

# **A window on the private sphere: Advice columns, marriage, and the evolving family in 1950s Italy\***

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## **Introduction**

Following the turmoil of the Second World War, there was a general consensus amongst politicians in Italy that a healthy and robust Italian family was vital to the reconstruction of a stable and moral society in Italy. Unsurprisingly, such views also had considerable appeal for individual Italians desperate to return to some kind of normality. The Catholic Church and the Christian Democrats were especially vociferous in their support of ‘family values’, emphasizing traditional gender roles and responsibilities, and, as the Cold War set in, promoting the Christian family as a primary defence against the Communist threat. Yet the PCI was also prompt in stressing the importance of the family. In fact, contrary to the anti-communist rhetoric of the times – and with a few important exceptions that will be discussed later – the Communists also proposed a largely traditional interpretation of family roles and relationships. Women had gained the vote and the new Constitution had declared all citizens to be equal, but with no will for radical change among any of the major parties, changes to family law were few, the well-known ambiguities of the Constitution remained, and the familiar image of the 1950s is one of a conservative and static society.<sup>1</sup>

Yet in reality, these were turbulent times and there was always the sense that the family was an institution under siege. Even once Italians were beginning to recover from the traumas wrought by the war, the economic hardships of the early 1950s took their toll on families who had to bear the brunt of low wages and unemployment. An improving economy brought its own transformations as Italy changed from being a largely rural to an industrialized nation. As huge numbers of Italians migrated, once again families were split up and whole kinship networks dispersed. The changing habits associated with growing consumerism and the all-pervasive influence of American society were seen by many, on the left and right of politics, as an even greater threat. The images portrayed in advertising,

magazines and the new medium of television may have been quite conservative in tone, but their modernity nevertheless had the capacity to appear threatening to those of a more conservative frame of mind.

Perhaps even more important were the subtle changes taking place in family relationships. Not always obvious, because of the lack of legislative change, but highly significant, was the changing role of women in Italian society. Despite the aspirations of the immediate post-war period, the vast majority continued to fulfil the traditional role of wife and mother, subordinate to their husbands. Those who combined that role with a job outside the home, whether through choice or not, endured the pressures of ‘double working’. Whilst there were new areas of work that had opened up for them, overall the number of women employed outside the home dropped during this period and there was an ever greater emphasis on the role of full-time housewife.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there are many signs that, during the post-war period, attitudes were shifting considerably and there was a growing demand, particularly amongst women, for greater freedoms and genuine equality.<sup>3</sup> There was also a growing sense of a ‘generation gap’, as young people differentiated themselves from their parents. These were not yet the days of public protest, but there was an anxiety in the press regarding the need to defend the family and combat the increasing immorality of modern society, especially against the evils of divorce and delinquency amongst young people. Towards the end of the 1950s, a decade already marked by public scandals, there was a burgeoning sense of moral panic.<sup>4</sup>

Saraceno talks of a ‘process of mutual adjustment involving a redefinition of authority and tradition within the family and across generations’ which took place in Italy in the 1950s, and refers to Simonetta Piccone Stella’s observations of ‘underground changes’ which ‘created small ripples on the apparently smooth surface of the family, where continuity and tradition seemed to continue to reign while everything else was changing’.<sup>5</sup> As she notes, apart from Piccone Stella’s study, which refers particularly to the young, but also indirectly suggests change occurring amongst their parents’ generation, this process has been little studied to date. It is the aim of this article to examine some of those conflicts and shifts in attitudes and behaviour within and towards families as they emerge from a study of the questions and answers that appeared in advice columns in well-known mass magazines of the 1950s. In part, this is a continuation of earlier work I have carried out on the writer Alba de Céspedes’ advice column in the magazine *Epoca*, and on her treatment of problems relating to marriage in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Here I will be considering a broader range of issues regarding the family in 1950s Italy and will refer to a number of advice columns; in particular those which appeared in *Epoca*, *Famiglia cristiana*, *Grazia*, *Noi donne*, and *Settimana Incom*.<sup>7</sup>

## The magazines

It is true that mass magazines had appeared before the war, but the 1950s saw a huge boom in production and the appearance of new illustrated weeklies. *Grazia* was first published in 1938, and, as Salvatici has noted, it marked a return to a very traditional approach, with an emphasis on cooking, children and the house and a very clear conformity with Fascist policies and propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Despite the process of renewal it underwent in the post-war period, with an increase in the quality and range of the content, it was still ‘moralista e conservatore’ (Buonanno, p. 15), seeking to characterize itself as a ‘rivista medio-superiore’ (Buonanno, pp. 44-45).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, an analysis of the reading habits of Italian women in *Noi donne* in 1956 stated that *Grazia* ‘rappresenta il tentativo, spesso riuscito, di rivolgersi alle donne della borghesia con certe esigenze intellettuali’,<sup>10</sup> even if it must be said that the level of education required to read it was certainly the lowest of all those considered here and the range of interests most limited. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all the magazines chosen are aimed at a relatively educated readership.<sup>11</sup>

*Noi donne* grew out of the Resistance and first appeared in 1944. Theoretically open to all readers, it was aimed above all at women on the left (‘donne democratiche’ as they were always described in the magazine). Though not explicitly a Communist publication, it was very closely connected with that party. Highly critical of the deleterious effect of other women’s magazines, *Noi donne* nevertheless had to take account of their popularity and represents an attempt to combine some of the familiar elements of other women’s publications with serious political comment and debate.<sup>12</sup> An important distinction when compared with the other magazines discussed in this article is that *Noi donne* was the only magazine edited by women.<sup>13</sup>

The other three magazines were aimed at the whole family. Published by the Società San Paolo, *Famiglia cristiana* appeared first in 1931. In 1954 it was still a modest 28 pages, but produced its first copy as a *rotocalco* (illustrated weekly) in 1955. In the second half of the 1950s, *Famiglia cristiana* increased its circulation more than any other magazine.<sup>14</sup> Gundle notes that the magazine was ‘aperta al progresso scientifico e all’innalzamento dei livelli di vita ma ferma nella sua adesione alla morale cattolica’, and ‘offrì ai suoi lettori, prevalentemente piccolo-borghesi e provinciali, una visione moderata e rassicurante della modernità in cui l’accento era posto sulla continuità con i valori tradizionali’ (Gundle, p. 180). Arnoldo Mondadori’s *Epoca* and Luigi Barzini jr.’s *Settimana Incom*, on the other hand, both appeared for the first time in 1950 and were very much part of the publishing boom of the period, influenced greatly by American publications of a similar ilk. Both had an emphasis on photojournalism and current affairs, and aimed to appear thoroughly modern, whilst avoiding offending conservative and Catholic sensibilities of the time.<sup>15</sup> Not only was the Church attentive to

such matters, the Christian Democrat government also kept a close eye on what appeared in the media and, as suggested above, was keenly interested in anything that might offend traditional morality. Editors would always have been aware of the government breathing down their necks and ready to punish any transgression.<sup>16</sup> Magazines could also be very critical of each other; *Famiglia cristiana*, for example, was as censorious as *Noi donne* of the ‘frivolity’ of most women’s magazines. The harshest criticism was reserved for photoromances, but nevertheless neither would have seen much value in *Grazia*, with its emphasis on stars, beauty, and fashion. *Epoca* and *Settimana Incom* were more substantial, aimed at a more educated reader, and more varied in their content, but they too were very much part of the criticized consumer society and promulgators of its ‘favole moderne’.<sup>17</sup> Exact readership is impossible to establish but mutual dislike between magazines did not prevent readers from reading more than one magazine, and from seeking something different from each one; the frequent injunctions in *Famiglia cristiana* and *Noi donne* suggest that they were continuing to do exactly that.

### Advice columns and advisers

The advice column was an increasingly prominent feature of magazines in Italy in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> The number of advice columns grew over the course of the decade, as did the physical space magazines devoted to them and the relative importance of the adviser. *Grazia* had two such columns, Signora Quickly’s ‘Ditelo pure a me’ (from 1950) and Donna Letizia’s ‘Saper vivere’ (from 1952), adding a third in 1955, ‘Parlate con Mike Bongiorno’, in which readers’ questions were allegedly answered by the television star himself.<sup>19</sup> *Settimana Incom*’s ‘I consigli’ with Contessa Clara began in 1950 and was still running at the beginning of the 1960s. *Famiglia cristiana*’s ‘Il padre risponde’ dated back to the late 1940s, with letters answered throughout the 1950s by the priest Padre Atanasio. Alba de Céspedes’ column in *Epoca*, ‘Dalla parte di lei’, appeared for a shorter period, from 1952 to the end of 1958 (and was not immediately replaced), whilst *Noi donne* had an advice column throughout the decade but a series of advisers, the most long-lived of whom were the writer and ex-partisan Renata Viganò (‘Fermo posta’, March 1951 to September 1955), and from 1956, the new editor of the magazine, Giuliana dal Pozzo (‘Parliamone insieme’).<sup>20</sup>

Apparently there was an ever greater need for advice. In her column in *Epoca*, Alba de Céspedes commented that:

il costume, in genere, si evolve con lentezza; ma le guerre recenti, anche in virtù delle ideologie che hanno manifestato, hanno impresso a questa evoluzione una rapidità che, a tutta prima, ci lascia sconcertati. La nostra

generazione ha il difficile compito di adeguarsi a questi mutamenti. (*E*, 20 September 1952)

With further shifts in society caused by economic developments and growing prosperity, many Italians found themselves in situations to which they were unaccustomed or in which they perceived that society's rules were changing. As might be expected given the differences between the magazines in which they appeared, the columns analysed here vary in the types of problems they address. Nevertheless, what they all have in common – apart from Donna Letizia's 'Saper vivere' in *Grazia*, which at this stage dealt almost exclusively with questions of social etiquette<sup>21</sup> – is a concern above all with the sentimental and relationship problems that traditionally form the subject of the 'piccola posta'.<sup>22</sup> Most prominent are two particular areas which continue to form the subject of many letters to advice columns today, but which had distinctive features in the 1950s: problems in love and the process of finding a spouse, and unhappiness and infidelity within marriage. In both cases, there is a marked anxiety regarding questions of sexual mores and there are various manifestations of the tension between traditional morality and the demands or threats of modernity. Indeed, the notion of modernity is crucial to this discussion; the term becomes a site of semantic struggle as advisers attempt to appropriate it to support their own visions of society, normality, and common sense, inevitably exposing their own internal contradictions and ambiguities.<sup>23</sup> Towards the end of the decade, a third area, that of discord between the generations, also becomes prominent. These three areas will be discussed in more detail in the next section, along with another series of related issues which are conspicuous by their absence, or near absence, from the 'piccola posta' of the 1950s. For equally important, when discussing this period, is the question of what was regarded as taboo, and the euphemisms and silences which also characterize such columns.

