

## Scandal, Motherhood and Mina in 1960s Italy

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Celebrity scandals are a useful tool to reveal the pervasiveness of expected ways of behaving within a particular culture or society. Italy of the early 1960s was particularly marked by these kinds of scandals, including that of singer Mina's pregnancy by Corrado Pani in 1963. This article takes this scandal as a case study to explore how star image in this period in Italy was influenced by the established ideologies that governed social convention, morality, and traditional gender roles. It examines in detail the ways in which the popular press reported on this scandal, using the reports that covered the announcement of the pregnancy and then the birth to cast light on the extent to which the mainstream social values and ideas regarding the status quo and expected ways of behaving for women in Italy during the early 1960s were destabilised and/or reasserted through the star persona of Mina.

**Keywords:** Mina; celebrity scandal; star image; status quo; gender roles; social expectations

### Introduction

Mina (born Anna Maria Mazzini, 1940) is a prolific Italian pop singer whose rise to fame occurred at the end of the 1950s. She was especially popular from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and her status with Italian audiences was cemented during the 1960s in particular by her continuous participation in RAI's Saturday night variety television shows. Indeed, her rise to national fame had been mediated through the small screen, beginning with guest appearances on two of the most popular programmes of the late 1950s in Italy: *Il musicchiere* and *Lascia o raddoppia?* By the time she took on her first recurrent role on television, becoming in 1961 the host and leading star of the first series of *Studio Uno*, Mina had already been labelled by the press as the 'national star' (Guerrini 1961, 12) of the moment.

Yet although she was cast on *Studio Uno* as the demure starlet and respectable young woman, Mina's star status of this period was more contradictory than might first appear. Her image was in fact informed by her early career as an *urlatrice* and modern pop star, thanks to the influence in particular of American pop and rock 'n' roll. She was presented by the media as the lively, modern young woman from Cremona, who lived a celebrity lifestyle with fast cars, cigarettes, and late nights out dancing. Her many different love interests were also the focus of magazine and newspaper articles. Indeed, her ability to shock her audience, be it through her performance style, outfit, current relationship, or interview response, had by 1961 earned her the nickname 'the tiger of Cremona'. Even if her star image had softened by the time of her television appearances on *Studio Uno*, as she embraced more obviously in her performances the traditional

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*canzone italiana* genre, she was still known to Italian audiences as ‘Mina: a very modern singer’ (n.a. 1962, n.p.).

One particular aspect of Mina’s private life illustrates the extent of her modernity: in January 1963, Mina announced she was expecting a baby with Corrado Pani, a married actor with whom she had been having an affair. It is important to place this announcement within the context of 1960s’ Italy, where divorce and abortion had not yet been legalised, and the influence of the Church and the Christian Democrat government resulted in the promotion of traditional domestic roles for Italian women. As a result of the socially transgressive nature of the pregnancy, the story received much media coverage throughout the year, as Pani sought to annul his marriage, and Mina prepared for motherhood. In particular, several feature articles were published in January 1963 in reaction to the announcement, and in April and May 1963, after baby Massimiliano was born.

The present article takes as its case study these reports, and examines in detail the ways in which the popular press reported on this scandal, in order to explore the clash of values that the pregnancy represented. Perry Willson explains that the early 1960s was the period in which there were ‘fears about the erosion of the family, the loss of parental authority over children, “juvenile delinquency”, the confusion of classes, the loss of moral and spiritual values in a period of unbridled materialism, and the spectre of the Americanisation of society’ (Willson 2010, 123). As a consequence, there was a renewed emphasis on women’s maternal role and the importance of the family. And in this period, ‘gender hierarchies remained essentially intact, albeit not unchanged’ (113). For example, although young women in particular experienced an increase in freedom, ‘approved sexuality for women was still located within marriage or, at most, as a prelude to marriage’ (126). This meant that extramarital sex and pregnancy were perceived as going against the dominant moral code of the period, which functioned to reinforce the perceived traditional roles for women as housewives and mothers. These conservative roles were informed by a politically-reinforced moral code that governed the accepted ways of behaving and ‘being woman’ in Italy in the 1960s.

This social conservatism clashed with the modernity of Mina’s star image. Her transgressive behaviour as an *urlatrice*, a sexually active woman, and, in 1963, an unmarried mother, posed a threat to the social and gender conventions of 1960s Italy. Writing about Italian stars in general, Stephen Gundle has pointed to the significance of their apparent ‘function as a cultural symbol and conduit for ideas about gender, values and national identity’ (2008, 263). As far as Mina is concerned, the ideas she came to symbolise by 1963 were two-fold, both highlighting and challenging established attitudes regarding gender and values in Italy in the early 1960s. The reporting on the pregnancy scandal then became the playing out of this challenge. In their volume on media scandals, Lull and Hinerman posit that ‘the scandal functions simultaneously as a moral anchor in a sea of conventionality, and as a vigorous challenge to mainstream social values conditioned by the substantial forces of ideological and cultural hegemony’ (1997, 2). Mina’s pregnancy scandal, then, was inherently contradictory and thus a useful tool through which to explore the ways in which stars come to signify as national symbols, and the extent to which they represent dominant and subaltern cultural ideas and values.

