

The representation of a woman judge in the Italian press. The case of Ilda Boccassini

La representación de una jueza en la prensa italiana. El caso de Ilda Boccassini

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Abstract

Various studies have highlighted how the media representation of the judiciary in Italy has shifted from the exaltation of judges who worked on cases of relevant public interest (for example, the Tangentopoli case) to a growing conflict between the judicial body and the political elite. This work focuses on the representation of the judge Ilda Boccassini by four Italian national newspapers during 2011, the year in which she conducted the investigations relating to the «Ruby trial», against the defendant Silvio Berlusconi. The analysis intends to investigate, using the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the press frames referring to a female judge conveyed in newspapers of different political affiliation. The study builds on other research on the media coverage of judicial investigations in Italy, that have demonstrated the existence of a strong political instrumentalization of judicial events (Mancini 2018; Mazzoni et al., 2017) and politicization and instrumentalization of the media representation of the professional category of magistrates (Priulla, 2014). This study will highlight how the professionalism and competence of Boccassini were poorly represented in the Italian press, while a prevalent use of gender stereotypes and an instrumental attention to the judge's private life can be detected.

Keywords: Italian press, women judge, politicization, Ilda Boccassini, Silvio Berlusconi.

Resumen

Diversos estudios han puesto de relieve cómo la representación mediática del poder judicial en Italia ha pasado de la exaltación de la judicatura que trabajaba en casos de relevante interés público (por ejemplo, el caso Tangentopoli) a un creciente conflicto entre el órgano judicial y la élite política. Este artículo se centra en la representación de la jueza Ilda Boccassini en cuatro periódicos nacionales italianos durante 2011, año en el que dirigió las investigaciones relativas al «proceso Ruby», contra el acusado Silvio Berlusconi. El análisis pretende investigar, utilizando la metodología del Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ACD), los encuadres referidos a la jueza transmitidos en periódicos de diferente afiliación política. El estudio se basa en otras investigaciones sobre la cobertura mediática de las investigaciones judiciales en Italia, que han demostrado la existencia de una fuerte instrumentalización política de los acontecimientos judiciales (Mancini, 2018; Mazzoni et al., 2017) y la politicización e instrumentalización de la

representación mediática de la categoría profesional de los magistrados (Priulla, 2014). En este estudio se destacará cómo la profesionalidad y competencia de Boccassini fueron escasamente representadas en la prensa italiana, al tiempo que se detecta un uso prevalente de estereotipos de género y una atención instrumental a la vida privada del juez.

Palabras clave: prensa italiana, jueza, politización, Ilda Boccassini, Silvio Berlusconi.

1. Introduction

A study conducted on the coverage of the main newspapers regarding women appointed to high positions in the judiciary in five democracies (Argentina, Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United States) showed that this representation cannot be traced back to a typology of characters referable to female judges, but it is specific to each country. For example, in Argentina, the portrait drawn up for the magistrate is that of an «atheist militant»; in the United States she is a woman «without children, but not by choice»; in Canada «she is a judge with a heart» endowed with great empathy, and so on. Based on the context, the image of the female magistrate changes, but in all contexts gender stereotypes can be identified, as many elements of the representations focus on physical appearance, private life, about being the first or second woman in that position (Escobar-Lemmon *et al.*, 2016).

This literature is part of the most developed line of research on the representation of women in the media, which has shown how the latter do not always carry the same stereotypes but develop new and multiple figures functional to different logics, ranging from the objective of seducing the audience to the political instrumentalization of such coverage. However, despite the studies on the representation of women in the media are numerous, there are very few studies on the representation of women judges- except the research quoted above (Escobar- Lemmon *et al.*, 2016). Several researches on the representation of the judiciary in the Italian media have underlined that in recent decades there has been a political instrumentalization of the representation of this professional category: in particular, it is emphasized that those newspapers that are closer to that part of the political elite adverse to the judicial body, devote great space to aspects related to scandals and to the private life of some judges, tending to a form of «trash'' journalism (Priulla, 2014).

This work intends to investigate the representation of a female judge in the Italian press, adopting a gender perspective, thus trying to fill the gap in the literature in this regard. The analysis will focus on the case of Ilda Boccassini, a judge who followed many important trials, in particular asking:

- which frames referring to Boccassini prevailed in the Italian newspapers.
- which differences or similarities in the representation of the magistrate are found in the comparison between newspapers of different political affiliation.