In academic studies, it has been all too easy to forget entirely about advice columns or to dismiss them as trivial and unworthy of attention.<sup>24</sup> Their subject matter and their association with women's magazines have tainted them with the historically negative connotations of both the 'feminine' and the 'popular': they were insignificant because they were just 'girltalk'. Undoubtedly they were designed to entertain – a function some of them fulfil admirably, by turns amusing and appalling – and in a sense the 'problems' were just as much a commodity as the magazines themselves. However, they also often included the very serious treatment of issues central to the political discourse of the day and to an understanding of the relationship between private and public worlds. On the other hand, it is not the intention of this article to suggest that advice columns are an unproblematic historical source that give unmediated access to the views and intimate lives of 'ordinary Italians'. A discussion of the insights they do provide requires first an examination of the ways in which advice columns operate as a discursive space. Their function rests on a series of expectations and of actual or posited

relationships between magazines, advice columns, advisers, and readers. As the terms ‘piccola posta’ or the English ‘agony column’ and ‘agony aunt’ suggest, the tendency has been to refer to such columns in a dismissive or ironic fashion. But how far is that kind of attitude representative of the way readers and magazines approached them?

### 1950s Italian advice columns as discursive space

Scepticism towards advice columns usually centres on doubts about the authenticity of letters sent to magazines. Even though a thorough investigation suggests that many, indeed most, were entirely genuine, it is equally likely that some were not. The delicate nature of the subjects discussed and potential embarrassment of readers makes pseudonyms the norm and it is rarely possible to establish a direct link between a letter and a real person. In fact, most of the advisers show themselves alert to the possibility that their columns were being read sceptically by at least some readers and choose to assert at some point both that they themselves have invented nothing and that they are able immediately to recognize joke letters.<sup>25</sup> Contessa Clara is particularly firm on the latter point, chiding a certain ‘Donatella’ for her/his ‘scurrilità’ (*SI*, 30 September 1951), or commenting ironically on the number of ‘frustatori’, ‘frustatrici’, and ‘frustati’ who write to her (for example *SI*, 18 December 1954). Furthermore, even if one assumes that the majority of letters were genuine, they necessarily come from a limited, self-selecting group of readers: those who have chosen and are able to read a particular magazine, who have a problem and have elected to deal with it by this means rather than by another. The letters were also subject to a process of selection for publication by the adviser and/or the editors of the magazine and there was wide variation in the extent to which readers’ letters supplied an independent ‘voice’ to these columns. In some (most notably Signora Quickly’s), there was no separate question and the problems were summarized, often extremely briefly, within the adviser’s answer, whilst in others this approach, or a series of very short questions and answers, was combined with the publication of a ‘letter of the week’.

Another fundamental aspect of these columns is the persona of the adviser and their posited relationship with readers (whether the individual letter-writer, or the readership of a particular column as a whole). The adviser had to establish a certain authority, but also seem sufficiently approachable for readers to expose intimate details of their own lives in a public forum. There were different approaches to establishing this relationship and naturally these must be understood within the context of expectations of the content and editorial line of a magazine as a whole. In the case of Padre Atanasio in *Famiglia cristiana* – the only professional in the group being studied here – the column effectively relied on the pre-existing model

of priest and parishioner. Generally the tone of 'Il padre risponde' is friendly (unless a reader is contemplating a sinful act), in contrast to the stridency typical of some pronouncements from the Catholic Church at the time, but it is quite formal; Padre Atanasio answers readers in his professional capacity, always using 'Lei' to address them. Many of the letters read like confessions of sins committed, but readers are firmly reminded that the column is not intended as an alternative and absolution can come only from true confession, face to face with a priest.

Unlike Padre Atanasio, the authority of most other advisers in 1950s Italy tended to rest on class, fame, or age and experience, rather than the professional expertise that would become common in later decades. Alba de Céspedes, for example, was a best-selling novelist,<sup>26</sup> but had also previously married a count and was therefore doubly qualified. Any readers of her fiction would also have known that she took a particular interest in contemporary society and mores. Renata Viganò played very heavily on her public persona as partisan, writer – in particular of the Resistance novel *L'Agnese va a morire* – and Communist Party veteran.<sup>27</sup> In the case of both, however, it is quite possible that the majority of readers of *Epoca* and *Noi donne* were more familiar with these writers' names than their fiction, and actually built up a sense of who they were, of the 'implied' adviser, to use Wayne Booth's term, from the column itself.<sup>28</sup>

In the columns of Contessa Clara, Donna Letizia, and Signora Quickly this is taken one step further as the personae are entirely fictional. In *Settimana Incom* the pretence is maintained that Clara – or rather Contessa Clara Rådjanny von Skèwitch – was the real name of the adviser, when in reality it was the journalist and writer Irene Brin, a fact she chose to deny strenuously on more than one occasion in her column.<sup>29</sup> In this case the adviser's authority is seen to derive from social class, but also from very varied life experiences, including flight from the Russian revolution, three marriages, children, and a wide circle of famous friends.<sup>30</sup> Class and experience are also fundamental to *Grazia's* Donna Letizia, whose 'Saper vivere' was in fact penned by Colette Rosselli, wife of Indro Montanelli. The column bears no indication of her true identity, but it was well known in later years, by which time the column had practically become a national institution.<sup>31</sup> Signora Quickly, on the other hand, is styled as a gossipy, older 'aunt', whose wisdom has been acquired through age and who describes herself as old-fashioned and nostalgic: when we were young, she says, 'eravamo più civili' (*G*, 2 August 1952). Whilst the name is openly a pseudonym, taken from Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, the fiction of the persona is maintained.<sup>32</sup> That was not unusual, but the fact that it masked the identity of a man certainly was: Signora Quickly was the playwright and screenwriter Dino Falconi.<sup>33</sup>

As well as assuming a certain superiority, the advisers (apart from Padre Atanasio) also suggest the pretence of friendship or closeness with their readers, the extent of which is implied by the forms of address used. Alba de Céspedes and

Contessa Clara use the more formal, more respectful, ‘Lei’ whether addressing male or female readers. Giuliana dal Pozzo, on the other hand suggests the greater confidence of a dialogue between close and equal friends with her use of ‘tu’. Viganò and Signora Quickly also use ‘tu’ (but ‘Lei’ for members of the opposite sex), but the effect is rather different. Both propose that they should be treated by their readers as an aunt or mother, and assume the intimacy, but also the deference that such a relationship implied. Signora Quickly’s answers further emphasize her distance and superiority by diminishing the stature of the writers of letters, often described as ‘mogliettine’ and ‘donnine’ with ‘problemmini’, and by contrasting her own absolute moral certainty with their vacillation. Of course, it was open to readers of the column to identify with Signora Quickly’s superiority or to read the letters with detached amusement, but it must also be said that it certainly does not invite such a reading. There is no trace of irony, and it is often stated that the problems discussed are chosen for their relevance to all readers. On the rare occasions when readers are openly encouraged to identify with the adviser, they are presented with an equally reductive view of womanhood. ‘Noi donne’, reflects Signora Quickly on one occasion, ‘rimaniamo tutte un po’ bambine’ (G, 7 April 1951). Of course the knowledge that Signora Quickly was a man would impose an entirely different reading, but there is no evidence to suggest that his identity was widely known.

The columns of Alba de Céspedes and Contessa Clara are more sophisticated and one of the crucial differences is the use of humour (this is also true of Donna Letizia, but she is usually dealing with different subjects). The fact that some letter-writers and their problems are subject to the sharp and often very amusing wit of these advisers gives a much clearer indication of the way that the columns were designed to be read. At the expense of a small, rather ignorant, and possibly entirely fictional, section of the readership, other readers are entertained and enjoy a sense of collusion with the adviser. Eriberto of Chioggia asks de Céspedes, ‘Vorrei sapere quante lettere inutili o stupide Ella riceve al giorno’, to which she replies, ‘Pochissime, in generale, ma, stavolta una di più’ (E, 27 May 1956). By contrast with these pithy responses, the majority of letters are answered in a manner which is entirely serious and sympathetic. Both are written with considerable sensitivity and sophistication and it seems particularly pertinent that they were aimed at a mixed readership.

