1946: 2.



pubblicano, moving with Basaglia to Florence and then, from July 1944, to Venice)<sup>77</sup>. Yet, the information provided by *Oggi* seems plausible, especially because in 1954-1955 Albani and Basaglia adopted the same *modus operandi* of *Redenzione*, exploiting state incentives and wealthy film ignoramuses from outside the Rome-based film circles to finance two movie productions to be shot in San Giorgio La Molara, Albani's home village: the comedy *Strapaese* (never completed) and *Sangue di zingara*<sup>78</sup>. Two of these wealthy film ignoramuses, Alfredo Maffei and his Italo-Brazilian brother-in-law Adone Fragano-Coppola, were instrumental to Albani and Basaglia's move to São Paulo in 1956. There, in addition to producing *O pão que o diabo amassou*, *Macumba na Alta* and the documentary *Brasil, mezzanotte* (never completed), Albani and Basaglia set up the dubbing studio Odil Fono Brasil<sup>79</sup> with funds from the Maffei-Fragano-Coppola family and other Brazilian and Italian businessmen (including Salvatore Persichetti, the founder of pioneering Italian dubbing studio Fono Roma in 1932-1933). However, due to Albani's shady financial administration of Odil Fono Brasil and its sister companies Euram Cinematografica and Comercial Internacional Cinematografica, he and Basaglia ran into legal troubles<sup>80</sup>, and in 1964 they fled back to Rome, where they made a living throughout the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s thanks to Basaglia's credited and uncredited translation work for cinema, television, and publishing houses such as Longanesi and Mondadori<sup>81</sup>.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The centrality of Paola Ojetti in Italy's cultural sector is testified by the frequent mentions of her activities in widely circulated Italian newspapers and magazines from the early 1930s onwards, and by her copious epistolary exchanges with the elite of the Italian and international arts scene, which are currently preserved in some of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Rome, Florence, Bologna and Milan. Moreover, information about Paola Ojetti can be found in her father's often-reprinted notes and diaries, in the numerous newspaper articles, essays and monographs dedicated to Ugo Ojetti's life and work, and in the autobiographical memoirs of those who frequented Il Salviatino between the mid-1910s and the early 1940s. In contrast to Paola Ojetti, whose life and work present few uncharted areas due to the abundant first- and second-hand resources available to researchers, Maria Basaglia is a much more obscure figure, as shown by the lacunae in her biography relating to the 1926-1938 years. More generally, apart from the 6 September 1939 letter discussed above, we never hear Basaglia speaking in the first person, so the reconstruction of her early career almost entirely relies on indirect sources such as succinct almanac entries, cursory mentions in the press, and oral memories of relatives and colleagues between Italy and Brazil. However, as the search for more first-hand, possibly autobiographical information about Basaglia continues, the comparison

<sup>77</sup> Reports on Marchetto's activities during the RSI can be found in the Busta 228 mentioned in Note 64. See also Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo, Fondo Miscellanea - Cinema italiano in epoca fascista, MSFC0011.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. ACS, Fondo Ministero Turismo e Spettacolo - DGS - Archivio Cinema - Lungometraggi. Fascicoli per opera (CF 16-5000), Buste 115 and 127.

<sup>79</sup> M. Barro, *Participação italiana no cinema brasileiro*, São Paulo: SESI-SP, 2017, 19 and 37.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Cinemateca Brasileira, 43293 - Coleção de recortes de jornais e revistas sobre produção e distribuição cinematográficas no Brasil (1964), clippings 21-30 and 38.

<sup>81</sup> Author's interview with Luciano and Andrea Panvini (in person, 2022); Camerini, Biarese, "13 filmografie di dialoghetti", 40.

between Ojetti and Basaglia's life and work experiences makes it possible to advance some conclusions about gender and labour in Fascist Italy's cultural sector.

If it is true that socio-economic privilege granted women intellectuals such as Paola Ojetti better access to the higher spheres of Italian culture, with all the related benefits in terms of reputation and remuneration, the similarities between Ojetti and Basaglia's careers in Fascist Italy's cultural sector are more relevant than the differences. First of all, their career trajectories during the regime show that the mastery of one or more foreign languages was a key requisite for women wishing to enter the field of cultural production, regardless of their socio-economic background: translation work was considered especially fitting to women because it was generally poorly paid, mostly carried out at home, held in lower esteem than authorial work, and thus perceived as less threatening to male privilege. Ojetti and Basaglia's work in film dubbing is proof of this, although more research needs to be carried out in order to ascertain the literary-based income of the two women and compare their fees to those paid to male literary translators. Secondly, the cases of Ojetti and Basaglia show that regardless of their talent and diligence, women intellectuals in Fascist Italy often had to put themselves under the mentorship or in the employ of male colleagues, who had greater civil liberties and career opportunities: not coincidentally, most of the letters by and to Paola Ojetti referenced in the present article belong to archival collections named after Ugo Ojetti and Mino Doletti, while Maria Basaglia passed herself as Marcello Albani's wife for most of her adult life.

The women who met these conditions accessed the cultural sector, working through the ranks of a specific branch (dubbing, then film journalism and screenwriting in the case of Paola Ojetti; dubbing, then screenwriting and assistant direction in the case of Basaglia) and reaching out to their fellow women intellectuals to create useful networks of encouragement, support and collaboration (such as the Ojetti, Cattaneo, Negri and De Céspedes relationships, and the seemingly less successful September-1939 attempt by Basaglia to fraternise with the *directrice* of *Film*). While confirming that women's intellectual work was rarely rewarded with proper public recognition and financial compensation due to social and moral prejudices and government-imposed restrictions in education and the job market, Ojetti and Basaglia's career paths, professional routines and social networks also suggest that there were ways for women in the cultural sector to partially break through the narrow boundaries of obscure, subordinate work. For instance, dubbing expertise and connections in the literary and journalistic world could become a gateway, and a springboard, to an eclectic authorial career in the film industry – all the more so after the Hollywood majors' embargo due to the late-1938 implementation of the Italian state monopoly on foreign film importation forced the Italian film industry to scale down dubbing activities and enormously increase movie production (Ojetti and Basaglia's official screenwriting debuts date from 1939, with *La guerra* and *Papà Lebonnard* respectively).

Finally, Ojetti and Basaglia's post-1945 activities show that the politics of discrimination towards women intellectuals somewhat relaxed in Italy after the fall of the Fascist regime. In the early 1950s, Basaglia managed to make her directorial debut with the Albani-produced features *Sua Altezza ha detto: no!* and *Sangue di zingara*, and in the early 1960s Paola Ojetti directed a literature-themed vinyl-record series, successfully applying to the record publishing industry the cultural mediation skills she had acquired in the book publishing industry. If looking at Ojetti and Basaglia's trajectories during and after the end of the regime is not enough to draw general conclusions about women's career developments in the post-war period, their example aims to stimulate further research into the gendering of cultural and creative work beyond the Fascist regime, during the postwar reconstruction and in the years of the economic boom.