This process was clearly informed in this case by Mina’s ‘national star’ status, or more precisely her star image, in 1963. Regarding star image in general, Dyer points out:

Star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to ‘manage’ or resolve. In exceptional cases, it has been argued that certain stars, far from managing contradictions, either expose them or embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position (itself usually contradictory) to dominant ideology. (Dyer 1998, 34)

Thus it is the coming-together of Mina's star image with the established ways of behaving and 'being woman' that allows us to identify emergent contradictions within the established ideologies at work in Italy in this period. Specifically, and as this article will demonstrate, Mina's case points to the presence within Italian culture of 'non-traditional' gender behaviours and ways of being woman. But Mina's scandal was not unique in this period in Italy. Other prominent examples of extra-marital pregnancies include: in cinema, Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini in 1950; in television, Carla Gravina and Gian Maria Volonté in 1961; and in music and entertainment, Marisa Del Frate and Tonino Micheluzzi in 1962.<sup>1</sup> Together, these scandals illustrate the broader turn towards modernity in Italy by the early 1960s.

### Scandals in the popular press

As far as the reporting of Mina's scandal is concerned, this article analyses the reports published in *rotocalchi* (magazines) during 1963. The specific titles considered are: *Gente*, *Oggi*, *Tempo*, *Amica*, *Grazia*, *Lo Specchio*, *L'Espresso*, *Epoca*, and *ABC*.<sup>2</sup> These magazines were *settimanali di attualità* (weekly news reviews); they had a national readership and their content was guided by national political or social concerns rather than local or regional preoccupations. They constituted examples of 'light reading' (Ajello 1976, 176), with articles written in a colloquial or romanticised style. Register and language use was determined by the target audience, which tended to be composed of 'ordinary people' (176). Finally, in addition to news articles, these publications also tended to feature opinion pieces, didactic essays, and publicity materials. The apparent function of such publications begins to explain this choice of content: Ajello suggests that a *rotocalco*

adheres to a vision of the world that is removed from successful laws and instead linked to immediately political considerations. Overall, each illustrated periodical more or less openly reinforces and exploits the political and cultural tendencies of its readers, who constitute a particular sector of society and represent national opinion. (Ajello 1976, 176)

However, the *rotocalchi* also, paradoxically, offer their readers a lifestyle to aspire to, which can at times be seen to contradict pre-established political, cultural, and social attitudes. And, as Morris (2004) has demonstrated in the case of *Epoca* and Alba de Céspedes in the 1950s, the nature of the articles included in these publications could also be determined by the aims of a particular journalist, seeking perhaps to highlight and offer alternatives to the established tendencies of the period. Such publications thus become a useful tool through which to analyse the changes and developments of Italian society in this period. Ajello suggests that 'the periodical press overall is able to offer a *diagnosis* of Italian ways of life, or at least a sociological exploration that is credible for its readers' (Ajello 1976, 176). It is for this reason that the present article does not focus on the differences in approaches adopted by the publications due to political allegiance, geographic provenance or target audience. Rather, by pursuing an overview of all the approaches of these publications to the scandal, it is possible to explore how Mina's star status related to the Italian ways of life of this period. In addition, whilst we must bear in mind that an investigation of articles in magazines can only ever offer comment on the nature of the target audience, and not of actual readers, such analysis is nevertheless useful in understanding the significance of star status, and the construction and dissemination of ideals and values regarding morality, social convention, and, in this case in particular, gender norms, in 1960s' Italy.

### A scandalous announcement

The news of Mina's pregnancy was first reported in a *rotocalco* by *Gente* on 18 January 1963. A further ten articles were then printed during the remainder of the month, which together allow

the reader to understand the facts and context of the story. By January 1963, it was no secret that Mina was in a relationship with Corrado Pani. Several reports reminded the reader that Pani's marriage to Renata Monteduro had broken down months prior to his meeting Mina. Yet up to 18 January, the two had denied that they were in a relationship; this was despite the publication in the *rotocalchi* of photographs of the couple together at multiple locations during 1962 that suggested precisely the opposite. Mina's announcement of her pregnancy, then, was confirmation of this 'open secret'. However, as well as updating the public on the developments of the story, the articles of January 1963 also serve to encapsulate a range of reactions to the pregnancy and to the scandal that it represented. As a result of the law in Italy at the time governing what happened to children born out of wedlock, Mina's baby would have the status of *figlio naturale* and, as such, would carry only the mother's surname. Pani would not have been able to recognise or adopt the baby as his, despite assertions made to the contrary by some of the articles published at the start of 1963. At best, he could claim affiliation with the baby, which involved a difficult legal process that would last several years.