*Noi donne* presents a rather different case because creating a sense of solidarity and community amongst its readers was a primary purpose of the magazine.<sup>34</sup> Viganò certainly encourages an atmosphere of mutual help and sympathy, but often does so with a condescension she clearly felt appropriate to her role as ‘aunt’ or ‘mother’. She also expresses a moral certainty that was a rather incoherent mix of traditional (Catholic) morality and Communist philosophy, and a confused attitude towards the role of women, summed up neatly in her comments on the



way that *Noi donne* was trying to create ‘un nuovo tipo di donna, che sia prima di tutto aiuto all’uomo, alla pari, e di assistenza ai figli, pure alla pari, e di valido sostegno alla struttura sociale, per la terza volta alla pari’ (*ND*, 28 October 1951). In part, this reflected ambiguities within the party itself, exposed particularly in a column of this nature,<sup>35</sup> but, as will be seen, it also put Viganò at odds with her own editors and with the general tone of *Noi donne*. Under Giuliana dal Pozzo, who presented herself as a friend with no monopoly on the truth, a much greater emphasis was put on dialogue and on using the column to find ‘una certa morale, certe leggi di vita conformi alla nostra mentalità e alla vita moderna a cui possiamo richiamarci tutte, derivando da esse una forza che sia valida nei vari momenti e nelle varie circostanze che ognuno [...] risolverà da sola’ (*ND*, 15 September 1957). When challenged by a reader, she too admits to responding to some letters in an ironic or humorous manner (*ND*, 2 March 1958), but in fact her wit is less biting and it is clear that she was keen not to alienate any section of her readership, even if she did not shy away from risking offence by broaching issues previously taboo in the magazine.

It seems that readers responded in large numbers to these offers of advice and friendship. In her study of two French advice columns, Anne Marie Sohn suggests readers were motivated by the need for information or by loneliness, but particularly by a desire for confirmation of answers they had already imagined an adviser would give (Sohn, pp. 364-69). Alba de Céspedes expressed a similar view, maintaining that she did not give advice: ‘Credo, infatti, che raramente una mia risposta sia stata diversa da quella che i miei corrispondenti prevedevano poiché, nel fondo del nostro animo, tutti sappiamo qual è la verità, dov’è il giusto, anche se le passioni, gli interessi o i conformismi, ci impediscono di ammetterlo’ (*E*, 30 September 1956). This cannot always have been the case, as demonstrated by the many letters sent to advice columns which clearly did not get the response they desired, particularly on questions of sexual propriety and marital discontent, as will be discussed later. Yet the attraction of a new source of information, beyond the usual circle of friends, family and parish priest should not be underestimated. Contessa Clara also points to the opportunity that such columns offered to publicly, if anonymously, discuss guilty secrets, noting that there seemed to be ‘un crescente bisogno di confidenze e addirittura di confessione’ (*SI*, 9 August 1952). She suggests on more than one occasion that, for those who would not turn elsewhere for help, her column functioned as a ‘valvola di sicurezza’ which prevented desires and perversions from being expressed in a way more harmful to society.

Another distinctive feature of the relationship between advisers and readers is that, despite the apparent intimacy, the advice column is a public forum, and in 1950s Italy this meant finding a way to address issues that were essentially taboo. Advisers found a number of solutions to this problem. They remind

readers that some (undisclosed) subjects are inappropriate for magazines: ‘È mai possibile, Silvana, che si possa parlare delle cose di cui mi scrivi?’ writes Viganò for example (*ND*, 10 June 1951), sometimes offering to answer in private instead. Others refer very briefly and obscurely to readers’ problems and answer in a way that is intelligible only to the original writer, but may be intriguing or unintentionally amusing when read by others (no doubt adding to the appeal of such columns for some): such as when Padre Atanasio concedes that, ‘si può, se serve a mettere la consorte in condizioni favorevoli per compiere bene i propri doveri coniugali. Fuori di questo scopo, non si può’ (*FC*, 4 October 1953). Most often when dealing with taboo subjects, they resort to a series of metaphors and circumlocutions. In this way, it is possible to find references to sex, prostitution, abortion, homosexuality, birth control, virginity, without any of the proper terms ever being used (see later sections).

Advice columns created their own discursive spaces, but continued to function within a network of possible relations. None of the advisers claims absolute authority and readers are often referred to other sources of help. Any young woman needing advice is told to talk to her mother; young men, on the other hand, are sent to the local doctor. There is also suggested recourse to local doctors and to psychologists and psychiatrists; indeed, as the decade went on, there is evidence of a changing attitude towards psychological health, with a growing tendency to recognize mental illnesses and to recommend professional help.<sup>36</sup> On moral questions, all magazines had to take account of the Catholic Church. Occasionally, in the first half of the decade, even *Noi donne* directed religious readers to their priest. Alba de Céspedes did the same, more explicitly, openly acknowledging that she had no answers for those who had beliefs she did not share, but proposing an entirely different set of rules for the rest.<sup>37</sup> For all the other advisers discussed, the Church remains the ultimate moral authority and they can all be described as conformist in this sense. Yet, in practice there were important differences and advice columns remained unique in what they offered or were attempting to do. Signora Quickly claimed that she and the other ‘redattori di *Grazia* ci consideriamo – e ce ne vantiamo – assolutamente in linea con la morale e ci preoccupiamo di essere ossequentissimi alla nostra Santa Madre Chiesa’ but that it was ‘in una forma intelligente e moderna, rifuggendo cioè da ogni eccesso di bigottismo e di beghineria che d’altronde, oltre ad essere controproducente da un punto di vista giornalistico, non sarebbe neppure praticamente utile ai fini della propaganda religiosa’ (*G*, 31 May 1952). In practice, this ‘modern’ version of morality actually meant that whereas ‘sinners’ could expect quite a sympathetic hearing in *Famiglia cristiana*, *Grazia*, which was far more concerned with public reputations and *costume*, very often offers no possibility of redemption for the transgressions it most despises (such as female adultery): society, it would seem was much less forgiving than the Church. As will

be discussed later, Contessa Clara's insistence on Catholic morality also needs careful interpretation.

### Love and the search for a spouse

One of the most frequently discussed topics was love. But advisers really only took it seriously within the context of marriage. The kind of worries and doubts suffered by teenagers in the first throes of relationships with the opposite sex appear commonly in the magazines studied (especially *Grazia*) and may well reflect the importance such subjects held for many readers, but they are usually treated quite dismissively, with the kind of attitude the younger generation was beginning to rail against.<sup>38</sup> It was generally assumed, moreover, that all readers aimed to marry.<sup>39</sup> Even in *Noi donne's* advice column, where it was stated more than once that couples should not be criticized for remaining unmarried, in fact far more effort was devoted throughout the decade to encouraging civil (rather than religious) weddings; the idea that the vast majority of couples wanted to marry was never really under discussion.<sup>40</sup>

Whether or not they should be in love first was another matter. Apparently a perennial issue, in fact, as Saraceno points out, it has its historical specificity:

pur nel permanere di forti squilibri tra i sessi, nel corso del secolo il modello della intimità e della condivisione si afferma sempre più come il modello normale di rapporto coniugale.

L'indicatore più vistoso di questa trasformazione è il posto che viene attribuito all'amore e all'innamoramento nel matrimonio. (Saraceno, 'La famiglia', pp. 62-63)

For *Noi donne's* advisers and Alba de Céspedes, it was women above all who desired love in marriage: to require it was to insist on a woman's rights and a modern marriage. Yet they acknowledged that this was an ideal, that men and women often viewed love very differently, and they called for a redefinition of love and its place in society.<sup>41</sup> Unlike *Noi donne's* advisers, Alba de Céspedes was prepared to admit that unions based on financial advantage only could work for some people, even if she had little respect for them.

There are few lofty aspirations regarding love in Signora Quickly's column, despite the 'modern fables' promoted in the rest of the magazine. Following a stereotypical view of women that sees them both as dangerous and weak, she urges some readers to marry as soon as possible, even in very imperfect circumstances, to avoid the risk either of failing to find a husband or of indulging in 'illicit' sexual activity,<sup>42</sup> but offers no sympathy at all to others who regret their marriages, having tied themselves irrevocably (in the absence of divorce) to men they do

not love or even like. The over-riding message is that any marriage is better than none and if love does not develop, then, fifty years after Aleramo's impassioned plea to the contrary, Signora Quickly is more than happy to exalt 'rassegnazione' as a 'virtue'.

Overall, the view that love had gained in importance as a criterion for marriage predominates, but it was far from being the only concern. Health is raised as an issue in all magazines, and premarital checks are generally seen as a reasonable requirement, particularly where there is some suspicion of a serious illness. To take on a spouse with some problem is seen as an (unnecessary) act of generosity and it is with very great caution, for example, that Viganò suggests to a mother that her son could marry a blind girl, if he really loves her (*ND*, 9 December 1954). Nevertheless, in an effort to educate readers particularly at the beginning of the decade, all the magazines were keen to reassure them that to consider tuberculosis as an impediment to marriage was an outmoded notion (see for example, *G*, 16 September 1950).

Often readers ask if they should wait for a future husband to establish himself in the workplace before marrying. Occasionally *Noi donne* advises that readers should go ahead anyway, but generally it is acknowledged that financial security – a rare commodity in the early 1950s and the cause of much angst – was more than desirable in planning the future, and the lack of it was sufficient to reject a fiancé. The question of women and work, on the other hand, is ignored by *Grazia* (apart from one rather anomalous reply in which Signora Quickly recognizes that because a female reader is able to work, she need not worry about marriage). It is not given any prominence in *Famiglia cristiana*, where the emphasis is always on the home for women.<sup>43</sup> Contessa Clara also emphasizes homes and husbands, yet does encourage women to work rather than suffer financial difficulty, particularly when faced with an unfaithful husband, and not to feel shame or embarrassment. Alba de Céspedes and the advisers of *Noi donne* go further and, in a clear example of advisers leading the way, they urge readers to ignore prejudice and to see work as a vital means of independence and dignity for women (and thus the solution to other problems too). De Céspedes also suggests drily that working women represent a good financial investment for men (*E*, 30 January 1955).