2. Corpus and methodology

Before describing the method used for this analysis, it is good to briefly recall who the figure at the center of our study is. Ilda Boccassini began her service in the judiciary in 1979 retiring in December 2019. Reconstructing the most salient moments of her activity we can cite in chronological order: the investigation called «Duomo connection», concerning mafia infiltrations in Northern Italy; the investigation into the perpetrators of the killing of judges working on mafia-related cases, Falcone and Borsellino; the «Clean Hands» (*Mani pulite*) investigation, related to the most important scandal of political corruption in Italy («Tangentopoli»); the investigations for corruption into Silvio Berlusconi and the lawyer Cesare Previti; the investigations into the radical-leftist terrorist group of the New Red Brigades; the investigation into the «Ruby case», for abuse of power and juvenile prostitution, which once again involved Silvio Berlusconi together with other well-known personalities.

These are all legal events that have been reported in the news' headlines and have continued over the years; therefore, in order to identify a period of time that could be significant for our purpose, that is, to analyze Ilda Boccassini's representation as offered by the Italian press, we checked in the *Factiva* database the amount of articles published in the paper editions of *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *il Giornale* and *La Stampa* published between 2006 and 2020, in which the keyword «Boccassini» appears. It thus emerged that the year in which the name «Boccassini» was most present in the articles of these newspapers is 2011, namely the year in which the judge dealt with the «Ruby case». Let's briefly recall the case, which began when Karima el-Mahroug, in the news known as «Ruby», was accompanied in May 2010 to the Milan Police Headquarters as suspected of theft, but is immediately released, and entrusted to the regional councilor of the *Forza Italia* party Nicole Minetti, following alleged pressure of the then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The Milan Public Prosecutor's Office started investigating on the legitimacy of this intervention by Berlusconi, assuming that he may have abused his office as Prime Minister and exerted undue pressure on the police officials in order to cover up the crime of juvenile prostitution. In fact, the investigation revealed that in his residence in Arcore, «red light parties» would have been held on several occasions, in which various girls from the show business would have participated, including the same regional councilor Nicole Minetti and the then minor Ruby, who allegedly provided sexual performances in exchange for money and favors. Following the investigations, on January 14, 2011, the pool of magistrates composed of Ilda Boccassini, Pietro Forno and Antonio Sangermano invited Silvio Berlusconi to appear before them, but he disdainfully refused. Following this, the prosecutors asked for an immediate trial and on February 15, 2011, Silvio Berlusconi was indicted for extortion and child prostitution. The whole event received great media coverage and Ilda Boccassini was one of the main figures in the narrative elaborated by the newspapers examined, as indicated by the high frequency with which her name recurs.

Our corpus is therefore composed of news articles published in the newspapers, *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *il Giornale* and *La Stampa* from 1 January to 31 December 2011. The articles were extracted using the keyword «Boccassini» from the *Factiva* database, obtaining the following results: 259 articles for *il Giornale*, 209 for *la Repubblica*, 136 for *Corriere della Sera* and 69 for *La Stampa*.

The methodology used for the analysis of texts falls within studies on the critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Lindekilde, 2014), an approach that is particularly attentive to the dynamics of power and the asymmetries generated by the narrative; this approach involves the use of a plurality of methods of analysis. Among these, this study focuses on identifying the frames present in the articles, in order to highlight the discursive strategies that have contributed to the representation of Ilda Boccassini in the newspapers examined. The concept of frame, widely used in critical discourse analysis, is not uniquely defined in the literature; indeed, its definition remains vague and sometimes problematic (Entman, 1993). For this study, we follow the definition and analytical use of the following authors:

- Benson's approach (Benson, 2013), particularly effective for showing how different frames on a given theme are produced in the media arena and dominant visions emerge depending on a series of factors, including the subjects producing the message;
- Lakoff and Johnson's theory (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980), who highlight how the framing activity derives from framing a phenomenon through a broader metaphor¹, but also outlines how in a discourse the different frames are organized following a hierarchy decided by the author, or by the reader (Hall, 1991), and recall how in the speech the different frames are organized according to a hierarchy decided by the author, or even by the recipient of the message;
- the idea of «frame package»: «Each reconstructed frame is presented by a frame package; that is, by an integrated structure of framing devices and a logical chain of reasoning devices that demonstrates how the frame functions to represent a certain issue» (Van Gorp, 2010). According to Van Gorp's idea, the reconstruction of the frames consists in identifying not only all the explicit discursive mechanisms such as statements, metaphors, tenses, etc., but also the presuppositions, or the implicit mechanisms such as reasoning, themes, positioning on a specific issue, which contribute to constructing the frame and direct the recipient of the message towards the interpretation desired by the author.

