

1 **Gender and the**
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3 **First World War**
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Editorial matter, selection and introduction
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Women Behind the Lines: The Friuli Region as a Case Study of Total Mobilization, 1915–1917

Matteo Ermacora

During the First World War, the northeastern border region known as Friuli became a rear area of the Italian front.¹ In this period people experienced ‘total war’ not only due to an extensive use of civilian workers in the context of the logistic efforts of the Italian Army, but also through the militarization of society, through air strikes, internments, and new forms of military control. After the defeat of Caporetto in October 1917,² part of the population managed to flee towards other Italian regions, while the others had to bear the harsh Austro-German occupation until the end of the war.³

Within this framework, women were deeply involved in the war. In this chapter I examine wartime mobilization of women from the lower class, their changing role, and the relationship between women and wartime society. In addition, I consider the question of how the state and religious authorities tried to maintain traditional gender roles behind the front. Finally, I will compare wartime representations of women and women’s subjective perspectives. For this purpose, I refer to various sources such as military and civil administration records, letters and diaries, parish books, newspapers, and interviews conducted between 1999 and 2000.

When analysing women’s changing role, we must consider some aspects of the area during both the pre-war years and wartime. Friuli was a rural, barely industrialized region, and characterized by a high level of male seasonal migration with 80,000–100,000 men working in the Habsburg Empire and Germany. Mass migration introduced elements of secularization and socialism to this traditionally Catholic society, which, to a certain degree, challenged patriarchalism and, in consequence, strengthened the position of women within families, especially in the foothills and alpine part of the region called Carnia.⁴ As a workforce, women and girls were mainly employed in the countryside, in textile factories, and as servants and housemaids, whilst some of them emigrated abroad and worked in brick kilns. August 1914 had a traumatic effect on the region, as migrants had to return home and the local economy got out of balance. Hunger and unemployment as a consequence of these events led to huge social unrest in 1914/15, in which women were in the

1 first line protesting against high prices and shortages of goods. Issues such as
2 social and welfare benefits, peace, and neutrality as discussed by the socialist
3 movement also contributed to the uproar, which lasted until March 1915.⁵

4 From May 1915, the region became a 'war zone', divided into 'operation
5 zones' 10–20 kilometres behind the lines and 'rear areas'. In both these areas
6 military authorities had special powers over civilians.⁶ The rural society in
7 Friuli was considerably transformed by the deployment of 1.5 million Italian
8 soldiers and by 200,000–250,000 workers who came from other regions to
9 build trenches, barns, roads, and railways.⁷ Thus, everyday life, space, time,
10 economy, and relationships were fundamentally changed by militarization.
11 Due to male enlistment, women and children had to cope with the loss
12 of their family income, shortages of essential goods, increasing prices, and
13 inflation. Unprepared for a long-lasting war, the Italian Army exploited the
14 rear area for workforce and raw materials. Within this general framework, the
15 mobilization of society and workforce was implemented, firstly, by the army
16 itself and army organizations such as the 'Segretariato per gli Affari Civili',
17 which took orders directly from the Supreme Command of General Cadorna;
18 secondly, by local authorities (prefetti, mayors); and thirdly, by agrarian
19 institutions and private committees.

20 The military efficiency of the whole country was closely linked to the eco-
21 nomic effort and the capacity to mobilize the civilian population. As Friuli
22 was near the front line the entire society was mobilized in the war effort.
23 While middle- and upper-class women participated in the patriotic effort
24 by joining local committees for work relief and aid to poor people, refugees,
25 soldiers and their families,⁸ lower-class women remained indifferent or even
26 hostile to the war they received with both rage and resignation. Their support
27 of the war agenda was improvised and military authorities, especially in the
28 zone near the front line, initially distrusted the local population and accused
29 them of disloyalty. However, the rear area soon became a resource for work-
30 ers to fill the gaps of the military logistics effort. Women kept on working in
31 the local textile factories and were involved in farming, where they replaced
32 called-up farmers. In Carnia, on the other hand, the logistic needs of the
33 Italian Army and the scarce agricultural resources attracted women to work
34 for army units behind the front lines. The mobilization of the workforce was
35 conducted to different degrees by military and local authorities. In 1915–16,
36 landowners and mayors sought to encourage peasant women to take up
37 jobs in farm work in order to improve agricultural production. Another type
38 of mobilization was promoted by the state itself and realized by local com-
39 mittees which involved adult women with small children, whose husbands
40 were soldiers, in sewing uniforms and knitting woollen scarves, sweaters,
41 and socks. Between 1915 and 1917, in Udine alone, about 1500 women
42 were employed in this task. It was a form of aid through work, but wages
43 were not sufficient to allow the survival of the families. However, this kind
44 of work was used for propaganda purposes to confirm women's traditional

1 domestic role.⁹ Women had to fend for themselves and showed great adapt-
 2 ability. During the war, women worked alternatively in the agricultural and
 3 the industrial sector, in textile factories, for the army's logistics services and
 4 in small businesses. This implied that women, especially young girls, had
 5 to move to the interior of the region, and to change their jobs to search for
 6 better wages and suitable working conditions.

8 **Women's mobilization in the countryside**

9
 10 Concern regarding the 'collapse' of agricultural production was common
 11 to all rural areas of Italy, as the debates in the Chamber of Deputies illus-
 12 trate. The situation in Friuli was marked by increasing difficulties, such
 13 as a shortage of labour due to enlistment in the army and to the involve-
 14 ment of younger and older male labourers in the logistics effort, as well as
 15 infrequent use of farm machinery. From March 1916, the main agrarian
 16 association (Associazione Agraria Friulana) urgently advised mayors, priests,
 17 and teachers to mobilize the countryside in order to keep up supplies.¹⁰ It
 18 was somewhat of a mass draft: 'The land must not be left abandoned. [...]'
 19 Behind every army an army of workers is absolutely indispensable [...]. It is
 20 therefore necessary that the work of the absent men is replaced by old men,
 21 women, and children.'¹¹

22 There are no figures available for this increase in involvement. Nevertheless,
 23 during 1916–17 women, young girls, and children replaced men on almost
 24 every farm. They performed men's work, such as ploughing, threshing,
 25 mowing, fertilizing, driving cars, looking after the cattle, and they had to
 26 use machinery for the first time.¹² Observers pointed out that the work
 27 in the fields and stables was taken care of 'entirely by women'.¹³ Local
 28 authorities and landowners emphasized that female work required not only
 29 'compensation' but also 'public recognition'; landowners and priests played
 30 an important role in mobilizing women. Following the French example,
 31 mayors and the Agrarian Association started to award silver medals to peas-
 32 ant women as patriotic symbols of cooperation. In June 1916, the Minister
 33 of Agriculture also decided to deliver diplomas, medals, and prize money to
 34 peasant women.¹⁴ In 1917, agricultural production was stimulated through
 35 incentives.