A further source of doubt was the question of class. In a society with increasing social mobility, or at least the prospect of it, in which magazines such as *Epoca*, *Settimana Incom* and *Grazia* proposed idealized images of the rich and upper classes, and even *Famiglia cristiana* and *Noi donne* talked a good deal in their different ways about self-improvement, it might be expected that advice columns should reflect these aspirations.<sup>44</sup> Certainly they share an optimism that lives can improve, and this is no surprise, given that the advice columns were effectively a means of selling hope – often in the face of reality. But in fact on this question advice columns expose the conservatism of these magazines; in the real

lives of readers, ‘marrying up’ or ‘down’ was rarely judged as advisable.<sup>45</sup> As might be expected, only *Noi donne* took a stand: class differences do not, or should not, matter (see for example, *ND*, 9 December 1956).

For Contessa Clara, a more important obstacle was posed by ‘questioni morali’, by which she meant religious differences, and she strongly advises a Catholic reader against marrying a Protestant (*SI*, 20 May 1950). Questions regarding religious compatibility addressed to *Famiglia cristiana* got the predictably hard-line response. Even in *Noi donne*, in the first half of the 1950s, problems involving religion provoked awkward answers that suggested uncomfortable compromises, as the magazine showed an unwillingness to alienate religious readers and offend religious authorities, and tried to suggest that readers could please everyone (with a civil wedding, for example). But Viganò clearly went too far in 1954 in suggesting that a reader should get her baby baptized to avoid social stigma. Her column was replaced the following week by a comment from the editors, reacting to complaints from readers and agreeing that ‘consigli come quelli che vennero dati [...] finiscono con il suonare doppiamente offensivi al cattolico e al non cattolico’ and that *Noi donne* certainly did not condone such hypocrisy (*Noi donne*, 3 January 1954). She returned the week after with no further comment, but it was not very long before her column ceased and later advisers no longer contemplated such an accommodation of Catholic values. De Céspedes was always most concerned that a couple should have a similar outlook and compatible ideas (see for example *E*, 10 July 1955).

Despite the stark political divisions of the time and the fact that women were now voting and being elected to parliament, *Grazia’s* editors – and its readers too, to judge from the letters – continued to regard the subject of politics as irrelevant to women.<sup>46</sup> Thus the question of a prospective spouse’s political views simply did not arise. *Famiglia cristiana*, on the other hand, used the main letter of the advice column in an overtly political manner in the early 1950s, and left its readers in no doubt as to the view they should adopt towards Communists: outright rejection. The reader who claimed to be both Communist and Catholic was told ‘la dottrina comunista è nè più nè meno che una dottrina senza Dio’ (*FC*, 31 May 1953). As Cold War tensions decreased in the middle of the decade, party politics – indeed politics *tout court* – disappeared from ‘Il padre risponde’. For *Noi donne*, a magazine dedicated to the political education of its readers, it was very much part of the everyday life of a modern, ‘democratic’ woman, and a range of questions appeared regarding the effect on relationships of political clashes, or problems arising from political activism; all issues, it should be added, that the PCI showed little inclination to address in other forums. These included: how to deal with a partner of different views (try to educate and convince him/her), with the politically-inspired opposition of parents (go ahead without them), or with a fiancé not comfortable with his future wife’s political activism (persuade him

gently).<sup>47</sup> In this way, and radically for their time, *Noi donne*'s advisers were very much concerned with the private consequences of public political acts. However, as will be seen in the discussion of unhappy marriages, there were ambiguities in the solutions they suggested and it was only after 1955 that they began to extend their politics of equality fully and consistently to the private sphere. Alba de Céspedes shied away from party politics and any difficulties it could raise for courting couples, but did remind readers that women were fully part of the political process and that all readers, but especially women, should educate themselves in politics and the law in order to know their rights.

### Sex before marriage

A particularly fraught issue at the time, and one that serves to highlight the difficult transitions taking place in private lives, was the question of what behaviour was regarded as suitable for couples prior to marriage. This subject appeared very frequently, but in *Famiglia cristiana* seems almost an obsession and at times there is little else in Signora Quickly's advice column in *Grazia*, giving the impression of barrage of questions and a growing sense of panic on the part of advisers trying to stem the tide of moral dissolution. Indeed, this would seem to be one of the main purposes of both of these columns, yet they, like the other advisers and writers of letters, were faced with the dilemma that such matters were generally regarded as unsuitable for public discourse and had to resort to a whole series of metaphors and clichés. Thus girls were told to protect their 'giglio' (a term used particularly in *FC*) to avoid being 'rovinate', but all the same, many wrote in confessing 'ho ceduto', 'amo completamente', 'sono sua'. Similarly, Viganò attempts a very contorted explanation of the differences between 'istinti' and 'sentimenti' (*ND*, 6 January 1952).

Padre Atanasio is extremely rigid about what is suitable prior to engagement; members of the opposite sex should not be left alone together, they should not dance, indeed even looking was regarded as very risky. As for kissing, it was completely beyond the pale – 'una porta sull'abisso' (*FC*, 12 July 1953) – even between fiancés. The idea that if young people were left to their own devices, and if young girls were not protected, then sexual activity was almost inevitable, was underlined by a particularly shocking letter from a girl apparently raped at a young age (or so we understand from the references to the 'dolorosi disastri, talora irreparabili' that can be caused by a 'tipo smalzato e corrotto' (*FC*, 29 November 1953)). The response takes it for granted that, even if the case is not hopeless, the girl has been damaged, in terms of marriage potential rather than psychologically, that is. Before offering any substantive response to the girl herself, he addresses mothers in general, holding this up as an example of what happens

when they are insufficiently attentive. The inclusion of this letter is very unusual in its unambiguous reference to a potentially salacious subject, but, Atanasio stresses, it is not invented and he casually mentions that he has received many, many similar ones (29 November 1953). (He does not say why he has chosen not to publish them, however.) Sex before marriage was wrong for men too (for example, *FC*, 14 February 1954), but the primary responsibility lay with girls and their mothers to make sure they were not 'ruined' before their wedding day.

In *Grazia*, Donna Letizia is of the same view and asserts that times may have changed, but the rules have not (*G*, 30 March 1958). On the face of it, Signora Quickly is similarly conservative, highlighting the dangers of illicit behaviour and offering dire warnings, especially to those women considering 'yielding' to their boyfriends. Yet she is far less categorical about what kind of behaviour is allowed and for those who are formally engaged regards any behaviour as almost sanctified by marriage; a tendency that becomes more marked towards the end of the decade (see, for example, *G*, 27 March 1960).<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, as mentioned above, fiancés having trouble controlling themselves are advised to marry as soon as possible. Without the protection of an engagement, girls should be far more circumspect. Those who have failed to be, and particularly those who show no remorse, and have been abandoned, are objects of scorn and disgust. It is regarded as entirely normal, on the other hand, and echoing views often heard at the time in the debate on brothels, that prior to marriage men will have had sexual experiences, including visiting prostitutes. But it is not just a question of the familiar double standards. The advice given to girls is actually rather more ambiguous (and takes on an almost sinister note, in the light of the fact that it was actually a man dictating behaviour to young girls) when female readers are told frequently that they will never get boyfriends if they do not effectively make themselves more available and more appealing to the opposite sex. After all, 'una monachina [...] non può aspirare che a fidanzarsi con Dio' (*G*, 17 February 1951). In these modern times – here apparently equating modernity with sexual availability – unlike thirty years ago, a girl needs to 'sapersi corteggiare' (*G*, 11 September 1955). Your inhibitions are causing you problems, another reader is told, so try to be more feminine (28 September 1958), a recommendation that dovetails very neatly with other sections of the magazine which counsel the reader on precisely the process of achieving an ideal femininity.<sup>49</sup>

In *Settimana incom*, Contessa Clara seems to share Padre Atanasio's moral certainty about pre-marital sex (in any case a much less prominent theme in her 'consigli'), and she usually encourages women to rely on their own sense of independence and self-worth. Yet here too the idea that women were objects to be perfected, and could learn from advice columns how to hone their characters and manners, is effectively the corollary of the rest of the magazine's emphasis on beauty products, clothes, and the glamour of famous women; it is not surprising

that female readers express confusion at the extent to which they are required to please men.<sup>50</sup>

*Noi donne*'s journalists would have claimed that their approach was entirely different, railing against the kind of 'frivolity' that suggested a woman's appearance and clothes were paramount and insisting instead, rather dubiously, that their magazine favoured a more 'natural' femininity. They also rejected 'pregiudizi borghesi' that condemned natural instincts as sins. However, a conformism that had more to do with traditional Italian society than Communist ideals often transpired from Viganò's column in the mid-1950s, even if she claimed she was not being puritan: 'ti sei sciupata (scusa la parola cruda) la gioventù' (*ND*, 14 December 1952), she tells one reader who has had sex before marriage. Overall, her inconsistency and nervousness on this subject betray a distinct reluctance and unease.<sup>51</sup> For Giuliana dal Pozzo in 1957, the subject is still a 'barattolo di dinamite', but she argues forcefully that there are no fixed rules and that 'amore sensuale' is still 'amore' and not 'peccato' (*ND*, 1 September 1957). A similar view is expressed consistently by Alba de Céspedes, who advised readers to work out what their own principles were, then adhere to them (*E*, 24 July 1955). Premarital sexual relations, she claimed more daringly on another occasion, and in a view certainly not echoed elsewhere in *Epoca*, were simply part of being a 'ragazza moderna' (*E*, 26 August 1956).

Certainly the impression given by these columns, whether deliberately or not, is that, counter to prevailing advice, there was a good deal of 'illicit' sexual activity. Yet, of course, that could just be the start of more problems. Readers who had found themselves new partners wondered if they should admit to a previous sexual relationship. The three apparently conformist publications in fact offer quite different advice. Padre Atanasio is entirely unambiguous and consistent: what has happened in the past need not jeopardize the future: the truth is to be kept for the reader and her/his (but usually her) priest, and a new partner need not know of it. Contessa Clara advises honesty, but tact to protect everyone's dignity and pride (*SI*, 24 June 1950), whilst Signora Quickly is only concerned with expediency, suggesting discretion all round if there was still the possibility of marrying, and reassuring one reader that she could still have a white wedding as she was morally if not physically pure (*G*, 20 May 1950).