Given the transgressive nature of the pregnancy, it is perhaps no surprise that several reports disapproved of Mina's forthcoming maternity. Articles in *Amica*, *L'Espresso*, and *ABC* implicitly and explicitly criticised Mina's behaviour, which flouted the established ideas about gender, value and identity of the period, going against the status quo in terms of behaviour and morality. In order to fully appreciate the significance of a celebrity scandal, Lull and Hinerman explain that we must be aware that 'the private act(s) in which stars engage [...] are interpreted according to the dominant morality, but they are simultaneously relativized in terms of the moral character and boundaries of the star's complex image system' (1997, 22). These established ways of behaving and the resultant ideas regarding dominant morality in this case form the backdrop against which Mina's behaviour was measured, but the negative interpretation offered in these articles is also dependent on the reader's awareness of Mina's star image. In *Amica*, we are clearly reminded that we should be shocked by Mina's announcement: 'the whole of Italy that is a fan of pop songs – and indirectly the rest of Italy too, given that the protagonist of this story has become a national idol – got worked up last week at the bombshell piece of news that Mina, the signer with the backcombed hairdo, is expecting a baby in April' ('I celebri bebè del 63' 1963, 20). We can only appreciate the wider implications of this bombshell if we remain aware of the fact that the protagonist of this story is a national idol. This status suggests that Mina in some way embodies what it means to be Italian. Thus her flouting of Italian ideas and values, which are reified as such on a national scale by the print media, not only challenges these ideas and values but also the very fabric of the nation. It is for this reason that the journalist stresses:

However, the behaviour of the future mother has seemed all too casual; OK, this kind of thing can happen and it is not right to point the finger and blame anyone. But on this occasion, a more reserved tone might be desirable. Instead Mina, like the good shouty singer that she is, has not had the courtesy to extend a veil of modesty over her story that, at other moments, would have made anyone shout 'scandal'. ('I celebri bebè del 63' 1963, 20)

Although apparently demonstrating an understanding attitude regarding Mina's situation and showing no desire to condemn her, the very mention of criticism, the 'but' that opens the second sentence, and the indication of Mina's bad taste in her lack of modesty, suggest that in fact the reader is encouraged to not understand and rather to criticise Mina's handling of the announcement. As a star, more is expected of her; she should appreciate the necessity to adhere to social conventions by not drawing attention to her transgressive behaviour. Her decision to not keep quiet and thus her lack of modesty enable us to identify this as a scandalous event. As Lull and Hinerman explain, in a scandal, 'the secrets of desire are unlocked; the curtains of privacy are

pulled back. The unspoken is articulated, observed, and pondered' (1997, 3). In the context of Italian society, where the ideas of 'woman as mother' and woman as symbol and protector of the family were identifiable in the constitution and in the political and social discourse of the period, where women caught in adultery risked being sent to prison, and where children born out of wedlock had to bear the 'considerable stigma' of illegitimacy (Morris 2006, 3–4),<sup>3</sup> the public disclosure of the pregnancy constituted a breaking of social taboos. Not only was an extramarital pregnancy an example of behaviours that went against those that were expected for young women, but Mina's decision to speak in public of her forthcoming maternity and her adulterous relationship with Pani elicited a public discussion of what was a private matter. The very act of talking about her pregnancy constituted a break with social conventions and thus challenged the mainstream social values of the time, which deemed this type of situation taboo. This identification of the event as scandal was reinforced by Mina's star status, and by the comparison of her case with those of other women, and the revelation of the resultant paradoxical handling of these 'scandals' ('I celebri bebè del 63' 1963, 20).

The treatment of these other cases was the focus of the report in *L'Espresso*. Here, in her gossip column *Il lato debole*, which commented on and satirised the alleged regressive nature of Italian society in the period, the journalist Camilla Cederna described the emerging trend in the Italian media that dictated how such scandals were to be reported. The reader is told:

The rights for love. The rights of the reporters. The right to make your own life. The courage of your own actions. These are phrases that we hear repeated or that we read every day, especially with regard to the public's favourite stars who, recently, give birth or decide to have children when more or less married (usually rather 'less' than 'more'). (Cederna 1963, 20)

There were clearly more of these cases happening in Italy, as they were reported regularly by the press, which indicates the ways in which Italian society was changing in this period. Yet this trend in reporting focused on the rights of the individual to fall in love and have a family with whomever they please, and the satire with which these 'more or less' married individuals were portrayed illustrates the extent to which Cederna saw this as negative. This is because it appears that the individual is held in higher regard than society at large, and so individual 'deviant' morality is protected over the dominant morality of Italian society. Cederna reminds us that Mina's pregnancy in particular goes against the ideals of the time. As such, it is right that 'the down-to-earth reader feels a little shocked' (1963, 20) when Mina declares herself to be proud of her courageous decision to announce her news, or happy to be choosing baby names or eating for two. Ultimately, Cederna concludes:

'Strong and courageous' are therefore the adjectives that the Tiger has used to gratify herself and I can swear that in the newspapers, from this point onwards, we will be seeing masses of these strong and courageous little girls. (Cederna 1963, 20)

The fashion for reporting all phases of these illegitimate pregnancies to the press reinforced the idea that merely talking about such situations posed a challenge to society, and could result in only one thing: more young girls in the same predicament. The irony of the inverted commas here reveals that this is an unacceptable and shocking situation, thus reasserting conventional morality as the social norm, and suggests that Mina is behaving selfishly by not acting in a manner becoming to a national symbol, and thus is challenging these social norms.