36 These initiatives were accompanied by intensive propaganda: Agrarian
 37 bulletins applauded women's new roles and tasks in the countryside and
 38 celebrated peasant women within a traditional framework as role models
 39 of patriotism and self-sacrifice, sobriety and renouncement.¹⁵ These articles
 40 demonstrated that women could do men's jobs. They were called 'female
 41 heroes of the fields' and portrayed as soldiers' mothers or wives who were
 42 waiting for their husbands and sons. In the meantime, they looked after
 43 house and land, they were attending to housekeeping and farming and in so
 44 doing they emulated the soldiers at the front. Rhetorically, the fields became

1 'battlegrounds', and women were depicted as 'wilful', 'strong', 'energetic',
2 and 'heroic' as they were 'quietly' responding to the 'fatherland's call'.¹⁶

3 The first topic that was highlighted by propaganda in 1916 was the notion
4 of 'cooperation'; that is to say, the involvement of women in the national war
5 effort as a 'patriotic duty'. By using dialogic texts and didactic poems which
6 were often written in the local Friulian language to suggest a sort of close-
7 ness, propaganda presented women's new roles as recognized and endorsed
8 by God and the nation itself.¹⁷ Loneliness, separation, and even death of
9 their relatives at the front line became noble reasons for their activities.
10 The second notion was 'stability': stability of production, of gender roles, of
11 families. Even male peasants recognized women's resistance to fatigue, their
12 dedication to the family and to their loved ones at the front as 'patience' and
13 'obedience'.¹⁸

14 Although female labour was not a novelty given women's wartime indus-
15 trial employment, this development also raised concerns in Friulian society.
16 For that reason, propaganda paid particular attention to gender hierarchy and
17 presented this female work as temporary and exceptional in order to avoid
18 women's masculinization. Photographs depicting women who did 'men's
19 jobs' and used tools and machinery from the 'male world' were not usually
20 published. The few pictures showing women using wagons and machinery
21 presented these tasks as the necessary process of mechanization and the
22 modernization of agricultural production. Abstract and rhetorical ideas were
23 personified and real people shown as examples, such as the 'courageous'
24 Santina Mantovani from Codroipo, mother of eight children, whose husband
25 had been called up and who worked on her own on her large estate.¹⁹

26 Due to increasing difficulties, the tone of propaganda changed in 1917. The
27 image of peasant women gradually became militarized. It was used to dissemi-
28 nate the ability to endure suffering, discipline, sobriety, and to rationalize
29 food consumption,²⁰ in stark contrast to the image of young urban female
30 workers who were accused of unnecessary spending.²¹ Another propaganda
31 keyword in 1917 was 'strength'. The nation needed 'strong' wives and mothers
32 who would dry their eyes and could cope with mourning and weakness. The
33 increasing atmosphere of resistance and war-weariness among soldiers is well
34 portrayed by a poem, entitled 'Madre Friulana' (Friulian Mother), published
35 by a leading newspaper: A patriotic mother takes her deserter son back to the
36 battlefield. In so doing, she symbolizes every woman's duty.²²

37 Local churches contributed to this discourse. In fact, the Archbishop of
38 Udine Anastasio Rossi, who was a patriot, loyally supported the Italian war
39 effort in the official bulletin *Rivista diocesana udinese* (Journal of the dio-
40 cese of Udine) between 1915 and 1919. He also played an important role
41 in the representation of women. He mobilized peasant women in public
42 letters, prompted them to subscribe to the national war loan (in January
43 1916) and accepted that people had to work on Sundays (in April 1916).
44 In February 1917, Rossi asked parish priests to urge congregants to reduce

1 their consumption: The keyword 'rationing' was associated with the moral
 2 issue of 'renunciation'.²³ A few months later, he requested them to improve
 3 agricultural production. Although parish priests in their diaries underlined
 4 the massive work of women and children, labour conditions were not chal-
 5 lenged in general, yet nurseries for small children were introduced in almost
 6 every village from 1915 onwards to facilitate women's work.²⁴ Nevertheless,
 7 in 1917 the Catholic authorities started denouncing unnecessary spend-
 8 ing and alcoholism among women in the countryside. Furthermore, they
 9 condemned defeatism and women who refused to work in order to hasten
 10 the end of the war.²⁵ In so doing, priests joined the paternalism of civil
 11 authorities and landowners who praised only women who sacrificed them-
 12 selves for their families and the nation.²⁶ As had already happened with the
 13 demonstrations of 1914, newspapers in 1917 portrayed women protesting
 14 against shortages of food and of state benefits as 'imboscanti' (slackers) and
 15 as being hysterical and irrational. By using a sarcastic tone, articles ridiculed
 16 and discredited the unrest. Rural women who stole wood, wheat, and maize
 17 were dehumanized and depicted as 'rats'.²⁷

18 All in all, local authorities 'discovered' the female workforce in the
 19 countryside during wartime. Their astonishment about women's capabili-
 20 ties was the expression of a deeply bourgeois and patriarchal culture which
 21 had confined women to emotional space, devalued female productivity,
 22 and feared women's presence in society outside of the private sphere.²⁸ For
 23 this reason, their work was officially recognized for the first time in special
 24 celebrations in village town halls. However, a paternalistic tone prevailed in
 25 public discourse, in which women were treated as children who needed to be
 26 educated. This public recognition did not improve their everyday lives.

27 Government and landowners counted on women to accept any hardship
 28 in order to make working the land as cheap as possible. Wages (0.80–1.50 lire
 29 per day, from dawn to dusk) as well as prizes distributed for seasonal work
 30 (5–10 lire per woman) remained extremely poor.²⁹ Moreover, there were no
 31 state benefits for peasants until late 1917.

32 33 **Beyond propaganda: Linda's and Maria's wartime** 34 **correspondence** 35

36 A close reading of letters that women sent to their relatives at the front allows
 37 us to analyse women's changing roles during wartime and to point out their
 38 social and cultural meaning. In the following, I refer to letters written by
 39 Linda Ellero from Variano, born in 1881 and mother of seven children, to
 40 her husband Giuseppe Merlino, a soldier at the front, and those by Maria
 41 Nardin from San Vito al Torre, born in 1876, to her father Michele Nardin,
 42 who was interned by the Italian Army in Ascoli Piceno. Using the example
 43 of these letters, we can learn about the living conditions of peasant women.
 44 Both of their families owned and rented small estates of land. Linda Ellero

1 lived in the Italian rear area, Maria Nardin in the territory that was occupied
2 by the Italian Army in 1915 and very close to the battlefield.³⁰

3 These two women clearly accepted the challenges posed by the war. Their
4 letters show how women had to cope with new tasks. Women became the
5 main labour force along with the young and the old. They had to leave the
6 domestic space (housekeeping, gardening, raising chicken, harvesting fruit)
7 to go outside to the fields to look after the cattle, drive cars, plough, plant,
8 fertilize, harvest, thresh all types of crops, and take care of the vineyards. Both
9 women did 'men's work' and used 'men's tools' (shovels, hoes, sickles, wagons,
10 ploughs), which could also be interpreted in a symbolic way.³¹ They also had
11 to take on new responsibilities on their own, such as managing labour, selling
12 cattle and foodstuff, buying seeds, distributing food rations to eight family
13 members, accounting as well as handling and saving money. In their letters
14 they described their work and what the situation was like in the countryside,
15 complaining about the lack of workforce and the increasing involvement of
16 the elderly and children in agricultural production. Men, on the other hand,
17 were in a state of passivity and helplessness. In spring 1916, for example,
18 Linda Ellero tried to reassure her husband at the front: 'Keep calm Giuseppe,
19 don't worry, neither about us because we're safe, nor about the agricultural
20 work, because if the weather is good, we'll do what we are able to do.'³²