Van Gorp also underlines the usefulness of an inductive approach, which finds in the text all the discursive indicators, implicit and explicit, which combine to build a frame. For this reason, we have chosen, in this research, not to search *ex ante* for stereotypes or other elements already highlighted in the studies on gender representations, but to study the articles and their discursive organization in order to identify what emerges with regard to the representation of Boccassini. Following this approach, the frames that emerged *ex post* from the analysis of the four newspapers under analysis are mainly two, opposed, which can be traced back to the theme of the competence-professionalism of the magistrate:

- the frame of the «political theorem», from which it derives that Boccassini is part of that «deviant judiciary», which acts by pursuing political aims;
- the frame of the «legitimacy of the investigations», from which it derives that Boccassini is a professional who is doing her job correctly and competently.

¹ With the term metaphor the authors do not intend to indicate an ornament of the discourse but a fundamental cognitive tool for the construction of meaning.

The area of competence and professionalism therefore represents the main point of view through which Boccassini is represented in the period under analysis; moreover, gender stereotypes or references to the private life of the judge sometimes contribute to corroborating these frames.

3. The opposing frames on the Ruby case: the «political theorem» and the «legitimacy of the investigations»

3.1. The narration of *Il Giornale*: the «political theorem» and the persecutor Ilda Boccassini

The representation of the magistrate Ilda Boccassini, in the corpus examined, is built within the coverage of the Ruby case. This is what the articles in which the name Boccassini appears are talking about: the investigations, the indictment and the trial of the Prime Minister, and it is in the narration of this story that the character of the magistrate is portrayed by the newspapers based on the chosen frame from each newspaper to frame the story.

One of the four news outlets under analysis is *Il Giornale*, owned by the Berlusconi family and holding a rightist political affiliation. As it will be seen in more detail in the following pages, *il Giornale* elaborates the frame of the «political theorem», or rather of the persecution by the «red robes» of which Berlusconi is a victim. This frame, this interpretative key, is communicated through a storytelling that uses the classic narrative scheme of the persecuted hero (Salmon, 2007) in which Berlusconi plays the role of the victim while Ilda Boccassini is assigned the role of the persecutor.

The narrative offered by *il Giornale* makes use of a very concrete language, which relies on emotions rather than rationality, and aims to arouse feelings of approval or aversion with respect to the actors involved rather than focusing on the facts. Therefore, the representation of these actors becomes fundamental, their description on the basis of which the reader can have confidence in one or the other character, and therefore take sides and consequently interpret the whole story, and the political implications of the Ruby case.

Among the judges working on the case (Pietro Forno and Antonio Sangermano, as well as the Public Prosecutor Edmondo Bruti Liberati, head of investigations), Ilda Boccassini is the person who is chosen to play the narrative role of «red robe». She is constantly being targeted, and is described as: incompetent, emotionally unstable, self-centered, persecutor and hater of Silvio Berlusconi, person of dubious morality, spy, leftist. It can be noted that the first two characteristics refer to widespread gender prejudices: the incompetence of women in sectors considered to be usually left to males, and emotional instability, are solidly rooted stereotypes. There are also references to her physical appearance - much more frequent when it comes to women than when it comes to men - conjugated to age-related prejudices, for which Ilda Boccassini is also defined «withered magistrate» with «dyed hair».

As a woman, Ilda Boccassini fits herself perfectly to embody the stereotypes that can represent her as an inadequate magistrate and, more generally, as a weak subject and scarcely worthy of professional consideration. When Silvio Berlusconi refuses the invitation to appear before the judges, the expression skillfully used by Silvio Berlusconi is: «I don't sit in front of Boccassini». The

Premier does not say: «I am not going to speak to the magistrates», but he uses an expression whose connotations suggest the interpretation: «I do not demean myself in front of an unworthy woman». And the character of an unworthy woman is cleverly constructed by the newspaper *il Giornale*, that will particularly stress references to the personality and private life of the magistrate.