Yet not all articles present Mina and her pregnancy in an entirely negative light. Reports in *Epoca* and *Lo Specchio* sought to explore the paradoxical elements of the story. In *Epoca*, for example, the journalist evokes sympathy for both Mina and Pani whilst simultaneously reinforcing social norms and highlighting the extent to which the couple has transgressed the

status quo. The headline and subtitle contextualise the article thus: 'For them, life is just a song. Mina and Pani caught between scandalous censure and satisfied absolution: two ill-prepared protagonists of a serious affair that they have not really understood' ('Per loro la vita è solo una canzone?', 1963, 62). The two lovers are ill-prepared for the severity of the situation in which they now find themselves. The naivety with which they have acted and the way in which they have divided public opinion are a reminder of the established moral code of the period. Indeed, the extent to which the reader should empathise with Mina and Pani is called into question as the article describes their lavish lifestyle and how they do not want for anything. We see that they have failed in their roles as stars to uphold the established way of behaving and there is then a sense of disappointment in Mina and Pani's apparent lack of responsibility. In her analysis of female film stars of the 1950s in Italy, Buckley explains that 'the[se] film stars, as working women who often married and had children while at the peak of their profession, were caught in multiple contradictions. In many ways they offered new role models but they were also pressured to conform to conventional expectations' (Buckley 2006, 36). As a popular music star, Mina was held up to the same scrutiny. Ultimately, it was her personal deviation from her public star image, which connoted an established expectation regarding ways of behaving, that had brought about this situation and prevented Mina (and importantly Pani, who was held to the same standard despite his gender) from truly grasping the legal and moral severity of the situation. The article then functions as a warning to readers to not be deceived by celebrity and success as Mina and Pani have, nor to follow the example of these stars who were previously perceived as role models.

A similar warning to readers featured in the article published in *Lo Specchio*. Here, the journalist Olghina di Robilant worried about how many girls would follow Mina's example and seek an 'adventure outside of conventions and common morals' (Di Robilant 1963, 36). Although the article disapproved of Mina's 'bad example', and showed a certain level of concern for the morality of future generations, it appears that here the scandal was not seen as entirely negative. This is perhaps because, in her private life, di Robilant herself was no stranger to scandal: it was at her birthday party in 1958 that the infamous photographs of Aiche Nana's striptease were taken and subsequently published in *L'Espresso*. The photographs quickly become synonymous with the excesses of 'la dolce vita' of Italy in the late 1950s. Di Robilant herself also had a child out of wedlock in 1959. Yet her attitude towards Mina in the article quoted here demonstrates much more the conservative attitude of the magazine for which she was writing. Thus it appears that this is a story that would sell well and attract readers, thereby affording di Robilant the opportunity to admonish the younger generation. Her apparently benevolent paternalism towards them is seen in the way in which Mina's headstrong behaviour and arrogance are highlighted as the reasons why she would want to challenge social convention. Yet 'Mina's case is different, in that she has become a kind of national monument and her example runs the risk of being more dangerous than the others' (Di Robilant 1963). Again, the idea of Mina as national star is evoked here: as a national figurehead, Mina arguably represents the values and ideals that were quintessentially Italian (whatever these may be). As such, she is held to a higher standard for other women to emulate. This is an example of apparently benevolent paternalism. Di Robilant appears to reprimand Mina from a position of caring authority: she is seemingly knowledgeable and well-informed enough to be able to read Mina's behaviour as transgressive and thus is able to warn other female readers to not follow suit. Yet such an attitude assumes a level of control over women's bodies, their reproductive rights, and their role within society; this supposition is informed by the established ideas about behaving and 'being woman' of the time, when 'the role of the family and identification of women primarily with it remained strong' (Willson 2010, 129). This was primarily thanks to the approaches of the two main political parties in this period, the DC

and the PCI, both of which ‘emphasised women’s maternal role, had quite “traditional” ideas about the private sphere and presented themselves as defenders of the family’ (129).

It is this gender status quo that di Robilant draws upon in her article, and which informs her reading of Mina’s behaviour as transgressive. She explains to her readers that

Mina has decided to become a mother by linking herself to the principles of love and maternity on their own and by putting to one side for the moment the principles of religion and convention; if it is necessary to point the finger at her it is first and foremost for the fact that her example may lead other women from simpler backgrounds, who are certainly less well-prepared, to do the same thing. To what extent can we blame the singer for such a lack of a sense of responsibility? (Di Robilant 1963, 36)

The counterposition of love and maternity to religion and convention establishes a hierarchy here, which valorises the latter over the former and thus encapsulates the social disapproval of Mina’s situation that we have seen elsewhere. Yet here, Mina is guilty of leading other women to emulate her. Her position as star means that more is expected of her and she is responsible for setting a socially and morally acceptable example. However, the naïve expectation that young women will follow Mina’s example, and thus require a stern reminder of the socially unacceptable nature of extramarital pregnancy, reinforces the patriarchal values that shaped the status quo of 1960s Italy.