21 Their role implied a new visibility as they attended new spaces such as the
22 marketplace and the town hall.³³ This involved the establishment of new
23 relationships: Maria Nardin, for instance, had to attend local authorities to
24 sign petitions for her absent father and to obtain benefits: 'Now, dear father,
25 I am always in the town hall, for one thing or another.'³⁴ Linda Ellero, on
26 the other hand, often asked the local authorities for leave for her husband
27 and an authorization to visit him at the front, or she had to negotiate requi-
28 sitions of cattle with military officials. Their relationship with state and local
29 authorities was characterized by diffidence and submissiveness, but also by
30 anger and the determination to fight for their rights.

31 Both women were in a state of constant nervousness and tension due
32 to the war. They faced the new situation courageously, yet with feelings of
33 uncertainty. Occasionally, when they were not sure about how to handle
34 a certain situation, they discussed the problem with husband or father, asked
35 for their permission to decide or took decisions together with them. Relatives
36 tried to give suggestions and advice, yet these women, who were well aware
37 of the local situation, acted on their own and proudly claimed their inde-
38 pendent choices: 'So, if I had followed uncle's decisions, I would have done
39 bad business, then, dear father, I did it all on my own, I didn't ask anyone,
40 I want to do it by myself.'³⁵ This new kind of female attitude and behaviour
41 pattern can't be stressed enough, all the more given the fact that everyday
42 life in the rear area was hard, a 'bad life', 'full of sorrow and worries', as these
43 two women wrote.³⁶ Women sometimes confessed weakness and increasing
44 fatigue, sometimes they felt powerless and inadequate, especially because

1 of the double workload of family and outside work. In October 1916, Linda
2 Ellero wrote: 'To tell you the truth, dear husband, I haven't got enough
3 breath to thank God for giving me and the children health, as we had
4 to work the whole season.'³⁷ Maria Nardin, too, grieved and declared her
5 weakness. She wrote in June 1917: 'Dear father, if you knew what my head
6 is like... a drunk's is better than mine.'³⁸ Sometimes both women were so
7 lonely, tired, and confused that they wanted to give up making decisions.
8 However, they were also happy to tell about their decisions, and proudly
9 claimed their increasing business skills.³⁹ Female behaviour patterns were
10 characterized by a progressive awareness and growing empowerment, yet
11 always accompanied by uncertainty and the continuous search for male
12 approval. This is shown by the fact that both women in their letters of 1917
13 devoted increasing space to their personal feelings, yet mentioned farm
14 matters less frequently because women's work tasks ceased to be extraordi-
15 nary. As we have seen, the years 1915 and 1916 were marked by significant
16 changes in women's lives.

17 The letters also underline the transformation of the rural landscape brought
18 about by the war. In October 1915, Maria Nardin wrote that soldiers had dug
19 trenches in the fields and cut trees, while cars and trucks were passing by.
20 She was not allowed on the fields, soldiers examined passports at military
21 checkpoints and officers banned the cutting of the corn.⁴⁰ Maria witnessed
22 damage, destruction of crops, and also thefts by soldiers. Furthermore, air
23 raids were a source of constant fear.⁴¹ Linda Ellero, in contrast, who lived in
24 an area far away from the front line, experienced the repercussions of the war
25 in terms of labour shortage, enlistment of men from the village, requisitions
26 of cattle, and widespread diseases. In this context they both stressed the dete-
27 rioration of living conditions, the fragile economy, and the increasing diffi-
28 culty in finding food. Due to the war both became 'single women': In August
29 1917, Maria Nardin's interned husband died of tuberculosis in Maribor, and
30 her father, Michele Nardin, did not return from Ascoli until 1919. Linda
31 Ellero lost her husband Giuseppe Merlino who, in September 1917, died at
32 the front of a disease. These circumstances were not uncommon.

33 Our two examples show how peasant women, who did not necessarily
34 identify with the official war aims or war motives, experienced problems
35 concerning working conditions. Moreover, the war had an intense, existential
36 impact on them. Their main intention was to keep their families together,
37 and their choices were not in accordance with the submissive image of
38 women portrayed by public discourse. They were neither involved in the
39 rhetoric of war, nor *matres dolorosae*. In fact, they tried to take a step across
40 gender roles and acquired a new identity. The tensions they experienced were
41 reworked within the family, as shown by numerous examples in 1917, when
42 other women, who perceived the injustices brought by war, decided to pro-
43 test publicly and to protect deserters, challenging the strong repressive police
44 apparatus behind the front.⁴²

1 **Behind the front lines**

2
3 Another form of wartime mobilization of women and girls was their employ-
4 ment in war logistics. This occurred especially in Carnia, in the rear of the
5 Alpine part of the front, where people were involved in building military
6 installations from the autumn of 1915 onwards. The villages' close vicini-
7 ty to the front line as well as the lack of roads and infrastructure were
8 reasons for many to participate. While young people and non-fighting
9 men were recruited for the construction of roads, trenches, barracks, and
10 military stores, women and girls were employed as 'portatrici' (see Figures
11 2.1–2.3) to transport tools and goods to the soldiers in the trenches up in
12 the mountains.⁴³

13 Mobilization of the female workforce intensified when even young girls
14 aged 11 to 12 and elderly women aged 50 to 60 were recruited. In February
15 1916, about 1600 women in Carnia worked for the Italian Army (45 per cent
16 of all troops at the Carnian front line), while in summer 1917, 4000 women
17 were employed (33 per cent).⁴⁴ As male migration ceased in 1914/15, work
18 for military units in addition to state welfare benefits and income from
19 gardening was the only way to survive. Women were directly recruited by
20 officers and had to transport food, cognac, pasta, wood, barbed wire, and
21 ammunition in large baskets on their backs towards the lines. While ascend-
22 ing altitudes from 500 to 1000 metres along alpine paths, they were often



42 *Figure 2.1* Inspection of the Alpine post Timau (Zona Carnia – But alto). In the
43 middle are Generals Segato, Airoldi, and Fara with *portatrici* and troops around them
44 *Source:* Museo della Guerra di Timau (Udine).



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Figure 2.2 *Portatrici* of Paluzza
Source: Museo della Guerra di Timau (Udine).