For those desperate readers who found themselves pregnant the consequences were far more serious, all the more so if they were abandoned by their boyfriends or fiancés. Whilst Padre Atanasio was quite sympathetic – the harshest letters are reserved for those contemplating sin; the sinners, unless unrepentant, are usually forgiven – it was nevertheless made clear that an unmarried mother did not have the right to the same expectations from life. On this subject, *Noi donne* displayed no inconsistency and made it a point of principle, throughout the decade, to say that there was nothing shameful about being an unmarried mother. Not



that advisers could suggest much practical advice in 1950s Italy. In fact, Viganò minimizes the difficulties, and only in later years was there a more realistic assessment of the challenges an unmarried mother faced. But the importance of *Noi donne's* uncritical support and sense of solidarity between women – a notion entirely lacking in *Grazia* for example – should not be underestimated. There was agreement across the magazines, on the other hand, when it came to a question that was still bothering readers, that the child itself should not regard its own illegitimacy as a problem (see, for example, *SI*, 22 April 1950, *G* (Signora Quickly), 16 November 1958; *ND*, 8 April 1951). However, only de Céspedes refers openly to the cruelty of society towards ‘figli di N.N.’ (*E*, 2 June 1955).

The illegal alternative, abortion, was practised by many but, with the exception of a few oblique references, is one of the obvious silences. There is a reference in Giuliana dal Pozzo's column to a woman who had an abortion (16 March 1958), but it is presented as one in a series of misfortunes in a particular woman's life, and it receives no further comment. Earlier in the decade, Padre Atanasio warns a pregnant reader: ‘Respinga decisamente tutte le voci da qualunque parte provengano, che volessero con un delitto fare più paurosa la colpa’ (*FC*, 7 March 1954). Otherwise it is not mentioned and there is no way of knowing how many letters about abortion advisers received.<sup>52</sup> References to birth control are more frequent, but remain low-key allusions; hardly surprising, as any promotion of contraception would have been against the law. De Céspedes identifies it as one of the many hypocrisies of the time – that everyone was practising it and no one was talking about it – and lists it as one of the subjects raised most often in letters to her.<sup>53</sup> *Noi donne* limits itself to expressing doubts, albeit rather obscurely, about the rhythm method (30 July 1950). There was clearly some confusion about what the Church allowed and while other magazines considered it taboo, it is in *Famiglia cristiana* that the subject is treated in more detail, with discussion of ‘continenza periodica’ and the Ogino Knaus system, but Padre Atanasio emphasizes that there must be good reason as it was a couple's duty to procreate (*FC*, 30 August 1953), unless they are practising a ‘castità matrimoniale’ (see later).<sup>54</sup>

### Unhappiness and infidelity in marriage

A DOXA survey from March 1951 suggests that for a substantial minority of women (43%), married life was ‘meno bella’ than they had expected.<sup>55</sup> Very many of the letters sent to the columns analysed here were from women unhappy with their relationships with their husbands. There are endless stories of loveless marriages, of husbands (and very occasionally wives) who range between neglectful, alcoholic, abusive, and violent, many references to adulterous relationships, and, in the second half of the decade, a gradual increase in complaints about sexual

dissatisfaction. For Padre Atanasio, such complaints were simply misplaced. Marriage and the way a wife feels about her husband is not a matter of ‘gusto’ or ‘disgusto’, he tells one reader (*FC*, 4 August 1957). If you are suffering now, he tells another, then your reward will be in heaven (11 December 1955). The needs of children must be put first (3 February 1957). Indeed there is almost a glorification of wives and mothers who remain faithful when their husbands are not (17-25 March 1954). There is no doubt that attitudes to women in *Famiglia cristiana* are highly reductive and patriarchal, but there is an emphasis on the duties of husbands too. Children are a joint responsibility (4 January 1953), and it is equally wrong for a husband to commit adultery (8 December 1957). Moreover, there are some signs of sympathy towards his female readers: for example whilst affirming that, whatever they desire, women are required to have sexual relations with their husbands, he does indicate that a wife might propose a period of ‘castità matrimoniale’ as an offering to the Virgin Mary (20 June 1954).

Similarly, Signora Quickly considers that wives who have a home, husband, and children cannot complain of loneliness, boredom, of feeling neglected or indeed of sexual dissatisfaction. In fact, going further than Padre Atanasio, at times she even questions the wife’s sanity.<sup>56</sup> The language used to describe the adultery of men always minimizes its significance: all wives must forgive the ‘esuberanze’ of their silly husbands (23 November 1958). A wife is expected to take the blame for any domestic problem (see, for example, *G*, 16 November 1958), and this can be true even in the case of a violent husband.<sup>57</sup> She can try to make herself more attractive, but if that does not work, she simply has to put up with the situation. Women are better ‘mal maritate che separate’ (*G*, 2 November 1958), Signora Quickly opines. As for adulterous women, or even those who have simply contemplated infidelity, the condemnation is absolute. Ultimately, the message is bleak: ‘Guardati intorno senza preconcetti: nessuno è felice. E chi lo è, ha saputo accontentarsi’ (30 June 1951). In both Signora Quickly’s and Padre Atanasio’s replies, the emphasis is always on the responsibility of the individual (woman, usually); social circumstances and relations are never advanced as a possible cause or solution.<sup>58</sup>

The answers in Contessa Clara’s ‘consigli’ are more sophisticated, and go further towards holding men to account, even if in the end the advice does not differ greatly and there is a similar assumption that these are individual problems. A female reader whose husband regularly visits prostitutes is told that whilst silence can often be a good strategy for an offended wife, in these circumstances she has a right to an explanation, but the only advice she offers is to remind him of his religion and to maintain the moral high ground, in the hope that things might improve. Contessa Clara is very harsh towards readers tempted by adultery – which she presents as a simple choice between good and evil – and complains that they simply want her permission – or a ‘scappatoia’ or ‘alibi’ – for behaviour

she can never condone (*SI*, 27 May 1950). Separation is possible, but can never involve new relationships; if a marriage does not work, a woman should simply get used to being on her own (*SI*, 3 June 1950). Yet perhaps this column needs to be interpreted in a less simplistic manner. On one occasion, Contessa Clara complains that in at least 40% of letters ‘si ostina, non senza crudeltà su problemi insolubili – secondo i miei principi, e secondo i loro. Vorrebbero, da me, una specie di autorizzazione a peccare’ (*SI*, 8 October 1952). This might read just as exasperation, yet it could also be taken to suggest the redundancy of those principles for those no longer convinced by religious morality. After all, letters about unhappy marriages continue to appear in her column, when they could simply have been omitted. It is also noteworthy that when answering a question that raises the possibility of divorce, she implies that she is not in favour, but actually evades answering the question directly (*SI*, 26 July 1952). The views of the fictitious Contessa Clara are entirely unambiguous, and would have kept the Church happy, but that is not to say that Irene Brin was beyond sowing a few seeds of doubt in readers’ minds.<sup>59</sup>

As I have shown elsewhere, Alba de Céspedes suggests marriage has become much more demanding as roles have changed (see Morris, ‘From Private to Public’, p. 15). She assesses the practical possibilities for women – which were very few – and, surprisingly in what was essentially conformist magazine, uses the column as means of arguing for divorce. In the meantime, despite believing that most men were unfaithful (*E*, 13 January 1957), and maintaining that it was possible for a woman to live alone with dignity, she admits that marriage still remained the best option for most. For women who were unhappy, she advises that increased self-reliance and work can help, even if they do not provide the full answer. Most of all, women should try to avoid being complicit in their own oppression (*E*, 14 July 1955).

At the beginning of the decade, there is an attempt in *Noi donne* to present reconciliation in a positive manner because it was the only option available to most readers. The advice offered was inconsistent, or even incorrect, and answers tended to be absurdly optimistic, or disingenuous, as readers were encouraged to hope that husbands might undergo a complete character transformation, given time (*ND*, 23 April 1950 or 13 May 1951).<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, they do suggest separation from violent husbands. On closer inspection, the responses nearly always support the status quo, reassuring women if they had already left their husbands, but otherwise recommending they should stay. Viganò’s traditional attitudes emerge in this area too. She tells a reader whose husband is a drunkard, but who has two children: ‘sopporta e sii buona [...] Capisco che ti chiedo un sacrificio continuo, ma la vita è così, specialmente per le mogli e per le madri, nell’interesse e nell’affetto del marito e degli figli’ (3 June 1951). Such advice sits uncomfortably with the rhetoric of equality and independence that is also part of her column. By 1955, *Noi donne*

was enthusiastically promoting a debate on divorce,<sup>61</sup> and the magazine began to use its advice column as a means of openly campaigning for it, maintaining that it was necessary for the ‘salvezza morale della famiglia’ (ND, 11 September 1955). The idea that divorce was morally beneficial became a familiar message when Giuliana dal Pozzo became editor. She overtly challenged the kind of tolerance and submission preached by others as being undignified for women (ND, 18 November 1956 and 3 March 1957), and encouraged women to make their own choices. Of course, the law had not yet changed and sometimes she could only offer sympathy, but she encouraged women to have much higher expectations of marriage.