Let's see some examples. As mentioned above, *il Giornale* is the newspaper that publishes the largest number of articles in which the term «Boccassini» appears in the period analyzed. Most of these articles are concentrated in the period preceding Berlusconi's indictment. In particular, already on 11 January 2011, when *il Giornale* has not yet published news on the Ruby case (the first articles are dated 12 January), an article was published with the title: «The Boccassini team's blunder», emphasizing a mistake made by PM Paolo Storari in the request for the release of Giovanni Valdes, former rightist mayor of Borgarello (Pavia), accused of auction disruption. It does not emerge from the article that Ilda Boccassini had a role in this case, but with a skilful semantic shift, the title attributes the responsibility to her. Moreover, the mistake is not mentioned as such but is defined as a «blunder», implying the unreliability and lack of competence of the judge, in a process of total delegitimization.

The article is emblematic of the communication strategy carried out by *il Giornale* with particular intensity up to the indictment of Berlusconi on February 15, 2011, and which remains identical in all the articles analyzed. It is a communication strategy aimed at «building the reader» (Salmon, 2007; Eco, 1979), that is, to equip her/him with those skills necessary to cooperate in the narrative world proposed by the author; in this case, to frame the Ruby case through the frame of the «political theorem», an interpretative framework that can be summarized with the statement: «where the political opposition fails in the elections, the red robes enter the scene». In particular, a timely article by the director of *il Giornale* Alessandro Sallusti dictates the storytelling plot to be disclosed and the list of elements that constitute a defense of the then Prime Minister Berlusconi, elements that will be variously declined and highlighted in the numerous articles to follow. The title and the buttonhole read:

The ambush: judges helping the left. Boccassini spies on Arcore's guests and reopens the Ruby case: Berlusconi accused of aiding and abetting prostitution for an intercepted chit-chat. (Sallusti, 15 January 2011)

It can be noticed that the author proposed a clever semantic shift from the «judges» to «the spy Boccassini». The term «judges», which suggests a function and does not designate specific people, is illustrated with a very precise image, the known magistrate who «spies», therefore performs an unworthy action that immediately qualifies her in a negative way.

The beginning of the article continues:

It is not an attempted coup but close. The ambush set yesterday by the Milan prosecutor for the Prime Minister.

The initial litotes is cleverly used to introduce the «politicized justice theorem» and the narrative becomes more and more figurative and captivating². Sallusti continues:

² C. Salmon (2007) considers concreteness and the invocation to emotions as the key characteristics of effective storytelling.

There is a girl, Ruby, who made the headlines two months ago ... And there is another woman, the prosecutor Ilda Boccassini (who has been targeting Berlusconi for 16 years with undisguised hatred) who has unleashed hell to sustain the existence of a crime that the same alleged victim [Ruby] categorically excludes.

This carousel of suggestive characters is functional to the construction of the narrative role of the antagonist, of the «villain», in this case in the guise of a powerful woman who has long hated Silvio Berlusconi and who would do anything («unleash hell» on the basis of «chit-chats») in order to destroy him.

The symmetrical narrative role, that of a good and persecuted hero - who in any case will be the winner, as in the best fairy tales - is perfect for Silvio Berlusconi, and will be enriched with details in subsequent articles in which the Prime Minister is portrayed as a concentrate of strength, patience and, if you really want to find a fault that sometimes gets him into trouble, who is too generous and compassionate, as it was with the «Olgettine» (the girls allegedly invited to his parties).

This is the basic script that organizes the storytelling proposed by *il Giornale* based on the frame of the «political theorem», and that will be developed coherently in the articles examined, in which Ilda Boccassini is the chosen one to build an effective narrative, and against who *il Giornale* unleashes the so-called «mud machine». Using allusions, various types of arguments, inferences and labels such as «Ilda the Red», Ilda Boccassini's integrity - both human and professional - is questioned on several levels.

If the first article of our corpus in which the name Boccassini appears in *il Giornale* attributes incompetence and unreliability, the ones immediately following describe her as undisciplined and neurotic. A short article dated January 16, 2011, traces a portrait of her, citing a statement by judge Saverio Borrelli in 1991, when he left the *Mani Pulite* pool due to disputes with colleagues. It is a story of many years before, dusted off for the occasion:

The colleague Ilda Boccassini demonstrated a lack of nervous control, an irrepressible charge of subjectivism, an unwillingness to share results, reflections, intentions.