23 exposed to enemy fire. They arrived at the military barracks after walks of two
24 or three hours and then went back to their homes. The pay for each trip was
25 2.50 lire. The goods they carried weighed between 35 and 50 kilogrammes.
26 The *portatrici* worked in all weather conditions and also under enemy fire.
27 The case of Maria Plozner Mentil from Paluzza, for instance, is well known;
28 she was shot dead in February 1916 by a sniper while she was transporting
29 food for soldiers. Maria Vigezza from Moggio Udinese, aged 48, died on
30 18 November 1916 when a bomb was dropped by an Austrian airplane while
31 she was delivering gravel.⁴⁵

32 General Agostino D'Adamo, chief of the Segretariato Generale per gli
33 Affari Civili, tried to regulate women's employment in military units and
34 protect them from exploitation and excessive risks. On 11 January 1917,
35 he issued a decree that banned the enlistment of women younger than 17
36 and older than 50 years. These women could not be forced to work in areas
37 'under enemy shell fire' or do heavy or dangerous work; their wages ranged
38 from 2.50 to 4.00 lire for a ten-hour working day. They were not subjected to
39 the code of military justice, yet lack of discipline and absence without notice
40 were punished with fines and wage deductions. Women were to be recruited
41 in the villages near the front line and were supposed to go back home every
42 day; meals and lodging were provided only if the women worked in isolated
43 places near the front line. However, these regulations were not acknowl-
44 edged in Carnia. Local army officers refused to dismiss young girls arguing

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20 *Figure 2.3 Carnic portatrici on a souvenir photograph*
21 *Source: Museo Centrale del Risorgimento, Rome, Album O2, 7.32.*

22
23
24 that their exclusion would reduce the workforce and push the girls ‘into
25 prostitution’ because they were not under the control of their fathers.⁴⁶

26 Poorly paid, this female work was considered mainly as a form of support
27 for army units. As interviews revealed, it was perceived as an extension of tra-
28 ditional jobs held in the mountain estates such as transporting hay or alpine
29 pasture. In the interviews, the women emphasized the danger they faced and
30 the heavy fatigue they experienced. ‘Fatigued to death’, as Irma Casanova,
31 one of the last survivors, told me in 1999. In fact, during the winter, women
32 had to transport goods in high snow and they had to shovel paths and roads.
33 Their work started early in the morning and at times went on overnight to
34 avoid being discovered and shot. They remembered that they were terrified
35 by artillery fire whilst hauling supplies.⁴⁷

36 Women therefore had to bear a great burden during wartime: logistic work,
37 farming, mothering, and housekeeping. It is difficult to decide if these women
38 were motivated to work for patriotic reasons; they accepted their mobilization
39 as a duty, but also as a relief from poverty. They often expressed their solidar-
40 ity and grief for the soldiers who had to live, suffer, and die in the trenches.
41 All in all, their relationship with the military was ambivalent as on the one
42 hand they received food and cigarettes from the soldiers, on the other they
43 were severely controlled by the officers. Especially in the first phase of the war,
44 military units were harsh, because they suspected civilians who lived near the

1 borderline to be spies or enemies. From this perspective, women's work can
2 also be seen as a sort of demonstration of loyalty. Often officers used women's
3 and girls' fear of the enemy to force them to work. In some cases the military
4 brutally requisitioned women, even those pregnant, to tow artillery or shovel
5 snow from alpine roads.⁴⁸

6 The third year of the war was characterized by a crucial transformation
7 of women's role in the Alpine rear areas. When the army built cableways to
8 transport goods and ammunition to the highest front lines, women were
9 employed to keep roads clear of snow or to transport gravel to maintain
10 roads. Due to the shortage of male workers during spring and summer 1917,
11 women and even girls were employed in heavy labour such as mining, exca-
12 vating trenches and building roads and railways. This implied medium and
13 short-scale migration to other valleys or towards the military workshops
14 behind the Isonzo front. Work in the rear areas became dirty, heavy, and
15 dangerous; women cut their fingers, got grit in their eyes, fell over and broke
16 their limbs, or had frostbites. Some of them died or were heavily injured by
17 exploding mines or in accidents.⁴⁹ It is very difficult to know how many
18 women were injured, killed, or fell ill, not only because these cases were
19 subject to censorship, but also because women were excluded from benefits
20 such as those given to disabled ex-servicemen and were reserved for male
21 military workers. Few disapproved of the harsh conditions for women.
22 In June 1917, labour inspector Guido Picotti wrote to General D'Adamo that
23 in the yards of Carnia there was 'no military control' of recruitment and offic-
24 ers tried to 'avoid providing tents and beds for the workers'. Picotti criticized
25 'precarious sanitary conditions, widespread involvement of children, youths,
26 and women without the respect of any law'.⁵⁰

27 This complaint remained a dead letter. The main problem as perceived
28 by local authorities was women's morality. In fact, in October 1917, the
29 Friulian Catholic deputy Michele Gortani deplored the perils of prostitution
30 among young female workers of Carnia and was worried about the 'honesty'
31 and 'innocence' of married women and children.⁵¹ Similarly, priests of the
32 villages in Carnia described women's deep involvement in military work
33 in their parish books. They did not mention anything about women's
34 'masculinization' as, due to male migration, women in alpine regions had
35 already been used to hard labour before the war. What bothered priests was
36 that female liberty emphasized 'male' patterns of behaviour such as personal
37 autonomy, lack of control, and absence of family restraints, especially among
38 the young female generation.

39 Nevertheless, women cooperated with the army and their work allowed
40 the troops to protect the high-lying trenches. In some places at the front in
41 Carnia (Timau, Paluzza Paularo), the transport of supplies and road main-
42 tenance was almost entirely conducted by women. Despite their massive
43 involvement, women employed in the army units were neither recognized
44 nor praised as peasant women were. Reports of their work were censored and

1 withheld from public discourse – perhaps to avoid criticism from enemy
2 propaganda, perhaps because it was too heavy, too dangerous, and too
3 ‘male’. In fact, women were dangerously invading ‘masculine’ spaces such as
4 trenches and the war zone, and they approached ‘male’ jobs par excellence:
5 they were ‘making war’. At the same time, this kind of women’s work was
6 often accompanied by promiscuity and for this reason was suppressed in
7 public discourse: No article described their heavy work, no photograph was
8 published on this subject. Consequently, propaganda rather chose to glorify
9 a reassuring image of peasant women.

10

11 **Women without men and men without women**

12

13 Behind the front, Friulian rural communities had to deal with a large presence
14 of soldiers who, on the one hand, stimulated commerce with civilians, yet
15 on the other transformed mentalities and social mores. In this new ‘wartime
16 society’, women played an important role and were submitted to severe ten-
17 sions. Faced with inadequate benefits and increasing prices, women had to
18 leave their homes and earn money. They became street vendors, worked as
19 shop assistants, opened inns, rented out rooms to soldiers and officers, cooked
20 meals, sewed, washed and ironed military clothes, or worked in logistics and
21 workshops. They were paid small sums of money, food, or clothes.⁵² Due to
22 the forced absence of men, communities, and families were shaken and the
23 war destroyed traditional rules of community and gender relations. Young
24 girls experimented with new and more open relationships with soldiers and
25 officers, while the stability of marriages was jeopardized by free relationships
26 (‘unioni libere’) between married women and soldiers. These were character-
27 ized by a mutual search for understanding and comfort in view of personal
28 vulnerability and fragility during the war. While men were looking for rest,
29 leisure, and a ‘normal life’ far from the trenches, women recognized the sol-
30 diers’ fragile condition and welcomed them as sons, brothers, or husbands.
31 Women escaped from uncertainty and isolation in these relationships, which
32 were also instrumental in improving their quality of life given the worsening
33 living conditions.⁵³