Yet Mina is also portrayed in this piece as a victim of circumstance and celebrity. The reader learns that Mina comes from a good, bourgeois family and is aware of the social expectations she should adhere to as a young Italian woman. In the presentation of her previous relationships, Mina is portrayed as being in conflict with her upbringing and thus as a morally upstanding young woman. It is Corrado Pani who has seduced Mina: this is the only possible explanation for her behaviour, according to the article. Indeed, di Robilant is careful to point out that Pani only married Monteduro once evidence had been put in place about her not wanting children, thus creating the grounds for a possible annulment of the marriage in the future. Pani is thus the deceitful one in the current relationship, and lacks integrity and morals. We are assured that ‘Mina is worth so much more than Corrado’ (37), suggesting that Mina can and should be redeemed from this socially reprehensible situation. We also feel sympathy for Mina who has been deceived by Pani and who has compromised her strength of character and morals as a result. The article concludes by claiming that, although outwardly men seem to admire Mina and disapprove of apparently ‘weaker’ women, inwardly they would not choose to be in a relationship with her: ‘Mina as pop singer does not know that she frightens men not as a pop singer but as a woman’ (37). This, then, is the paradoxical situation that Mina faces as a result of the pregnancy: she is strong and courageous but undesirable, and feared and avoided by men as a result. Ultimately,

Unfortunately, Mina does not know that in this way she has become superwoman and thus ‘an exception to the rules’. Beautiful and courageous. But if any woman who respects the rules tried to copy her (and perhaps there will be more than one), that poor thing risks ruin, suicide, or slipping into the role of the wretched mother as a result of feminine compromise. (Di Robilant 1963, 36)

The apparent benevolent paternalism returns here, with di Robilant once again underscoring the dangers of extramarital pregnancy for women and thus re-establishing the dominant social conventions at work within Italian society during this period. Moreover, it is clear now that the description of Mina as beautiful and courageous is paradoxical: although she is an exception thanks to such qualities, and will thus survive thanks to her extraordinary status as a star, she nevertheless suffers the negative connotations of these descriptors, as established in the article. The younger female generation is thus discouraged from following Mina’s example, and the established ways of behaving and being woman are thus reasserted.

What is clear from these articles is the apparent widespread acceptance of and adherence to Italian societal norms during the early 1960s. The established ideology is so entrenched that, contrary to what we might expect, the gender of the journalist writing does not in fact have an impact on the expression of disapproval of Mina's actions. This disapproval also illustrates the extent to which expectations for the ways in which stars are to behave were derived from and governed by the established ideologies of the period. In the Italian context, conservatism and tradition informed these expectations and thus the disapproval of Mina's pregnancy. Even though the very act of reporting Mina's situation broke a social taboo and thus constituted a challenge to established social norms, the journalists here were quick to re-establish the status quo. They disapproved of and condemned Mina's behaviour, both in spite of and because of her star status, and thus warned their readers of the dangerous effects on their social status should they follow this example.

### **Mina's pregnancy as positive**

Despite the negativity of the articles cited above, there are also reports that seek to portray the announcement of Mina's pregnancy in a neutral or more positive light. Such reports in themselves are examples of what Lull and Hinerman identify as the scandal's potential to 'challenge mainstream social values conditioned by the substantial forces of ideological and cultural hegemony' (1997, 2). In the first article to cover the story of Mina's pregnancy, published in *Gente* on 18 January, the journalist Alberto Libonati presented Mina's strength and courage alongside her presumption and deception, with no comment then on the potential contradiction generated by these typically positive and negative qualities. She is also seen to be the representative of her generation, and Libonati points out how problematic her situation is as a result of her position:

As a well-educated little girl at fault, Mina, who well represents the youth of today, when faced with such an embarrassing question, knew nothing else but to deny everything, convinced as always that she would be proved right this time, too. (Libonati 1963, 22)

Here, we are reminded of the moral status quo in a way that allows us to read the situation only as embarrassing. Mina's age, naivety and upbringing are emphasised for us, bringing with them the possibility of explaining and ultimately forgiving her behaviour. Although she is stubborn in her behaviour, the reference to her as a 'well-educated little girl at fault' begins to diminish the severity of her situation.

The more positive treatment of the story is demonstrated by the attempts made by Libonati to justify what has happened. The reader is reminded, for example, that Pani is 'still legally married, even if that marriage is essentially over': the 'law of the heart' is what is important here, not the laws of the land. Then, Libonati charts Mina's meteoric rise to fame and explains the dangers of having everything (fashion, shoes, regular new hairstyles, and commercial success), and thus expecting that everything is attainable. He explains that 'for a girl like her, who never had time to assimilate her success, popularity and wealth, nothing must have appeared absurd or impossible' (24). Again, Mina's lack of experience is emphasised as a way of explaining her behaviour, but Libonati also implies that the music industry is to blame in allowing this situation to even come about. The passive structure here not only helps to explain and, to a certain extent, justify Mina's actions but it also begins to distance her from the situation and thus from any associated responsibility or condemnation.

As Libonati distances Mina from the negative implications of transgressing the dominant morality, so he sets in motion a 'rehabilitative' process by emphasising the redemptive potential of



maternity that has already begun to affect Mina. As he concludes his article, Mina's youth, naivety, and inexperience are again emphasised, but we are told that a positive transformation of her character has begun, thanks to her becoming pregnant. The miracle of motherhood appears to have strengthened her resolve and softened her attitude and behaviour. Indeed, as she is quoted directly in the article, we see how she demonstrates her love for and loyalty to Pani, her continued belief in the value of family through the importance she attaches to the baby, her hope for the future, her belief in the goodness of her peers, and her intention to fight for love and for her baby, to ensure a better future for him/her.