In the following few lines, the columnist closes by delivering this question to the readers: «*Has she changed in twenty years?*».

The answer is obvious, and the attack is powerful, an attack based not on the current case - the Ruby trial, which is not even mentioned - but through a thorough investigation of all aspects of the magistrate's entire life, sifted through in order to be used against her and delegitimizing her work. So, in the following days *il Giornale* will circulate some minutes dating back to 1981, in which Boccassini's superiors discuss whether some of her «loving attitudes» towards a *Lotta Continua* (a leftist newspaper) journalist were inappropriate, and then deciding that there were no extremes to sanction said behaviors. Despite the filing of the case, and the fact that thirty years that have passed, *il Giornale* focuses on the story, emphasizing both the «lack of morality» of the magistrate and her proximity to the extreme left, writing in a headline:

The accusation against Boccassini and those evening checks in the judges' rooms. Here are the minutes with the complaints of the former chief prosecutor: «inappropriate and compromising behavior». (27 January 2011)

Another «case» that is raised concerns the son of Ilda Boccassini, who was sued in 1997 for a fight in front of a nightclub. Although there is no evidence of an intervention by the magistrate in favor of her son, the journalists of *il Giornale*, Vittorio Sgarbi in the lead, argue that any mother would do anything for her son, it is therefore legitimate to assume that she too did help him and for this her son was only granted a little sanction.

The extreme attention paid to the private life of a professional like Boccassini is part of a type of journalistic activity that «chooses and administers its sources in relation to the effects it intends to produce. [...] Behind the degeneration of trashy journalism, however, there is a much more foundational plan that builds the repertoires of meaning» (Priulla, 2004). So, in line with the findings of Escobar-Lemmon *et al.* (2016) and Kahn (1996), the gender coverage does not focus so much on the professionalism and experience as a judge of the subject in question, but rather on irrelevant factors such as personal and family life.

The narrative constructed by *il Giornale* on the Ruby case can be read on several levels, and therefore address more «naive» or more informed readers.³ There is a simpler level, which reduces everything to two characters, the magistrate and the premier, and a more complex one, in which we talk about clockwork justice, due to the proximity of the investigations to the elections, a deviated judiciary and therefore a wider panorama in the relationship between justice and politics. The two levels of interpretation integrate and reinforce each other, and the label of «Ilda The Red», in the apparently harmless form of a simple appellation, is a powerful synthesis of the attack on the integrity of the magistrate, since it attributes her at the same time both the political partisanship and the stereotypical connotations associated with ginger hair, which can indicate: malice, falseness, aggression, instability. It should be noted that while this expression («Ilda, The Red») is used several times in the articles of *il Giornale*, it never appears in *la Repubblica*, and appears only twice in *Corriere della Sera* (June 19 and November 9, 2011) and twice in *La Stampa* (16 April and 15 June 2011), and always as a quotation from *il Giornale*.

3.2. *La Repubblica*: the frame of «Legitimacy of the investigations» and the absence of a counter-narrative referring to Ilda Boccassini

The second newspaper in terms of number of articles in our corpus is *la Repubblica*. Here, too, the representation of Ilda Boccassini is part of the journalistic coverage of the «Ruby case», which *la Repubblica* frames in a completely different way than *il Giornale*.

How is the narrative of the Ruby case elaborated by this newspaper and what role does the magistrate play in it? In the first articles of January 2011, Ilda Boccassini is always cited as one of the three judges who conduct the investigations (Boccassini, Forno, Sangermano, all three always listed in alphabetical order) and she is not attributed any particular qualities or roles. The focus of the narrative

³ On the definition of «naive» and «informed» reader, see U. Eco (1979).

is on the suspect Silvio Berlusconi, on the hypotheses of crime and on the possible consequences of the scandal on the political scenario.