34 Parish priests condemned the ‘moral decay’ and accused women and girls
35 of immorality, crime, inadequate parental control, bad language, provocative
36 fashion styles, and, above all, sexual relationships with soldiers. Priests were
37 worried because this new behaviour threatened to weaken faith and the moral
38 authority of the Church among peasants.⁵⁴ In June and again in December
39 1916, the Archbishop of Udine, Anastasio Rossi, repeatedly denounced the
40 ‘painful consequences’ of the soldiers’ presence in rural communities because
41 of the number of ‘illegitimate babies, broken engagements, and abandoned
42 women’.⁵⁵

43 Yet there was another side to these new forms of relationships and lifestyle.
44 The amount of rape and clandestine prostitution due to poverty and hardship

1 rose significantly. So many mothers and young servants became occasional
2 prostitutes that venereal diseases were widespread and the army was forced
3 to establish military brothels to prevent diseases among troops.⁵⁶ In fact, the
4 province of Udine was the one with the highest rate of illegitimate babies
5 from Italian or, in 1917/18, Austro-German soldiers. Birth ratio increased
6 in the years 1915–18 from 359 to 836 (per 10,000).⁵⁷ In Mortegliano, for
7 instance, a typical rural village of the lowlands with 3400 inhabitants, there
8 were about 25 illegitimate births between 1915 and 1918, instead of the two
9 or three cases per year in the pre-war period.⁵⁸

10 Surveys in newspapers and parish books demonstrate that prostitution was
11 not considered as a result of increasing poverty, but as women's desire for
12 'lust and pleasure', evasion of parental control, and scarce maternal educa-
13 tion. However, the 'liberalization' of sexual mores did not constitute women's
14 emancipation. Though there was greater freedom in sexual relationships,
15 there was also a large increase in rape and prostitution. During wartime
16 this behaviour became 'ordinary', due to the fact that people were living in
17 an 'extraordinary' period, in which all social and moral restraints fell and
18 adaptation prevailed. Illegitimate births meant severe problems for girls and
19 women, as they were often marginalized by their families and communities.
20 This resulted in a growing infant mortality rate, due to neglect, abortion, and
21 infanticide.

22 Concern about social mores and girls' independence was also fed by an
23 increasing juvenile mobility in 1917. As mentioned previously, the shortage of
24 male workers stimulated migration from the mountains and the countryside
25 to military workshops at the Isonzo front, where women produced masks,
26 mats, and coverings for trenches, and mended used uniforms. This weakened
27 parental restrictions and enhanced personal and economic independence.
28 The new situation was perceived as a social threat in as much as women and
29 juvenile workers were seen as criminals or 'irregular' subjects, who jeopard-
30 ized not only traditional hierarchies between upper and lower classes, but also
31 between the sexes.⁵⁹ Female workers and peasant girls were accused of wasting
32 their money on superfluous expenses, such as wine, new clothes, short skirts,
33 stockings. In addition, they were reproached for new behaviours, such as
34 'male' language, hedonism, provocative clothes, 'immorality', and the lack of
35 religious feeling.

36 In this context, newspapers condemned promiscuity at the workplace and
37 saw women and young girls as potential prostitutes and as elements of disorder
38 and 'immorality'. Civil and Catholic authorities, on the other hand, wished
39 to maintain, and even to cultivate and glorify, traditional 'feminine' qualities,
40 especially women's maternal 'instincts' towards sons and husbands at the
41 front. Moral and social concerns were used to justify a new repressive wave
42 in rear areas and in the city of Udine during the summer of 1917. Military
43 records show that the arrests of women were often based on anti-female ste-
44 reotypes such as bad moral behaviour ('cattiva condotta morale'), occasional

1 prostitution, and poverty, and were aimed at assuring social and political
2 control in order to prevent unrest behind the front.⁶⁰

4 Celebrating a 'sad victory': final remarks

6 The defeat at Caporetto in October 1917 marked a rupture in the involve-
7 ment of civilians in the war. About 135,000 people, mostly women and chil-
8 dren, fled from Friuli towards other Italian regions, while 500,000 remained
9 under enemy occupation. These events had severe effects on women and
10 on women's public image, which turned women from active participants
11 in the war effort into passive bystanders, from heroines into victims of war.
12 Women who fled the area were depicted as patriotic refugees who escaped
13 'Teutonic slavery', while women who remained in the occupied territories
14 were represented as having fallen victim to rape by the 'barbarian enemy'. In
15 this understanding, women stood as a symbol for 'the body of the nation'.
16 Both patterns were used to bolster soldiers' resistance at the River Piave
17 battlefield until the end of the war and also to portray the nation as welcom-
18 ing towards refugees.⁶¹

19 After the war, the female image shifted to the 'mourning mother'. In the
20 1921 celebrations of the 'unknown soldier', in Udine, Gorizia, and Aquileia,
21 women were again considered only as 'soldiers' mothers' or 'soldiers' wives',
22 and depicted as heroic victims who represented the national mourning. The
23 main image was the Catholic *mater dolorosa* or the war widow, which stressed
24 women's domestic and maternal roles and their willingness to sacrifice their
25 husbands and sons for the nation.⁶² These ruling class and gender models
26 and the representations of mourning were unacceptable for peasant women.
27 Despite the visibility they had gained as workers, this role was neither recog-
28 nized nor recalled in public discourse. Female experiences were excluded and
29 women did not find adequate channels to express themselves and their suf-
30 fering, also due to the fact that even the socialist party in the post-war years
31 supported only returning soldiers.⁶³ The 'other side of the war' remained
32 hidden in diaries or in letters. These traces of women's experiences were
33 almost completely neglected, overshadowed by the myth of victory and the
34 'male' nation at war. Fascism later on ideologically reinforced this process by
35 increasing the emphasis on gender differences.⁶⁴

36 It was not until 1969 that finally state authorities officially awarded
37 the honour of Cavaliere di Vittorio Veneto, to the *portatrici carniche* as
38 a symbol of women's patriotism, maybe because this specific and extreme
39 mobilization could be linked to the soldiers in the trenches. In 1997, Italian
40 president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro rewarded the 'heroine' Maria Plozner Mentil
41 with the gold medal for military valour.⁶⁵

42 In Friuli, 4 November 1918 was a day of liberation rather than a day of
43 victory. Here, in the 'liberated territories', people celebrated a quasi 'sad
44 victory'. The main issues of 1919 were mourning, reconstruction, but also

1 anger and a desire for social change. The return of refugees and men from
2 the battlefield and the process of reconstruction were traumatic due to
3 devastation, losses, hunger, and disease. About 15,000 soldiers and 5000
4 civilians had died during the war, thousands came back injured, sick, and
5 wounded. Women had to bear a large part of the burden by caring for men
6 and children.