In setting out desirable qualities and norms of behaviour, there is very little room for those who do not conform to society’s expectations. As a result, there is an almost entire avoidance of the idea that readers might be homosexual. Given the context, it is hardly surprising that it was regarded as taboo, even for *Noi donne* which prided itself on discussing issues regarded as ‘scabrosi’ by others. It may well have been the subject of various questions and answers that are so obscure as to be indecipherable, but otherwise it appears very rarely. There are a couple of examples in *Famiglia cristiana*: Padre Atanasio responds to a certain Pino, telling him: ‘il suo affetto non è secondo natura’, and, to make his point clearer, tells him to read St Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter I, verses 18-32. He instructs him to break off the relationship and go to confession, but also to realize that he has already gone too far and that the responsibility is all his if, one day, ‘anziché uomo si ritroverà semplicemente bestia’ (FC, 8 March 1953). The other, of a rather different order, addresses a schoolgirl who has a crush on a friend. ‘Non sei sulla buona strada’, he tells her, it is not true friendship, ‘è altra cosa: morbosità, profanazione, perfino scempiaggine’ (FC, 1 September 1957). The response offered by Signora Quickly to what seems to be a similar situation, though reversed, is to break off the friendship, because ‘la tua amica [...] avrà mille e una buonissima qualità ma – forse non per colpa sua – ha in sé una tara e, comunque, costituisce una deplorable eccezione nella normalità femminile. Una pesca bacata, lo sai, può far marcire l’intero cesto di frutta’ (G, 23 August 1952).

The only examples of a relatively open treatment of homosexuality, and a much more nuanced response, appears in *Settimana Incom*. Letters on this subject are hardly frequent, but there are a number that appear over the decade. The most explicit example consists of two letters which appear in 1956, and which Contessa Clara addresses in a single answer. In the first, a man who calls himself ‘Neuter’ is about to have a sex change, with the support of his family, and says that he is happy. By contrast, the second letter is from a homosexual, but married, man who is suicidal. Both are treated with sympathy and understanding by Contessa Clara, who recognizes the right to happiness of the first and the despair of the second. She still regards Neuter as a sad case, because ‘non sarà madre, povero Neuter, povera Neuter’, but he still might hope to find ‘un’esistenza pacificata e armoniosa’. The

second is far more serious, particularly as he does not have family to help. Yet, she claims that she does not fear for him: 'È talmente forte che saprà scegliere la strada difficile e rara [...] Saprà soffrendo e tacendo e vietandosi qualsiasi indulgenza vivere' (*SI*, 3 November 1956). Of course, she does not know if he is strong or not, and the reader of the column is all too aware of that fact. As before, it is tempting not to take the column at face value. That the issue has been raised at all – and treated sympathetically with the acknowledgement that some homosexuals can be happy – appears a good deal more significant than Contessa Clara's more conventional comments. The fact that Irene Brin's husband, Gaspero del Corso, was homosexual goes a long way to explaining the presence of these letters in this particular column.

### Different generations: interfering parents and disaffected youth

Questions from parents (mostly mothers) about their difficult teenage offspring become more common in all the magazines towards the end of the decade with the increasing incidence of delinquency and fear of a spreading epidemic of immorality. For Signora Quickly, the new generation has been given too much and is spoilt (9 February 1958). By 1960, she is talking scathingly of the 'Brigittebardotismo' of some girls, a waste of their youth and anyway most unattractive to men (14 February 1960). In *Famiglia cristiana*, a mother worries her son just wants to enjoy himself, refuses to go to church, and is unable to hold down a job. She is told: 'la storia di suo figlio è press'a poco la storia di gran parte della gioventù di oggi, specialmente delle città e dei centri più abitati'. 'Non cessi di esortare e richiamare', Padre Atanasio continues, adding lamely that she should see if a priest can influence him (3 February 1957).<sup>62</sup> *Noi donne's* advisers often voice concerns about the effect of the 'Americanization' of society and of consumerism on young people. Their conservatism surfaces in worries about young women who are 'sbandierate' (2 October 1955), or the 'gioventù senza ideali che non sa bene per che cosa vive' (3 March 1957) that Giuliana dal Pozzo mentions, despite claiming that she has no desire to preach. Yet a couple of years later, overtly challenging 'conformist' publications who had taken to despairing about the youth of the time, dal Pozzo quotes two letters which represent, she says, in their stories of suffering at the hands of adults and of acts of generosity respectively: 'il volto vero, pulito, coraggioso della gioventù moderna' (29 March 1959).

Contessa Clara and Alba de Céspedes, on the other hand, are consistently sympathetic to young readers. Clara advises parents to give their teenagers more space and understand that many young people go through a 'rage de jeunesse' (see for example, *SI*, 5 July 1952 and 20 October 1956). De Céspedes, with her familiar mix of realism and faith in progress, is very keen to engage in a

dialogue with the young, encourages letters from them and expresses considerable doubts about the existence of a 'gioventù bruciata'. Donna Letizia is in favour of strict discipline, yet she also advises parents to trust young people more (G, 21 September 1958).

Another of the areas of agreement between the magazines, and one that arose quite frequently, was that young couples should do all they can to avoid living with their parents as it was always a cause of arguments. In part this was a recognition of change, but it was also symptomatic – or possibly generative – of the atomization of the family and a growing desire for more space in 1950s. By contrast, a subject that is mentioned far more rarely, is the sexual abuse of young people. But it is not entirely absent. As has been noted, on one occasion in 1953 Padre Atanasio is prepared to mention, if euphemistically, the rape of a young girl, as the ultimate threat to mothers who do not pay attention, casually alerting them to the fact that he received many such letters. In Signora Quickly's column the subject of abuse is treated dismissively; it is raised only to deny such problems exist (G, 24 July 1955). In *Noi donne*, there is a brief mention at the beginning of the decade (ND, 17 June 1951), but it does not appear again until Giuliana dal Pozzo chooses to break the silence as part of her project of cautiously bringing taboo subjects into the open. Unlike Padre Atanasio, she is most concerned with the point of view of the abused. In 1958 she includes a letter which describes the abuse of a reader by a neighbour that occurred when she was a young teenager and continued over a period of two years, as she was too frightened to tell her mother. 'Vorrei, proprio vorrei non ricevere lettere come la tua, perché vorrei che fatti simili non accadessero,' dal Pozzo responds, 'ma invece ne ricevo, e molte' (ND, 2 March 58). The following year another letter appears, this time from a girl abused by a relative:

Sono decine e decine le lettere di giovani donne che ogni settimana mi raccontano un dramma avvenuto fra le soglie della fanciullezza e quelle dell'adolescenza, quando erano troppo giovani per capire, troppo deboli per potersi difendere. La loro fiducia nel mondo, negli uomini è spesso crollata con un brutale atto di forza compiuta da persone che reputavano amiche (ND, 29 March 1959)

She has no advice to offer regarding the effects of abuse, but the very fact of bringing it out into the open is significant. Presumably other advisers had been receiving similar letters but continued to choose to ignore them. Gabriella Parca's collection of unpublished letters to *fotoromanzi*, *Le italiane si confessano* (1959), also suggests a similar conclusion.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

The advice columns analysed here constituted genuine attempts to mould the behaviour of Italians in their private lives, by either suppressing or promoting changes in the way that the sexes and the generations related to each other. It was a society in which many subjects were still regarded as unfit for public discussion, yet advice columns were dealing regularly with ‘private’ problems in a very public forum and a whole range of difficulties, particularly regarding dysfunctional, unhappy marriages and divorce, but also others including sexual relations, domestic violence, sexual abuse, relationships with the wider family, and unmarried mothers, were all aired in advice columns well before they became the subject of articles and the ‘inchieste’ that were so familiar in the following decade. The intimacy of advice columns, albeit a fictional construct, and the fact that they have generally been dismissed as unimportant, or assumed to be read only by women, seem to have allowed their writers greater freedom in broaching awkward subjects. The aura of privacy, of an adviser speaking one-to-one with a reader, may also have made their subject matter more acceptable to a readership very used to the idea of confession. Of course, for some readers, the function of advice columns was to entertain and no doubt they found considerable amusement in knowingly ironic answers, in the rare opportunities to read about scandalous or taboo subjects, or indeed in the foolishness and misfortune of other readers. The editors of magazines were clearly aware of their popularity too, yet none of the columns discussed here was written purely to entertain.

All the columns show an awareness that expectations were shifting and – in this most modern of media at the time – recognize the need to find their own ways of coming to terms with the clash between modernity and tradition. In many ways, the approach of Padre Atanasio in *Famiglia cristiana* is the most straightforward. He was more equitable in his admonishment of both men and women for transgressive behaviour, and did not encourage duplicity, but it is very noticeable that the only relationship required to be fully honest is that between the individual and a priest (or God). In advice that reflected the Church’s views but must have seemed old-fashioned to very many readers at the time, he attempted to curb ‘modern’ behaviour and preserve the traditional model of the family which assumed a very limited role for women. Signora Quickly paid lip-service to the same Catholic moral framework, whilst also trying to lay claim to a certain modernity. In fact, ‘she’ was most concerned with perpetuating the objectification and subordination of women and the hypocrisy of a society that put reputations and appearances first. The modernity of her column lay, if anywhere, not in the actual advice, but in its relationship with the promotion of lifestyles and aspirations inherent to the mass magazine in which it appeared.

