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Author: Alberto Fabris

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Libere. Directed by Rossella Schillaci. Italy. Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza, 2017. 76 minutes.

Over the past few years, the Italian visual anthropologist and filmmaker Rossella Schillaci (born in Turin, 1973) has released many documentaries that deal with migration, ecology, and women's conditions in critical contexts, such as maternity in prison. With *Libere / Free Women* Schillaci makes a remarkable contribution to a subject that has yet to receive the attention it deserves: the role of women in the Resistenza movement that fought against Italian Fascism. Few works of cinema or literature treat this topic: Mario Camerini's 1945 film *Due lettere anonime / Two Anonymous Letters*, Renata Viganò's 1949 neorealist novel *L'Agnese va a morire / Agnese Goes to Die*, and recent documentaries by Alessia Proietti (*Bandite / Bandit Women*, 2009) and Daniele Segre (*Nome di Battaglia Donna / Call Sign Woman*, 2016). *Libere* is simultaneously a documentary on the Resistenza, a study on the role played by women as partisans and workers during and after the war, the reconstruction of this particular turning point in women's history, and a meditation on the documentary form itself.

Libere is a work of significant archival research, based on photos, journals, videos, and records kept in the Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza, the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, the Istituto Gramsci, the Archivio Nazionale Unione Donne Italiane, and many other institutions. Through the recordings of several witness interviews, Schillaci's meticulous research restores the fundamental role played by women in the Resistenza who would go unacknowledged and vilified immediately after the war. In this regard, the speech that the former partisan Ada Gobetti gave at the 1965 convention of the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (National Liberation Committee) in Turin marks an important transition in the documentary and, as disclosed by Schillaci, constitutes a source of inspiration for her work. After having denounced the lack of consideration for the role women had played during and after the war, Gobetti expressed the hope that one day "some young student ... would like to study what has been the women's movement during the Resistenza, from 8 September to 25 April. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyze the action of the women who joined the Woman's Defence Groups in the various Administrations or in the Government and administrative positions where they served after the war."

Libere is the result of attentive editing work, in which associations between the visual materials and the archival audio testimony create a singular, unified narration. The voices of the many women active in those years are thus the guiding thread through the images and the videoclips. The discourse and perspective of women—silenced during the era of Fascism but also by almost all of the republican parties—now form an autonomous narration that describes the Resistenza as a turning point in feminist history. As the partisan Giuliana Gadola Beltrami observes, "feminism is born in the *Resistenza* because women changed radically their roles." The feminist gaze mobilized by Schillaci enables her to uncover not only the connection between Fascism and women's oppression (see "Le patriarcat fasciste" in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, vol. 5, Paris: Plon, 1995), but also the instrumental role of women in Italy's contemporary social and economic history. Wartime needs, coupled with the will for social advancement, inspired women in many cities to replace men in various labor sectors and fight Fascist oppression by various means: through sabotage and strikes in factories, writing and distributing anti-fascist propaganda, etc. Compared to prewar domestic segregation, the new role that women acquired during the Italian liberation and in manufacturing activities made them politically active subjects. At the end of the conflict, with the expectation that men would return to civil activities and the traditional order would be re-established, the situation changed drastically. In the words of one female partisan, the period after 25 April was an "authentic restoration." It is thus illuminating to relate *Libere* to recent research on the women's condition and political participation in the postwar period, such as Perry Willson's *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (2010) and Molly Tambor's *The Lost Wave: Women and Democracy in Postwar Italy* (2014).

The schism between pre- and post-1945 Italy is emphasized by Schillaci, thereby dividing the film into two halves. The presentation of archive images is suspended, and the camera depicts the archive, materials, and (we think) the filmmaker's hands, as they touch the celluloid, select sources, and turn on the recording. The second half of *Libere* conveys the transition to the Republic as betraying the claims of the Resistenza: the amnesty that left many Fascist crimes unpunished, the obstacles that many partisans found after disarming (for example, workplace discrimination and the expulsion from many public functions by the Scelba law), and the practical disempowerment of women's achievements. Though the Republic granted female suffrage, the presence of women in institutions was nonetheless dramatically smothered; the political parties (and the Partito Comunista Italiano as well) did much to exclude women from decision-making; the status quo was again determined by (now latent) Fascism and the inveterate patriarchy of a society that wanted no substantial change. A woman who had taken up arms against invaders could now be denied by her husband the right to drive, even if it was impossible to curb a change that would come to explode in the sixties and seventies, as the post-war was a period of disillusionment (on the "long wave of the *Resistenza*," see Franca Balsamo, Maria Teresa Silvestrini and Federica Turco, *A sessant'anni dal voto. Donne, diritti politici e partecipazione democratica*, Turin: SEB27, 2007). Indeed, for women and activists for social justice, even after the fall of Fascism and the institution of the Republic, the Resistenza was still unrealized.

The recourse to female partisan voices allows Schillaci to craft a documentary that is respectful, well-documented, and at the same time critical. Its revisionist critique does not refuse to admit differences but instead lays bare the facts and rejects the mummification of history into celebratory rhetoric (see Angelo Del Boca, *La storia negata. Il revisionismo e il suo uso politico*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2010). The words of the protagonists of the Resistance show that, since the beginning, the fight for freedom and political independence, for social and economic rights, for the emancipatory action of the Gruppi di Difesa della Donna (created in 1943), were fundamentally a united front. *Libere*, finally, makes space for women to express themselves, and it sheds an important light on women's history.

ALBERTO FABRIS

The Johns Hopkins University