In this context, we see the status quo being reasserted and re-established by both Mina and Libonati. The only way in which Mina can be saved and rehabilitated, in order to once again become an upstanding member of Italian society and thus an exemplary national star, is through the redemptive miracle of motherhood. And the way in which Mina herself focuses on the positive values of family, love, and maternity reinforces the start of this redemptive process. Libonati's conclusion thus introduces a new type of construction to the notion of Mina as star: that of mother. By embracing this socially acceptable role, Mina's transgression of and challenge to social convention can be forgotten and thus rendered neutral and ultimately unproblematic within her star image.

As Buckley has pointed out, in the late 1950s and early 1960s,

Even as economic opportunities increased with a greater range of jobs available to women at this time, the belief that a woman's main role was to care for her husband and her children and to look after the home continued to be very widespread. This situation of conservatism within a context of change produced a variety of conflicts between tradition and modernity (Buckley 2006, 35).

This conflict regarding gender roles and ideal behaviours is seen in particular in the decision to report on Mina's extramarital pregnancy, a situation which was symptomatic of the changes in Italian society regarding sexuality and attitudes towards marriage,<sup>4</sup> and of the modernisation of Italian society in this period. Yet the pregnancy also constituted a scandal, which went against the social expectations of the time, whilst also challenging these established norms by casting light on other, apparently transgressive, ways of behaving. The fact that it was a beloved star and apparent role model behaving in this way added weight to the challenge that the scandal constituted. Libonati sought to nullify this contradiction in his article by beginning a redemptive process that would realign Mina with the established social status quo. But his article nevertheless illustrates that Italian society in the early 1960s was changing, and that the overriding values of conservatism and tradition that are often associated with this period were in fact in flux.

Thus it is that the journalist Domenico Alessi writing in *Tempo* can describe Mina and Pani's decision to have a baby together as generous, honest and beautiful. According to him, this is not a publicity stunt, nor a challenge to public order and morality. Rather, it is an act motivated by their love for one another. Questions regarding what is socially and morally acceptable and expected are deliberately overlooked. Instead, Alessi shows that by having a baby, Mina is embracing the traditional gender role of motherhood that comes as a consequence of growing up. We are told that 'Mina as mother is the logical consequence to Mina as girl' (Alessi 1963, 68), and this, implicitly, is what will facilitate her rehabilitation. Alessi is adamant that Mina 'will be a good mother; she already has it impressed on her face. Her expression is sweeter, more constant, occasionally lost in a secret, affectionate thought'. The changes to Mina's star persona that must take place in order to make her socially acceptable once again, have already begun. She is becoming gentler and more affectionate as a result of

her forthcoming maternity. Total redemption is possible due to the fact that Mina will be a good mother. The reader is told that

Mina will bring her son up herself. She will not show him off to the photographers, she will not exhibit him in the shops at Christmas Eve, or in the snow, or in his pram at the park. She will need a nanny but just an ordinary nanny; she wants to make mistakes, be frightened, get tired on her own. (Alessi 1963, 68–69)

By ignoring the opportunities to increase her fame that her child would bring, and rather embracing fully her role as mother, Mina could be seen to be accepting the socially acceptable role of mother, reaffirming the moral status quo and beginning to nullify the challenge that this transgressive pregnancy was seen to constitute.

The presentation of the pregnancy as positive appears on one level to challenge the established ideologies of 1960s' Italy, allowing potential questions regarding the extent to which conservatism and tradition were dominant in this period. Yet a closer reading of these articles reveals that this potential challenge was also nullified as the positive depiction of the pregnancy was informed by the traditional gender role for women as mothers. These articles therefore emphasise the changes in Italian society in their period whilst simultaneously re-asserting the established way of behaving. It would therefore appear that in this case, and contrary to Ajello's observation that the *rotocalchi* sought to reinforce and exploit the established political and cultural tendencies of their readers, these publications actually shed light on emerging tendencies whilst at the same time seeking to reiterate the status quo and to educate their readership about the established ideology of the period.

### **The birth of Massimiliano**

On 18 April 1963, Mina gave birth to a son, Massimiliano Mazzini, by caesarean section at the Mangiagalli clinic in Milan. The first reports of the birth were understandably brief, and appeared on 28 April in *Amica* and *Grazia*. It was not until Mina had more fully recovered from the operation at the start of May that articles were published featuring interviews with Mina and Pani, and photographs of Mina and Massimiliano. These were published by *Gente*, *Oggi*, *Tempo*, and *Grazia*.

The initial reports reasserted the status quo of the period by focusing on the illegality of Mina and Pani's situation. In *Grazia*, the announcement was hidden in amongst reports of other 'famous births', which all received more attention. The piece in *Amica* described the birth in a little more detail, recounting how the singer was surrounded by her relatives and 'non relatives' during the birth, and how the baby's surname must be recorded as Mazzini, due to the fact that his father is married to another woman ('I bebé della settimana' 1963, 35). The reader, despite feeling some sympathy for the singer, is nevertheless encouraged to concentrate on the transgressive nature of the pregnancy and to thus temper his/her response to Mina's difficulties.

This was also the case with the second article to appear in *Grazia*, published on 5 May 1963. Here, the journalist reminds us of Pani's marital situation and thus the necessity to give Massimiliano the surname of Mazzini. Again, the legal status quo is evoked, but the comment comes as the journalist explains how Massimiliano was baptised. This is an example of Mina and Pani's behaviour affirming the established moral and religious conventions. And the journalist goes on to tell us that 'the singer has decided to personally raise her son and as a result – she has declared – she will prioritise her motherly duties over any future artistic activity' ('Il figlio di Mina vivrà con i nonni' 1963, 78). Mina's decision to put motherly duties ahead of those of her career again suggests she is once again embracing social convention and established ways of behaving

as a woman. It is through her embracing of motherhood that Mina's transgressions may be forgiven, her rehabilitation may be effected and her star status reaffirmed.