Ilda Boccassini's representation begins to change on *la Repubblica* on January 23, when the writer Roberto Saviano dedicates his law degree received *honoris causa* from the University of Genoa to the pool that investigates the Ruby case, arousing many indignant reactions including that of Marina Berlusconi, Silvio's daughter. It is at that point that numerous articles in *la Repubblica* begin to contest the «mud machine» set in motion by *il Giornale* and Ilda Boccassini's name begins to appear on its own, as if she were the only protagonist of the investigations. The prosecutor Edmondo Bruti Liberati, expressing his solidarity with Boccassini, declares:

In consideration of the delicacy of the matter, the Public Prosecutor constantly and fully monitors all the investigation activities, which he personally coordinated and consequently took full responsibility. (*la Repubblica*, 28 January 2001)

This declaration, and the related claim of leading role by Liberati, however, will not produce changes in the representation of Ilda Boccassini offered by *il Giornale*, while it is observed that more and more, even in *la Repubblica*, her name will appear on its own, and not as a member of the pool, indicating her as the only protagonist of the investigations, a functional element to the communication strategy of *il Giornale*.

Two other significant factors for communication are associated with this. The first is the fact that, while contesting the «mud machine», the arguments in defense of Ilda Boccassini are abstract, indirect, referring to the category of magistrates and to the principles of law and not to her as an individual, with the effect of constructing generic statements, not very effective from a communicative point of view (Lakoff 1996; 2004). The second is the fact that *la Repubblica*, to contest the statements of *il Giornale*, takes them up and repeats them, thus granting them an even wider dissemination, and bringing the debate to the opponent's terrain. Instead of building new frames to be offered to the reader, «*la Repubblica*» tries to demolish those of the adversary, an operation which generally has little communicative effectiveness.

Thus, *la Repubblica* - albeit with a polemical tone - reports that:

Ravetto [a Forza Italia's deputy] publishes posts of «Boccassini clochard» on Facebook. [...] The photo of the prosecutor Ilda Boccassini in clochard version on the Facebook page of the undersecretary for relations with the Parliament Laura Ravetto. With the caption: «The prosecutor, after having exhausted the entire budget of the Milan prosecutor to intercept Berlusconi, has taken steps to raise additional funds, useful for the prosecution of the investigation». (*la Repubblica*, 30 April 2011)

Or, leaving again space to those who criticize the judge:

In a rally, in the main square, Santanché [a Forza Italia's deputy] fires on Boccassini «She is a metastasis of democracy». (10 May 2011)

On the contrary, in the articles of *la Repubblica* it is possible to find references to Ilda Boccassini's professional successes, with reference to the mafia investigations that she conducted and successfully concluded: thus, on 1 December 2011, Roberto Saviano explains:

The Boccassini method, heir to the Falcone [a notorious anti-mafia judge] method, is characterized by a widespread search for evidence and a prudent rigor in communicating investigations to the media: nothing starts from sensations or from wiretapping only, or from the statements of collaborators of justice.

Even in this case, however, there is no concrete reference to the Boccassini's character, no note that can produce empathy in the reader or arouse some other passion: the reference is to something rational and abstract like «the method», and moreover a method that was not elaborated by Ilda Boccassini herself but «inherited» by a mythical figure like that of Falcone.

Another article in *la Repubblica* by Natalia Aspesi instead differs from the others, and reporting the first day of the Ruby trial writes:

Women [...] those who in the Tribunal commit intelligence, experience and love for justice: almost a cruel nightmare for a *tombour des femmes* who must find himself uneasy in front of self-made ladies, who did not need his generous professional and financial help; the Court is made up of three female magistrates (Carmen D'Elia, Orsola De Cristoforo, President Giulia Turri), and a female assistant prosecutor (Ilda Boccassini). (*la Repubblica*, 7 April 2011)

In this representation, the journalist does not think of answering back the arguments of *il Giornale* but elaborates her own representation (women who built their career without external help) and cites qualities like intelligence, experience, love for justice. The frame built by Natalia Aspesi appears effective in the representation of the female figures present in the Court, but once again it is not focused on Ilda Boccassini *per se*: she is only a figure among the others. Her positive representation in this article of *la Repubblica* does not therefore contribute to creating her own character, while in the smear campaign of *il Giornale* her negative profile emerges in a clear and easily identifiable way.

In summary, what is found in the articles of *la Repubblica* here examined is the absence of an autonomous counter-narrative referring to the figure of Ilda Boccassini. *la Repubblica* chooses to contest the statements of *il Giornale* with abstract arguments of a general nature, such as the right / duty of the judiciary to carry out investigations. The newspaper also expresses disdain at the mud machine set in motion by *il Giornale*, but in doing so, it repeats some of the opponent's statements and constructs the character of the magistrate as a victim of insults. As pointed out by Lakoff (1996; 2004), this type of communication strategy – often adopted by progressives in the US context – can be ineffective, since instead of proposing its own vision, it focuses on demolishing the opponent's theses. This operation involves the citation and dissemination of these theses, and therefore itself strengthens them.