By contrast, *Noi donne* sought to educate and empower women. As has been seen, its advisers were only partially successful in early 1950s, as they struggled to shake off old prejudices (a phenomenon that could be seen throughout the Communist Party), but formed a much clearer strategy from the middle of the decade, even if they were still operating in a relatively oppressive climate. Alba de Céspedes was also aware that there were restrictions on what could be said in print, but she too chose to use her column in a bold fashion, calling openly for divorce, better education for the whole family and genuine equality between men and women. Whilst Contessa Clara was firmly conservative in her responses, her column bears only a superficial similarity with those in *Grazia*, as she too puts much greater emphasis on the education and responsibility of the individual, inevitably inviting the reader to consider the validity of her answers as well as considering the problems of the readers. In this sense, her column could be said to lie midway between those of *Grazia* and *Famiglia cristiana* and those of *Epoca* and *Noi donne*. The former always identified *private* solutions to problems within the family. The status quo was to be maintained and readers – very often women – had to find a way of adapting themselves to the existing morality, even if that meant that the solution amounted to keeping up appearances. Alba de Céspedes and *Noi donne*'s advisers, on the other hand would attempt to give practical advice for coping with the situation within society as it was, but also called for the 'modernization' of Italy and changes in attitudes and in the law. Whilst Contessa Clara rejects the possibility of dramatic change, her column nevertheless gives more than a glimpse of the desire for it. In fact, the same could also be said of Signora Quickly's and Padre Atanasio's columns, even if it was hardly their intention, as readers and advisers indulge in a struggle, with the same questions raised again and again, only to be given the same answers each time. For many letter-writers and readers of the columns this must have been a cause of great frustration and pain. Yet the fact that their frustration and pain was given a public voice must have had a considerable effect on those readers who recognized problems similar to their own, and so much more so when the problems were taken seriously and they were offered sympathy and some prospect of change. It is impossible to tell how far the advice was followed, or whether readers shared in the optimism they all expressed, but they undoubtedly added to growing debates on marriage and the family, providing widely available alternative sources of opinion that varied much more than the apparent conformity of the period suggests.



## Notes

\* I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for awarding me leave in order to complete this research and the British Academy for a Small Research Grant which funded a number of research trips to Italy.

<sup>1</sup> See L. Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters: Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London, Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> These figures can be somewhat misleading as to the number of women carrying out work alongside domestic chores since they do not take paid homeworking into account. See P. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-88* (London, Penguin, 1990), p. 236, and C. Saraceno, 'La famiglia: i paradossi della costruzione del privato', in *La vita privata: il Novecento*, edited by P. Ariès and G. Duby (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1988), pp. 33-78.

<sup>3</sup> For further information on the history of women in 1950s Italy, see P. Morris, 'Introduction' in *Women in Italy 1945-1960*, edited by P. Morris (New York, Palgrave, 2006), and subsequent chapters.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that even as early as 1950, *Settimana Incom* was asking what could be done about problems with the Italian youth (27 May 1950).

<sup>5</sup> C. Saraceno, 'The Italian Family from the 1960s to the Present', in *Gender and the Private Sphere in Italy since 1945*, edited by P. Filippucci and P. Willson, *Special Issue of Modern Italy*, 9, 1 (2004), 47-57 (p. 48). She is referring to S. Piccone Stella, *La prima generazione* (Milan, Franco Angeli, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> P. Morris, 'From Private to Public: Alba de Céspedes' Agony Column in 1950s Italy', in Filippucci and Willson, *Gender and the Private Sphere*, pp. 11-20. De Céspedes' column provides intriguing insights into the state of family and marriage during a time of transition. The article discusses the idea of the agony column as a commodity, but also highlights de Céspedes' aim of providing a kind of compendium of lay morals, arguing that any attempt to provide an alternative to the Catholic Church, and the prevailing conservative attitudes of the time, was a matter of careful negotiation.

<sup>7</sup> The following abbreviations will be used to refer to these magazines: *E*, *FC*, *G*, *ND*, and *SI*. It should be noted that other studies of Italian magazines from this period have tended to concentrate on particular areas,

such as Cold War politics, religion, or magazines aimed only at women. See for example, S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista: pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI (1947-1956)* (Rome, Carocci, 2000), S. Portaccio, 'Buona e bella: i periodici femminili cattolici negli anni '50', *Memoria*, 4 (1982), 140-44 and M. Buonanno, *Naturale come sei: Indagine sulla stampa femminile in Italia* (Rimini-Florence, Guaraldi, 1975). Bellassai does use the advice column from *Noi donne* quite extensively, but his study only goes up to 1956. These studies also concentrate on specific articles or 'inchieste' rather than regular columns and thus ignore or quote quite selectively from the advice column.

<sup>8</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* (Milan, Franco Angeli, 2004), pp. 110-26 (p. 124).

<sup>9</sup> Buonanno's figures for readership of the magazines she analyses date from the 1970s, but there does not seem to have been any change in the intended readership of *Grazia*.

<sup>10</sup> G. Gaetani, 'Le donne leggono più degli uomini: un grande dibattito sulla stampa femminile', *Noi donne*, 7 (October 1956), 9-10. It is interesting that whilst this article is at pains to show that women are very avid readers, it overlooks magazines aimed at the whole family, despite the fact that it is clear that a substantial number of their readers (and quite possibly the majority) were women.

<sup>11</sup> This study does not include therefore magazines such as the very popular *fotoromanzi* (see A. Bravo, *Fotoromanzi* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003)). For a consideration of Gabriella Parca's collection of letters sent to advice columns of *fotoromanzi*, see P. Morris, 'The Harem Exposed: Gabriella Parca's *Le italiane si confessano*', in Morris, *Women in Italy 1945-1960*, pp. 109-30.

<sup>12</sup> Thus the magazine includes articles on fashion, beauty, film stars and so on and even introduced its own *fotoromanzo*. See S. Gundle, *I comunisti italiani tra Hollywood e Mosca: la sfida della cultura di massa* (Florence, Giunti, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, this is an important distinction between *Noi donne* and nearly all other magazines of the time.

Portaccio (p. 140) notes that the Catholic magazine *Così* was also edited by women, but it is very difficult to find other examples.

<sup>14</sup> 'Throughout the 1950s the weekly magazine, *Famiglia cristiana*, had an enormous circulation, reaching more than a million copies by May 1961' (Ginsborg, p. 173).

<sup>15</sup> *Settimana Incom* was different to the extent that it was produced in order to exploit the popularity of the newsreel of the same name.

<sup>16</sup> For Alba de Céspedes' comments on the need to avoid offending the government, see Morris, 'From Private to Public', p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Murialdi states that 'I rotocalchi soddisfanno il desiderio di "favole moderne"' with their references to royal families, millionaires, and film stars (P. Murialdi, *La stampa italiana del dopoguerra, 1943-1972* (Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1974)).

<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that all the columns, even those in the women's magazine *Grazia*, contain some letters from men. Buonanno asserts that in women's magazines the problem page was often the only one actually read and considers that 'le rubriche di corrispondenza hanno contribuito in maniera massiccia a determinare il successo della stampa femminile' (Buonanno, p. 77).

<sup>19</sup> It seems inconceivable that Mike Bongiorno would have spent time on such a column, but it is not clear who was really responsible for it. For the most part, it deals somewhat repetitively with teenage worries. Whilst this theme is not irrelevant to a discussion of families, the column does not differ substantially from the advice given in Signora Quickly's column and will not be examined in any detail.

<sup>20</sup> Prior to Viganò, *Noi donne's* adviser was 'Michela' (despite strenuous efforts to discover her true identity, including amongst members of UDI, I have not yet discovered who she was). Viganò was succeeded by another, less well-known writer, Silvia Magi Bonfanti, who held the role for just one year. Some study has been made of this column in the context of communist culture in general, in one case only until 1956 (S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista*) and in the other with particular reference to divorce (M. Seymour, *Debating Divorce in Italy: Marriage and the Making of Modern Italians, 1860-1974* (New York, Palgrave, 2006)).

<sup>21</sup> In later years, Donna Letizia's 'Saper vivere' column evolved and increasingly addressed readers' domestic and emotional problems, changing its title to 'Vivere e convivere'. Whilst the question of social etiquette in the 1950s, with its insights into class mobility and into the related fields of fashion and design, is certainly of interest, it will not be analysed here.

<sup>22</sup> Signora Quickly's 'Ditelo pure a me' dealt almost exclusively with such subjects, whilst Alba de Céspedes' column was striking for its range of subjects, including questions of a philosophical, literary, or practical (especially legal) nature. *Noi donne* also responded to practical enquiries and, not surprisingly, had the most overtly political column, aiming to educate women and mould the new female citizens of Italy, providing 'una guida sicura e precisa per le donne italiane, uno strumento di educazione politica e morale' (6 January 1950). It should be noted, however, that *Famiglia cristiana* also made a decidedly political use of its column in the early 1950s.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of 'common sense' and struggle in language, see N. Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London, Longman, 2001), pp. 64-90.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the extent to which advice columns have been studied, see P. Morris, 'From Private to Public', note 3, p. 18. See also a recent article on French 'agony aunts': A. M. Sohn, 'Marcelle Ségat et Menie Grégoire, les nouvelles intermédiaires médiatiques du couple (1946-1969)' in B. P. Wanrooij, *La mediazione matrimoniale: il terzo (in)comodo in Europa fra Otto e Novecento* (Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), pp. 357-94.

<sup>25</sup> Giuliana dal Pozzo, for example, says she would be mad to invent letters when she has so many real ones to answer (*ND*, 22 March 1959). The authenticity of letters is often stressed by advisers in later discussions or anthologies of their columns.

<sup>26</sup> For Mondadori, who published both her novels and the magazine *Epoca*, there were clear advantages to naming de Céspedes' advice column *Dalla parte di lei*, the title of her novel of 1948.

<sup>27</sup> *L'Agnes va a morire* (Milan, Mondadori, 1949). In the case of *Noi donne* of course, an upper-class pedigree would hardly have been an advantage. Viganò's

middle-class background is not given any prominence, as might be expected.

<sup>28</sup> W. C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983). Both writers include some brief autobiographical information, but a much stronger impression is created by the sum of judgements, advice, the tone of responses and the choice of subjects that appear. It must also be assumed that, particularly for writers of fiction, the process of projecting a self-image through such journalism was necessarily a self-conscious one. A full exploration of similarities between the real or implied writers of fiction and the personae adopted for these columns – whether or not a pseudonym was used – would be fruitful but is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see *Settimana Incom*, 16 August 1952. In fact Irene Brin was also a pseudonym. Her real name was Maria Vittoria Rossi.