The journalist Neera Ferreri, writing in *Oggi* on 2 May 1963, also implemented a similar strategy regarding Mina's rehabilitation. In the headline, 'Now I feel like a real Tiger. I'll scratch anyone who touches my baby', we see the rewriting of the significance of Mina's stage nickname, which is now seen to encapsulate her role as a mother. The positive resonances of a mother wanting to protect her child, now evoked by the nickname 'tiger', begin the process of making Mina socially acceptable once again. The rehabilitation process that starts with the resignification of her nickname is then emphasised through the use of direct speech in the article:

'I've cried up until now' says Mina, wiping away her tears with a little embarrassment. 'It's impossible to me that it's all happening, that the baby is here. And he's a boy too like I wanted, even if for superstitious reasons I would always talk about having a girl. I didn't think it possible to have feelings like this with a son. It really is true that when your child is born, he is still linked to his mother by an invisible thread. If someone comes and caresses him, I get angry, I'm jealous. All he needs to do is cry, become red in the face, and I get worried. I'm frightened that he will get ill, that something will happen to him.' (Ferreri 1963, 34)

It is significant that Mina herself recounts how she is discovering the joys of being a mother: she is testifying to her own apparent acceptance of the traditional role of motherhood, as demonstrated by her expected emotional response to the cries of her son. The magic of childbirth is also evoked, as Mina cannot believe that her son is here, and that he is a boy. This echoes the miraculous changes to Mina's character that have apparently taken place: we see that she has renounced her former aggressive way of behaving, and has become gentle and emotional thanks to the birth of her son. Becoming a mother has redeemed Mina: she has embraced the traditional role of mother and thus become socially acceptable once again.

The photographs published alongside this article emphasised this change in behaviour as well as the redemptive and rehabilitative journey that Mina had begun.<sup>5</sup> She featured on the front cover of the magazine, as well as in two large photographs that accompanied the article. In each of these shots, her hair and make-up are perfect, she is dressed in white lace blouse, and she poses serenely with her son, who is also dressed in white. The constructed nature of these photographs is such that we clearly see the beginning of the rehabilitation process. The use of white brings a sense of innocence, goodness and even purity to the 'Mina as mother' image that is being constructed here. In each photograph, then, we see how 'natural' a mother Mina is: she smiles contentedly for the camera, as Massimiliano lies sleeping in her arms; she tenderly kisses his fingers; and she carefully and attentively brushes his hair. The troubles of the scandalous pregnancy have been forgotten now that Mina is finally a mother: she has been redeemed thanks to her son and her apparently innate ability to care for him. This transformation is symbolised by the white lace blouse, which is reminiscent of a first communion outfit: the transformation from sinner to saved star is complete, thanks to the arrival of Massimiliano.

This transformation process was emphasised in the article published by *Tempo* on 11 May. Here, Pani was interviewed by the journalist Sergio Di Falco, and commented on the changes in Mina that he had witnessed. Mina's voice is erased as Pani explains that she 'is the most middle class, principled girl I have ever known: she will be a perfect mother to Massimiliano' (Di Falco 1963, 29). The reference to principles and bourgeois standards here underscores the social status quo, and Mina's now silent adherence to it. The scandal of the transgressive pregnancy is not mentioned at all, and it thus appears that all challenges to the moral status quo have been resolved or can be forgotten, thanks to Mina's acceptance of social conventions. This acceptance is illustrated by her love for her son. Pani explains that 'with our son, Mina is truly, and for the first

time, a tiger: she has this feeling of ownership, she feels that she must defend and protect him. When compared to Massimiliano, not even I count anymore' (33). The redefinition of her role as 'tiger' functions here to underscore her acceptance of society's requirement that her baby should be her primary focus. She can thus be rehabilitated and rendered socially acceptable once more. And this process will be completed, according to Di Falco, as Mina evaluates her future career in light of becoming a mother: 'she must now begin everything again from scratch, and also as a singer: she can no longer shout her songs that used to make the juke boxes come alive. Her maternity will profoundly transform her future as a singer' (33). Being a mother means a change in character as a performer, as well as in personality as a private individual. As the status quo is reasserted, so Mina's old performance style must be re-evaluated and altered so as to now conform to her role as a mother. Her ways of behaving and the values that were previously associated with her star image must be transformed in order for her new role as mother to be incorporated. Such a change is perceived as necessary by the established ideologies that inform both the construction of star images and the reporting of celebrity scandals in the media in Italy in this period. The reporting of the arrival of Massimiliano thus demonstrates the ability of the status quo within Italian society of the 1960s to seemingly shape public attitudes, star image, and media coverage.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that during the media coverage of Mina's personal scandal in 1963, readers were consistently reminded of the illegality of her situation, and the break with the status quo that it constituted. However, journalists also sought to render Mina's pregnancy less scandalous by focusing on the redeeming potential of motherhood for the singer. The emphasis on the miracle of maternity and its ability to 'positively' transform Mina into a traditional mother, who fully embraces her new role and who places her son's needs above her own, demonstrates the ways in which this scandal, as a challenge to the established ways of behaving and being a woman and a female star of the period, is in fact deflected, diminished and ultimately overcome.