3.3. The secondary role of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*

In the representation of the magistrate Boccassini, as well as in the entire Ruby case, the *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* – two more centrist news outlets, with less clear political affiliation than *il*

Giornale and *la Repubblica* – do not play an original role and do not elaborate their own frames, but are limited to reporting the positions of the various parties involved, also through numerous quotes from other newspapers. For example, the *Corriere della Sera* of January 28, 2011, commented on *il Giornale*⁴:

It is the grammar of «journalism of retaliation»: if you invade my private sphere, I am authorized to destroy yours. But it is a bogus equation. And if it is believed that intrusions into a person's private sphere are barbaric, justifying it as a «counter-barbarism» does not cancel the previous barbarism, it simply doubles it.

However, this does not correspond to a clear stance of «Il Corriere» against the smear campaign against Boccassini. In fact, on February 11 it reports the words of Fabrizio Cicchitto, the group leader of Berlusconi's party at the Chamber of Deputies:

I am for the total respect of private life. But I am not convinced by these bigots who first discovered the playful dimension of life in 1968, and now engage in the role of censors.

Again, on February 16, 2011:

For Cicchitto «it is really appropriate to talk about clockwork justice, because for Berlusconi it is very fast, even instantaneous justice. Democracy is at risk because the popular vote is questioned, as well as the legitimately elected government [...]. There is a risk of overturning the electoral result with a media and judicial operation, carried out by Boccassini and which is disturbing. [...] Santanché summarizes, «Boccassini should take the field and stand as a leader of the center-left».

The position of the news outlet *La Stampa* is similar, characterized by an even more chronicle-oriented style, intended to give news of the developments of the affair and to report the declarations of the various parties involved. The articles that mention Boccassini's name are far fewer in number than in the other newspapers (69), and only in two letters by the readers clear positions in favor or against the judge can be found. We mention them here to give an idea of the tenor of the opinions expressed:

The unification of Italy owes a lot to Cavour, and Cavour owes a lot to the «escort of the time», the Countess of Castiglione: It can be said that Cavour, Napoleon Bonaparte, Nigra and Castiglione are at the root of united Italy. This year we celebrate them ... perhaps Boccassini would take them to trial. (*La Stampa*, 26 gennaio 2011)

On a completely different note, another reader:

Dear Dr. Boccassini, as a citizen I want to thank you for the extraordinary work you are doing in Lombardy against the expansion of the 'Ndrangheta [mafia] in northern Italy. And I also want to thank you for the investigations with which, in 2007, you foiled an attack against Mediaset that could have had dramatic consequences for the people – some friends and colleagues as well –

4 «Boccassini; Il commento; gli (Sterili) Colpi Proibiti per Demolire l'Avversario» («Boccassini; The comment; the (Sterile) Forbidden Blows to Demolish the Adversary»).

with whom I have been working for years. Recently much more illustrious writers than me have attacked you for the color of your hair, arrogantly red, or for a kiss given to a boyfriend 30 years ago ... I think that you have always done only what your duty imposed on you - as evidenced by the blitz against the new red Brigades in 2007 - and that if there is a judge who deserves neither the «Boffo treatment» nor the «Mesiano treatment»⁵, it is you. We are the only country in Europe that has had 24 judges massacred by organized crime and also the only one in which a woman who risks her life every day by fighting it gets ridiculed. (12 febbraio 2011)

These two letters lead to two considerations: the first is that they offer the testimony of how the readers of *La Stampa* may have opposing opinions on Boccassini, which is unlikely to happen for the readers of *il Giornale* or *la Repubblica*, confirming that *La Stampa* has not promoted its own storytelling in this regard.

The second consideration is that very positive representations of Ilda Boccassini have also circulated in the public opinion, based on her career and her considerable commitment against organized crime. This is clear in the letter of February 12 cited above, as well as in news articles that report demonstrations of support and esteem for Boccassini expressed by groups of citizens on the occasion of the Ruby trial.