7 The war experience can be described as complex and contradictory. Friulian
8 women faced 'total war' and they, too, were directly affected by the violent
9 face of war in this border region, while they were gaining 'liberation' and
10 'emancipation' to a significant extent. For them, the experience of war meant
11 fatigue, social upheaval, insecurity, fear, diseases, hardships, dislocation,
12 violence, humiliation, and anger. As diaries and letters demonstrate, they
13 were concerned with responsibility for their family and relatives, strain, and
14 loss rather than with patriotic duties. However, despite the militarization of
15 society, hardships, and war violence, women handled their duties very well.
16 In so doing, they surprised civil and military authorities with their ability to
17 undertake heavy work and with their efficiency, both behind the front and
18 in the countryside. Due to women's farming, agricultural production in Friuli
19 was maintained at almost pre-war levels, while the work in the rear area
20 allowed Italian troops to stay in the mountain trenches for three years.

21 War shook up gender relations, yet only temporarily, especially in rural
22 communities where sexual and gender hierarchies were more stable. Although
23 women's work became more and more important, this process developed
24 within a framework which was still characterized by subordination and
25 devaluation and in which women were still treated as inferior. In public dis-
26 course, the war was represented as a 'male war'. Until October 1917, official
27 propaganda emphasized traditional images of women to reassure the stability
28 of gender roles. In addition, some inconvenient facts such as the presence
29 of women at the front line were hidden. Women's work, although effective
30 in boosting the war effort, was considered as temporary almost everywhere.
31 Gender stereotypes were maintained rather than challenged. Military author-
32 itarianism, paternalism, and patriarchalism as well as religious and moral
33 rules preserved and stabilized gender roles. Local and military authorities
34 considered women's work as a 'natural' duty. In so doing, they reinforced
35 the subalternity of women's position in society and contributed to keeping
36 wages to a minimum: In fact, women's wages, routinely portrayed as 'high'
37 in the wartime press, remained significantly lower than male wages. Working
38 in the mountains with military units and sewing uniforms for the soldiers
39 were considered as forms of assistance rather than as 'proper' jobs like men's
40 work. Women's employment and payment were merely to avoid poverty and
41 prostitution. Moreover, the fact that many female jobs were closely linked
42 to the 'war' itself made it necessary to emphasize their being exceptional
43 and temporary, yet also affected the process of emancipation through work
44 negatively and turned into mass exploitation. In some cases, women's labour

1 was viewed as too extreme and, paradoxically, as exceptional rather than as a
2 starting point for emancipation. Overall, the priority given to 'moral' issues,
3 which actually hid any fear of the subversion of gender and class hierarchy,
4 prevailed over labour safeguards. Therefore, women in 1919 considered the
5 end of the war as a relief and a return to 'normality'.

6 The issue of the troops' homecoming has yet to be fully investigated. We
7 need further research on the early 1920s: Beyond the myth of victory, local
8 sources such as parish reports reveal that violence, hunger, and prostitution
9 characterized the post-war years until 1923.⁶⁶ The post-war experience was
10 not free of pain, as high mortality rates, the collapse of marriages, the decline
11 of births, and a growing number of separations show. In the aftermath of the
12 war, new social subjects emerged such as war widows, who had to manage
13 their estates on their own and tried to enter extra-marital relationships ('more
14 uxorio'), as they would have lost their benefits in the event of remarriage.⁶⁷

15 Although they were reliable and capable, women's 'citizenship' was still
16 considered second class, as the state denied them both the right to vote and
17 special welfare benefits. Public space became narrower in the post-war years,
18 while the private sphere assumed new importance. Nevertheless, during the
19 war women reasserted their position in their families and gained more confi-
20 dence in their own abilities by demonstrating courage and responsibility. The
21 war only accelerated the ongoing social process of emancipation which had
22 already been initiated by migration. 'Wartime skills' such as self-confidence,
23 autonomy, mobility, the ability to adapt to different tasks were not lost, but
24 could be applied again during the great depression after 1929 and the Nazi
25 occupation between 1943 and 1945. Furthermore, women were more familiar
26 with their role in society and multiplied their relationships with state and
27 local authorities. Those who had experienced mobilization and evacuation
28 developed a sense of citizenship and were well aware of the new rights they
29 had acquired by having contributed to the war effort. These feelings became
30 apparent especially in April and June 1919, when women protested against
31 food shortages and high prices. In this way, the war diminished traditional
32 paternalism between upper and lower classes. Social inequalities, the national
33 war effort, flight, and occupation contributed to making women aware of
34 their rights within society. They became even more inspired and radicalized
35 by the example of revolutionary Russia.

36 In a generational perspective, the Great War constituted a turning point.
37 This is true in particular for younger women and girls, who attained more
38 autonomy and found their wartime labour experiences in some way
39 'liberating' because they were able to escape from parental restraints and
40 experienced new patterns of socialization. This critical step was character-
41 ized by severe instability and war violence, factors that made this wartime
42 'transformation' even more remarkable. Even though women's social status
43 did not change permanently in the short term, wartime experience eased the
44 distance between male and female worlds in the long run.