The articles considered here illustrate the ways in which attitudes regarding social and moral conventions and traditional gender roles were prevalent within the written media and at work in the construction of star image in this period. Building on Gundle's assertion regarding Italian stars and their function as 'a cultural symbol and conduit for ideas about gender, values and national identity' (2008, 263), we can see that in the case of Mina in 1963, her star image was constructed by the popular print media in such a way as to preserve the status quo and represent and disseminate established ideas about ways of behaving and being a woman in 1960s Italy. Her personal scandal is rewritten in such a way as to quickly re-establish social conventions and rehabilitate her star image.

However, as Lull and Hinermann point out, a scandal has the ability to simultaneously re-establish and destabilise the status quo (1997, 2). In this particular case, Mina's behaviour does constitute a challenge to the established ideas about gender, present in Italian society during the 1960s. Even if conventionality, tradition, and conservatism are quickly reasserted by the *rotocalchi*, in an attempt to nullify the challenge and re-establish the status quo, the very act of writing about the extramarital pregnancy constitutes a challenge to the established ideologies of the period. The demand for details and coverage that the very existence of these articles highlights, points to a gap between the established political and social ideologies of the period, and the changes in society that were in fact beginning to take place. Perry Willson has underlined the complex and contradictory nature of this period in Italian history, and has illustrated how 'many Italians displayed enthusiasm for the benefits of modernity and consumerism, whilst at the same

time wishing to retain elements of what they saw as Italian lifestyles (which often included what they understood as “Italian” gender roles)’ (Willson 2010, 128). Mina’s celebrity scandal illustrates well the complexities of this period, and the balance between modernity and tradition that characterised Italian society of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

More broadly, however, the scandal also demonstrates the ability of stars to function as cultural symbols and conduits for multiple and even conflicting ideas that derive from a particular social or cultural context. Prior to 1963, Mina had been labelled as the national star; her status as domestic star was imbued with traditional ideas regarding ways of behaving and being woman that rendered her a symbol of ‘contemporary’ Italian femininity, which was nevertheless reliant on long-established traditions and social conventions for women in Italy. In 1963, when the scandal of her extra-marital pregnancy broke, the actual extent of Mina’s modernity was revealed. Her decision to openly go against social expectations by publicly discussing her pregnancy, and to have the baby and to build a family outside of marriage, demonstrates her rejection of the conservative traditions upon which her star image had previously been constructed. The coverage of the 1963 scandal in the popular press then reveals the extent of the tensions between the conservative expectations for women that informed the status quo of the period, and modern ways of being woman that Mina’s star image embodied. And although the articles considered here use Mina as a means of restating and propping up the conservative notions of femininity in 1960s Italy, the extended coverage of her story and the apparent need to shore up and rehabilitate Mina’s way of behaving in fact illustrate the extent to which such notions were beginning to crumble by 1963, as Italian society began to seek more modern ways of ‘being woman’.

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### Notes

1. For more information about the Bergman-Rossellini scandal, see Gundle 2000. The Gravina-Volonté and Del Frate-Micheluzzi scandals are yet to be the focus of sustained analysis. It is also important to note that the Del Frate-Micheluzzi scandal differs from the others cited here as the baby did not survive, thus generating a different reaction in the press to that for Mina, for example.
2. For more information about the nature of these publications, see Ajello 1976.
3. See Morris 2006, 1–20 for more detailed information regarding the political and social context affecting women and gender roles in the 1950s and early 1960s in Italy.

4. See Willson 2010, 123–128 for detailed information that illustrates the contradictory nature of this period in Italy and the changes taking place regarding sexuality and marriage, and women's attitudes to them in particular.
5. It is important to note that only one official photographer was invited to take photographs of the star and her baby, thus maximising the potential for the construction of a redemptive narrative through the photographs. This also explains the similarity of the photographs published in all articles printed about the birth of Massimiliano during May 1963.

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## Italian summary

Gli scandali che coinvolgono le celebrità costituiscono strumenti efficaci per svelare la diffusione dei modi di comportarsi previsti in un contesto culturale o sociale particolare. Nei primi anni sessanta, l'Italia ha assistito a vari scandali di celebrità, compresa la gravidanza della cantante Mina derivata dalla sua relazione extra-coniugale con Corrado Pani nel 1963. Questo articolo si focalizza sul loro scandalo per esplorare come le ideologie costituite (che controllavano le norme sociali, la moralità e i ruoli tradizionali delle donne) influenzassero l'immagine generale della star in quel periodo. L'articolo analizza in modo dettagliato i modi in cui i rotocalchi hanno riportato lo scandalo, utilizzando gli articoli che sono stati pubblicati subito dopo l'annuncio della gravidanza e poi dopo la nascita del bambino al fine di mettere in evidenza fino a che punto i valori e le idee sociali convenzionali che stabilivano lo status quo e il comportamento previsto per le donne in Italia nei primi anni sessanta si destabilizzano o si riaffermano attraverso la celebrità di Mina.