An alternative narrative of the magistrate to that constructed by *il Giornale* is therefore not only possible but is also shared by a certain number of readers; however, not even *la Repubblica* gives emphasis to these views, nor does it use them as materials for a counter-narrative.

4. Conclusion

The scientific literature on the representation of female judges in the media is extremely incomplete. This study seeks to offer a contribution on the subject, analyzing the representation of the magistrate Ilda Boccassini in the articles published by four Italian newspapers in 2011, during the investigations and trial relating to the «Ruby case», in which the then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was accused of extortion and child prostitution.

The main point of view through which all the newspapers under analysis represented the judge relates to her presumed competence-professionalism, resulting absent or present depending on the newspaper under analysis. In particular, *il Giornale* and *la Repubblica*, which are at the extremes of the political spectrum in terms of affiliation of the newspaper, dictate the most effective narratives, which are taken up, confirmed or denied, also by *La Stampa* and the *Corriere della Sera*.

The frame chosen by *il Giornale* was that of the «political theorem», according to which the left, which failed to defeat Berlusconi at the polls, would resort to the «red robes»- politicized judges- to do so. In this narrative Boccassini becomes an anti-hero, a persecutor of Berlusconi. Through a series of articles concentrated in the period preceding Berlusconi's indictment, the magistrate is portrayed as incompetent, emotionally unstable, self-centered and sick of protagonism, persecutor

⁵ Terminology that became common in the journalistic language to indicate cases of smear campaigns, as those suffered by the journalist Dino Boffo and the judge Raimondo Mesiano, who were subject to a press campaign of «Il Giornale» taking place against them after writing/investigating against Silvio Berlusconi.

and hater of Silvio Berlusconi, a person of dubious morality, spy, friend of the left. The label «Ilda the Red» label, used several times by *il Giornale*, represents the synthesis of this media operation and stigmatizes Ilda Boccassini as a deviant judge.

la Repubblica, on the contrary, chooses the frame of the «legitimacy of the investigations», highlighting factual elements that justify the action of the magistrates (wiretapping, hypothesis of crime) and highlighting how Boccassini is the victim of strong attacks by her opponents, who through references to her private life try to delegitimize her. The frame built by *la Repubblica* is aimed at contrasting the frame of the «Political Theorem» and at supporting the «Legitimacy of the investigations». The newspaper therefore places itself in a position of follower, measuring itself on the same ground prepared by *il Giornale*.

Similarly, the other two newspapers examined, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, do not elaborate original frames but merely report alternatively those proposed by *la Repubblica* and *il Giornale*.

How to interpret these results? A first factor that clearly emerges is the political instrumentalization of the narrative on the judge, which has already been noted in the literature. Studies that deal with media coverage of corruption have shown the existence of a strong political exploitation of judicial events, which concerns Italy in particular (Mancini, 2018; Mazzoni *et al.*, 2017; Mancini & Mazzoni, 2016). In recent decades the representation of the Italian judiciary shifted from the exaltation of judges who work on cases of strong public interest (e.g., the *Mani pulite* pool) to a growing conflict between the judicial body and the political elite, a conflict that often involves politicization and exploitation of the media representation of the professional category of judges (Priulla, 2004).

The representation of the judge Ilda Boccassini is located within this general trend, but the analysis carried out also allows for the identification of gender discrimination. In fact, among the numerous magistrates involved in the investigation of the Ruby case, *il Giornale* chooses to expose Ilda Boccassini to the media pillory because, as a woman, she was the most functional character to cover the role of the anti-hero, for several reasons. First, the very fact of not being a man constitutes an element of singularity, and therefore greater visibility, to those who stand out in a traditionally male environment⁶. Furthermore, gender prejudices are more easily attributed to a female figure, undermining her integrity and authority, these stereotypes being: her emotional instability, lack of competence in traditionally male sectors, irrationality that makes feelings prevail over reason, a greater aptitude for the private sphere which corresponds to a fundamental inadequacy for the public sphere, motherhood before any other duty. Finally, being «weak subject», a woman constitutes a not fearsome enemy, who can be mocked, with whom confrontation can be refused confrontation (e.g., not sitting in front of her, as affirmed by Berlusconi).

6 In Escobar-Lemmon *et al.* (2016) it is noted that in the case of women appointed to high positions in the judiciary, the press emphasizes the fact that she is the «first» or «second woman» to hold that office, to the detriment of other characteristics such as competence, merit, etc.

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