Notes

- 1
- 2
- 3 1. In this chapter I refer to the former 'Provincia di Udine' that belonged to the Veneto
- 4 region as Friuli.
- 5 2. On 25 October 1917, the Austro-German army under General von Below achieved
- 6 a significant breakthrough by a gas attack against the weak Italian lines in the Isonzo
- 7 valley near the little village of Caporetto. German and Austrian forces penetrated
- 8 into Friuli and conquered Udine. They captured 300,000 soldiers, and occupied
- 9 Friuli and part of the Veneto region within a week. In order to avoid a wide
- 10 encirclement of the armies placed along the main line of the Carso front, General
- 11 Cadorna ordered a retreat to the right bank of the River Piave. The Caporetto
- 12 defeat became somewhat of a 'stain' on the Italian First World War campaign.
- 13 During the retreat, Cadorna accused his soldiers of cowardice and interpreted the
- 14 defeat as a soldiers' strike. Although the events of Caporetto were actually due to
- 15 a military strategic surprise, the defeat became a symbol in public discourse of the
- 16 1917 Italian crisis both at the front line and at the home front, and contributed to
- 17 the repression of and suspicion against 'internal enemies'. Among the broad range
- 18 of publications, see N. Labanca, G. Procacci and L. Tomassini (1997) *Caporetto:*
- 19 *Esercito, stato, società* (Florence: Giunti); N. Labanca (1997) *Caporetto: Storia di una*
- 20 *disfatta* (Florence: Giunti).
- 21 3. Italian historiography has analysed the situation of women especially in industrial
- 22 towns (Turin, Milan, Genoa), while research on women from rural districts
- 23 has been sparse. Since the 1980s, women's industrial work has been selected as
- 24 a paradigm to analyse women's changing roles, and this approach has affected
- 25 the understanding of women's wartime experience as a whole. In the late 1990s,
- 26 historians started to investigate the First World War as a 'total war' and tried to
- 27 evaluate the impact of war on society behind the front line. See M. Ermacora (2007)
- 28 'Le donne italiane nella Grande Guerra: Un bilancio storiografico (1990–2005)', in
- 29 P. Antolini, G. Barth-Scalmani, M. Ermacora, N. Fontana, D. Leoni, P. Malni and
- 30 A. Pisetti (eds) *Donne in guerra, 1915–1918: La Grande Guerra attraverso l'analisi e le*
- 31 *testimonianze di una terra di confine* (Rovereto: Centro studi Judicaria, Museo storico
- 32 italiano della guerra), pp. 11–30.
- 33 4. See L. Lorenzetti and R. Merzario (2005) *Il fuoco acceso: Famiglie e migrazioni alpine*
- 34 *nell'Italia d'età moderna* (Roma: Donzelli).
- 35 5. See M. Ermacora (2001) *Un anno difficile: Buja tra pace e guerra (agosto 1914–*
- 36 *maggio 1915)* (Udine: El Tomàt); E. Ellero (2007) *Friuli 1914–1917: Neutralità,*
- 37 *guerra, sfollamenti coatti, internamenti* (Pasia di Prato: Ifsml), pp. 19–61.
- 38 6. N. Labanca (2008) 'Zona di guerra', in M. Isnenghi and D. Ceschin (eds) *La Grande*
- 39 *Guerra: Uomini e luoghi del '15–'18*, vol. 2 (Turin: Utet), p. 606.
- 40 7. See M. Ermacora (2005) *Cantieri di guerra: Il lavoro dei civili nelle retrovie del fronte*
- 41 *italiano (1915–1918)* (Bologna: Il Mulino).
- 42 8. See D. Menozzi, G. Procacci and S. Soldani (2010) *Un paese in guerra: La mobilitazione*
- 43 *civile in Italia (1914–1918)* (Milan: Unicopli).
- 44 9. See 'Commissariato Generale per l'assistenza civile e la propaganda interna' (1917),
- in *Notizie 23 sull'Assistenza civile in Italia al 30 giugno 1916* (Rome: Bertero), p. 54.
10. 'Agricoltura di Guerra', *L'Amico del Contadino*, 15 January 1916, p. 2.
11. Associazione Agraria Friulana, 'Collaborazione delle donne friulane nel lavoro dei
- campi', 28 March 1916, *Archivio di stato di Udine, Archivio della deputazione provinciale*,
- b. 808, 156.
12. A. Roja a don P. Valle, 29 May 1917, *Archivio Roja, Tolmezzo*, b. 149.

- 1 13. G. Bubba (1916) 'Il lavoro delle donne nell'alto Friuli', *L'Amico del Contadino*,
- 2 7 October, p. 3.
- 3 14. 'Premi di produzione per incoraggiare la collaborazione delle donne al lavoro nei
- 4 campi', *L'Amico del Contadino*, 17 June 1916, p. 3.
- 5 15. 'Anute, tu as alvorât par doi!' [Ann, you did the work of two !], *L'Amico del*
- 6 *Contadino*, 1 July 1916, p. 4.
- 7 16. Quotes from: 'Le donne italiane che sostituiscono i combattenti devono essere
- 8 additate a pubblica riconoscenza', *L'Amico del Contadino*, published between
- 9 August and November 1916.
- 10 17. See 'Il lavôr das feminis' [Women's work], *L'Amico del Contadino*, 3 September
- 11 1916, p. 2; A. Molinari (2008) *Donne e ruoli femminili nell'Italia della Grande Guerra*
- 12 (Milan: Selene Edizioni).
- 13 18. 'Lis feminis. Discors tra Tite e Toni' [Women: Dialogue between Giobatta and
- 14 Antonio], *L'Amico del Contadino*, 23 September 1916, p. 4.
- 15 19. 'Il premio del Ministero dell'Agricoltura alle lavoratrici dei cereali', *Il Corriere del*
- 16 *Friuli*, 1 July 1917, p. 2.
- 17 20. See, for example, 'Cucina di guerra', *L'Amico del Contadino*, 25 February 1917, p. 3.
- 18 21. 'Pes femines. Fat di veretât' [For women. True facts], *L'Amico del Contadino*,
- 19 30 December 1916, p. 2.
- 20 22. 'Le donne e la guerra', *La Patria del Friuli*, 11 June 1917, p. 3.
- 21 23. A. Rossi (1917) 'Lettera pastorale', *Rivista diocesana udinese*, 24 February, pp. 61–77.
- 22 24. For example, see: *Libro storico parrocchiale di Fagagna* [Historical parish book], sub
- 23 15 June 1916, p. 11.
- 24 25. 'Dicerie sciocche e perniciose', *L'Amico del Contadino*, 2 June 1917, p. 1.
- 25 26. See, for example, 'Le donne forti', *Il Corriere del Friuli*, 10 July 1917, p. 5.
- 26 27. See, for example, 'Tavagnacco. Le donne agitate', *La Patria del Friuli*, 1 February 1917,
- 27 p. 3; 'Tricesimo. Una donna granivora', *La Patria del Friuli*, 4 February 1917, p. 2.
- 28 28. See B. Pisa (2011) 'L'évolution de l'identité féminine en Italie au cours de la
- 29 Grande Guerre', in F. Bouloc, R. Cazals and A. Loez (eds) *Identités troublées,*
- 30 *1914–1918: Les appartenances sociales et nationales à l'épreuve de la guerre* (Toulouse:
- 31 Editions Privat), p. 271.
- 32 29. These figures are taken from: 'Fagagna, Le donne premiate dal ministero
- 33 dell'agricoltura', *La Patria del Friuli*, 7 July 1917, p. 5.
- 34 30. Linda Ellero and Giuseppe Merlino's correspondance is published by G. Sut
- 35 (1998) *Torno o non torno: Giuseppe Merlino fante friulano e la grande guerra da lui*
- 36 *non voluta* (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine); Maria Nardin's letters
- 37 are published in C. Mengozzi (2006) *Raccontare la Grande Guerra: Lettura di un*
- 38 *epistolario di San Vito al Torre* (Mariano: Circolo Comunale di Cultura).
- 39 31. See L. Scaraffia (1988) 'Essere uomo, essere donna', in P. Melograni (ed.) *La*
- 40 *famiglia italiana dall'Ottocento ad oggi* (Bologna: Il Mulino), p. 196.
- 41 32. Linda Ellero to Giuseppe Merlino, 28 March 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*, p. 49.
- 42 33. Linda Ellero to Giuseppe Merlino, 4 December 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*,
- 43 pp. 141–2.
- 44 34. Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 18 January 1916, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare la*
- Grande Guerra*, p. 168.
35. Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 24 May 1917, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare la Grande*
- Guerra*, p. 207.
36. Linda Ellero to Giuseppe Merlino, 11 October 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*,
- p. 111; Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 18 January 1916, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare*
- la Grande Guerra*, p. 168.