<sup>30</sup> Clara also claims for example that one of her daughters was born on the Trans-Siberian Railway, and that later in life she herself was muse to Proust and Rilke (but did not like them much).

<sup>31</sup> In fact this persona was one that evolved. For quite a short time at the start of the column, the idea that she should not be threatening to readers meant that it was suggested that she was of quite lowly origins but had married into a higher class. Colette Rosselli's column continued until 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Other oft-repeated 'facts' include the idea that she was married but her beloved husband died some time ago, and that she was never able to have children (but would have liked to).

<sup>33</sup> The true identity of Signora Quickly is mentioned in an article by Claudio Carabba, 'Il costume italiano nelle "piccole poste"', *La Nazione*, 3 February 1968. This fact also explains 'her' fondness for theatrical references. Throughout the article Signora Quickly will be referred to as 'she' as the discussion centres on the fictional persona.

<sup>34</sup> There are more letters apparently signed by real people, with addresses, instances of readers not only responding to previous letters but also offering practical help and solutions to problems. In the early years of the decade, when its readers were suffering particular hardship, *Noi donne* also had what it called an 'angolo della solidarietà'

to which readers might be referred and which offered financial assistance to those most in need.

<sup>35</sup> See Bellasai, *La morale comunista*.

<sup>36</sup> Signora Quickly seems impressed by the possibilities of tranquilizers, while Contessa Clara displays a certain fondness for Freud's ideas, a view which sits somewhat awkwardly with the rest of her persona. By the following decade, magazines tended to have a number of different advice columns and advisers were far more likely to be specialists or professionals of some sort.

<sup>37</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, *Epoca's* advice column is particularly striking for the way that de Céspedes aims to provide a kind of compendium of lay morals, a new set of ideals and mores more suited to the modern age and to the changing relationships between the sexes (Morris, 'From Private to Public', pp. 16-18).

<sup>38</sup> A frequent response from Signora Quickly was that it was impossible to be unhappy if you are young and that before a certain age matters of love were not even relevant; fourteen and under seems to have been the range 'she' had in mind. In fact, there only seemed to be a few years of grace, because by her late teens according to this column, a girl was usually old enough to know better. Most of the answers addressed to young readers are very condescending. In *Noi donne* too, there is a certain impatience expressed with teenage loves. In fact at one point in 1957, Giuliana dal Pozzo says she is not going to answer any more letters on such subjects. See for example, Giuliana dal Pozzo's exasperation at 'amori contrastati' (14 July 1957) and then her announcement that she was not going to answer questions about 'primi amori' any more (4 August 1957). Alba de Céspedes and Contessa Clara, on the other hand, include far fewer letters from this age group (and quite possibly did not receive so many), but generally respond in a positive manner. Such questions form the bulk of letters published in magazines like *Confidenze*, and *fotoromanzi* like *Bolero* and *Grand Hotel*. A good number of the letters in Gabriella Parca's collection *Le italiane si confessano* also come from this group (see Morris, 'The Harem Exposed').

<sup>39</sup> In fact, even teenage worries about relationships are treated as part of a process that had only one form of resolution. The only notable exception is to be found in *Famiglia cristiana* when readers write expressing a vocation to become priests or nuns, often in the face

of opposition from families. Even so, it is still described as joining another family; for a woman, Padre Atanasio states, it is a different way of being a mother (29 September 1957), and this is one of the few instances in which readers are encouraged to go against the wishes of the family.

<sup>40</sup> Michela's advice (23 March 1950), that happiness comes from 'situazioni precise' – that is, marriage – may have been thinly veiled conformism with the norms of the time, but even a decade later, when Giuliana dal Pozzo explicitly encouraged a much greater sense of independence and self-reliance in women, the underlying assumption remained the same.

<sup>41</sup> *Noi donne* consistently advised its readers not to marry unless they were in love, even if society had yet to learn the true meaning of 'dignità, rispetto e anche amore', required if women were to be more than servants and slaves (12 November 1950). Later in the decade, Giuliana dal Pozzo advises against marrying at all costs and, in 1959, tells readers that it was their duty not to marry if they did not love their prospective spouse completely (19 May 1957 and 25 January 1959 respectively.)

<sup>42</sup> For example, a woman is told that, because of her age, it is only if she feels real repulsion for her prospective spouse that she should refuse the offer of marriage from a man she does not love.

<sup>43</sup> Padre Atanasio accepts that women work well, and have even shown 'più attitudine' than men, but asserts that they should not take jobs from men (*FC*, 14 June 1953). However, it should be noted that *Famiglia cristiana* does pick up on the issue of the poor treatment of women at work in an article in 1960: L. Barbo, 'Le donne lavoratrici sono trattate male' (10 June 1960, pp. 14-15).

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that Padre Atanasio was not in favour of the kind of self-education and learning advised by Alba de Céspedes in *Epoca*, and was convinced of the deleterious effect of too much reading (*FC*, 24 August 1958).

<sup>45</sup> Signora Quickly and Donna Letizia made it clear that it was always a mistake to marry someone from a different social background (see for example *G*, 26 January 1958 and 2 March 1958), a view echoed in *Famiglia cristiana* (10 February 1957). Alba de Céspedes had a strong sense of class differences and the extent to which they moulded characters, making her dubious about cross-class

relationships even if she did acknowledge in 1956 that social classes were mixing a good deal more (*E*, 4 November 1956).

<sup>46</sup> A rare exception was a brief answer from Donna Letizia, in which she affirmed the right of wives to vote differently from their husbands (*G*, 11 May 1958). Earlier in the decade, the Catholic Church, keen to make sure that wives did not feel obliged to vote in the same way as their socialist or communist husbands, had promoted a similar message.

<sup>47</sup> See Bellasai for further discussion of the conflicts that arose in Communist households.

<sup>48</sup> Indeed, she maintains that to hold back from kissing can be positively harmful (5 October 1958).

<sup>49</sup> Signora Quickly's comment that soon she will no longer really be a woman (because of her age) is enlightening in this respect (*G*, 31 May 1952).

<sup>50</sup> In a striking example, 'Maria' declares herself to be a middle-aged, unmarried, and unattractive woman who has unexpectedly inherited a large sum of money but does not know what to do with it. Contessa Clara's response is that first of all she should have plastic surgery: 'Abbia, inanzitutto, un naso perfetto, una fronte senza rughe, un collo a colonna', because, 'oggi giorno si può realmente diventare diverse, ed in tempo relativamente breve [...] Diventi bella, e le sarà facile diventare buona. Non è uno scherzo, da parte mia, ma una certezza' (*SI*, 19 January 1957).

<sup>51</sup> For example, she was more restrained – and more ambiguous – in an answer that very nervously attempted to address directly the delicate issue of what was 'lecito' between fiancés (*ND*, 17 May 1953), apparently allowing greater latitude, provided it was with a view to marriage. Somewhat later, she challenges a man for his 'stolido pregiudizio borghese' (*ND*, 20 March 1955) in complaining that his girlfriend has had sex with a previous partner, but her advice on the topic remains inconsistent.

<sup>52</sup> In a DOXA survey from 1952, 48% of respondents thought that 'pratiche tendenti ad arrestare una gravidanza già iniziata' were either 'molto' or 'abbastanza diffuse': P. Luzzatto Fegiz, *Il volto sconosciuto dell'Italia: dieci anni di sondaggi DOXA* (Milan, Giuffrè, 1956), pp. 377-96.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Arnaldo Mondadori, 31 July 1953, Fondo Arnaldo Mondadori, Fondazione Mondadori, Milan.

<sup>54</sup> A DOXA survey in 1953 suggested 53% of respondents did not know of the Ogino Knaus method allowed by the Church (Luzzatto Fegiz, p. 384).

<sup>55</sup> 'Sembra dunque che i primi giorni di matrimonio siano davvero, per molte spose, una delusione; e col passare degli anni appaiono in una luce meno rosea' (Luzzatto Fegiz, p. 357).

<sup>56</sup> The attitude of a woman who finds sex with her husband abhorrent is described as an 'aberrazione' (*Grazia*, 13 December 1952).

<sup>57</sup> For a particularly chilling example, in which a wife is blamed entirely for her husband's violence, see *G*, 9 March 1958. For a further example see *G*, 23 September 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Fairclough (p. 70) notes the way that the 'ideological role of implicit assumptions' can provide 'a commonsensical framework and procedure' for treating social problems in a purely individual way.

<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Vittoria Caratozzolo for her insights on this matter. For further information on Irene Brin, see V. Caratozzolo, *Irene Brin: alle origini del look italiano, 1945-69* (Venice, Marsilio, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> It was mentioned that separation or annulment via the Sacra Ruota but it was acknowledged that they cost

more money than most readers could afford. One reader is told – quite incorrectly – that she will be able to obtain a divorce because she and her husband only had a civil wedding (17 December 1950), whilst another is advised to separate from her husband; she was free to have relationships with other men, but would need courage as people would gossip (*Noi donne*, 7 August 1950). For further information on divorce, see Seymour, *Debating Divorce in Italy*.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Concetto Marchesi, 'Variazione sul divorzio', *Noi donne*, 3 July 1955, pp. 8-9.

<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, in this magazine too, Italy's 'gioventù bruciata' becomes the subject of longer articles and debates, which tend to conclude, like Reginaldo Francisco's, that 'per arrestare la diffusione della delinquenza minorile il rimedio più sicuro consiste nel ritorno ad una concezione cristiana della famiglia, ad un senso di responsabilità collettiva sullo sforzo educativo dei genitori maestri e sacerdoti ad una visione soprannaturale dell'esistenza e del mondo', R. Francisco, 'La gioventù bruciata comincia a scottare', *FC*, 20 September 1959, pp. 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> See Morris, 'The Harem Exposed', in Morris, *Women in Italy 1945-1960*, pp. 117-18.

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