34 *Gender and the First World War*

- 1 37. Linda Ellero to Giuseppe Merlino, 11 October 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*,
 2 pp. 111–12.
- 3 38. Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 14 June 1917, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare la Grande*
 4 *Guerra*, p. 207.
- 5 39. Sometimes they downplayed their satisfaction in their work due to the absence
 6 of their male relatives, whom they missed. In June 1916, Linda Ellero wrote: ‘The
 7 countryside’s good enough. Well, but being unhappy, anything can be appreci-
 8 ated.’ Linda Ellero to Giuseppe Merlino, 12 June 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*,
 9 p. 63. At the end of 1916, Giuseppe Merlino was concerned about her health
 10 and wrote: ‘I’m surprised, dear wife, [...] but I wish you didn’t have to work so
 11 much because, dear wife, if you don’t finish today, you’ll do it tomorrow. I know
 12 that when things are done it’s better, but you don’t have to die for it.’ Giuseppe
 13 Merlino to Linda Ellero, 20 October 1916, in Sut, *Torno o non torno*, p. 116.
- 14 40. Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 24 October 1915, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare la*
 15 *Grande Guerra*, pp. 163–4; about military bans, see also 6 February 1916, p. 169.
- 16 41. Maria Nardin to Michele Nardin, 4 April 1916, in Mengozzi, *Raccontare la Grande*
 17 *Guerra*, p. 176.
- 18 42. See G. Procacci (1991) ‘La protesta delle donne delle campagne in tempo di guerra
 19 (1915–1918)’, *Annali dell’Istituto Alcide Cervi*, 13, pp. 57–86.
- 20 43. This kind of mobilization was common in the Alpine rear areas of the front (Carnia,
 21 Cadore, Altipiano di Asiago). Between 1915 and 1917 the Italian army employed
 22 about 12,000 female workers in logistic tasks. See M. Ermacora, *Cantieri di guerra*.
- 23 44. Minuta gen. D’Adamo, *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*, Roma (hereafter ACS),
 24 Segretariato Generale per gli Affari Civili (SGAC), b. 483.
- 25 45. Vigezza Maria, 18 November 1916, ACS SGAC, b. 695; *Archivio comunale di*
 26 *Paluzza*, b. 770, fasc. Guerra 1915–1918: Pensioni ai civili. The village of Paluzza
 27 was characterized by a shocking death toll amongst civilian workers.
- 28 46. ACS SGAC, b. 483, fasc. Mano d’opera femminile: Comando Supremo – SGAC,
 29 11 gennaio 1917, n. 110457; ACS SGAC, b. 483, fasc. 26. For the officers’ refusal,
 30 ACS SGAC, Zona Carnia, Comando genio militare XII C.d. A., a SGAC, n.5321,
 31 16 February 1917.
- 32 47. M. Ermacora (2000) ‘Il lavoro dei ragazzi friulani dall’età giolittiana alla Grande
 33 Guerra’, in B. Bianchi and A. Lotto (eds) *Lavoro ed emigrazione minorile dall’Unità*
 34 *alla Grande Guerra* (Venice: Ateneo Veneto), pp. 132–4.
- 35 48. See *Libri storici parrocchiali di Paularo* (sub 1915), and *Monaio* (sub 1915, p. 18).
- 36 49. The records of Segretariato Generale per gli Affari Civili provide a lot of cases of
 37 injuries and diseases; see, for example, ACS SGAC, b. 685, 688, 689, 692.
- 38 50. ACS SGAC, b. 508, Picotti a Comando Genio Zona Carnia, 24 June 1917.
- 39 51. *Atti Parlamentari*, 24th leg., 18 October 1917, p. 14621.
- 40 52. See L. Fabi (2000) ‘Militari e civili nel Friuli della Grande Guerra prima di
 41 Caporetto’, in G. Corni (ed.) *Il Friuli, Storia e società, 1914–1925* (Pasian di Prato:
 42 Ifsml), pp. 125–42.
- 43 53. For this ‘mass mothering’, see C. Fragiaco (1990) ‘Paularo. Un paese in guerra’,
 44 in L. Fabi (ed.) *La gente e la guerra*, vol. 1 (Udine: Il Campo), pp. 157–88.
54. See *Libro storico parrocchiale di Avasinis*, 11 March 1917.
55. A. Scottà (1991) *I vescovi veneti e la S. Sede 1915–1918*, vol. 2 (Roma: Edizioni di
 storia e letteratura), p. 523.
56. See E. Franzina (1999) *Casini di guerra: Il tempo libero dalla trincea e i postriboli*
militari nel primo conflitto mondiale (Udine: Gaspari).

- 1 57. L. Livi (1921) 'La natalità illegittima durante la guerra', *Rivista internazionale di*
2 *scienze sociali e disciplina ausiliarie*, 91, pp. 145–55.
- 3 58. *Archivio Curia Arcivescovile di Udine* (hereafter: ACAU), Visite pastorali, Mortegliano,
4 1923.
- 5 59. See B. Bianchi (1995) *Crescere in tempo di guerra: Il lavoro e la protesta dei ragazzi in*
6 *Italia 1915–1918* (Venice: Cafoscarina); M. Ermacora, 'Il lavoro dei ragazzi friulani',
7 pp. 50 and 64.
- 8 60. See M. Ermacora (2007) 'Le donne internate in Italia durante la Grande Guerra:
9 Esperienze, scritture, memorie', *DEP. Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica*
10 *sulla memoria femminile*, 7, pp. 1–27, available online at: www.unive.it/dep.
- 11 61. See D. Ceschin (2006) *Gli esuli di Caporetto: I profughi in Italia durante la Grande*
12 *Guerra* (Rome: Laterza); E. Ellero (2001) *Storia di un esodo: I friulani dopo la rotta di*
13 *Caporetto 1917–1919* (Pasian di Prato: Ifsml).
- 14 62. See L. Cadeddu (2006) *La leggenda del soldato sconosciuto all'altare della patria*
15 (Udine: Gaspari), pp. 64, 80, 109–13; A. Baù (2002) 'I figli miei che non son più
16 miei: Note sulla condizione delle vedove di guerra in Padova nel primo dopoguerra
17 (1923–1927)', *Venetica*, 5, pp. 79–104.
- 18 63. See M. Casalini (2001) 'I socialisti e le donne. Dalla mobilitazione pacifista alla
19 smobilitazione postbellica', *Italia contemporanea*, 222, pp. 5–41.
- 20 64. A. Bravo and A. M. Bruzzone (1995) *In guerra senza armi: Storie di donne 1940–1945*
21 (Rome: Laterza), p. 10. For example, flight and occupation – mainly female experi-
22 ences – were omitted because they were a symbol of national defeat. These dramatic
23 events became 'local memories' and were removed from the national collective
24 memory until almost the 1990s, when historians started to study war violence in
25 the areas along the Italian border.
- 26 65. The decree was signed on 29 April 1997; see Associazione Amici delle Alpi Carniche
27 (1997) *Le portatrici carniche* (Tolmezzo: Moro), p. 16.
- 28 66. See ACAU, Visite pastorali, Flaipano 1921, Lusevera 1922, S. Leonardo 1923.
- 29 67. In post-war parish reports, widows were often criticized for their 'illegitimate
30 relationships' with men. See, for example, ACAU, Visite pastorali, Resia 1919.
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