



# UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

***La Resistenza: Gendered narratives on women's contributions to  
the Resistance***

**By**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines women's narratives on the Italian Resistance over the span of 50 years. Through analysing three sources, Liliana Cavani's *La donna nella Resistenza* (1965), Bianca Guidetti Serra's *Compagne* (1977) and Lidia Menapace's *Io partigiana, La mia Resistenza* (2014), I compare and contrast women's representation and narratives over time. Through analysing these texts in light of the social context of the time, and through a gender-political lens, I identify a shift over time in the representation of women's Resistance narratives and contributions to the Resistance. A shift can be seen, from an essential narrative of women's roles in the 1960s, through a progression of these roles in the 1970s, to a more emphatic focus on women as political agents in the 2010s. In analysing these texts as both gendered political narratives and testimonies, this thesis proposes a more nuanced and varied understanding of women's experiences of the Resistance. Considering women's normative gender role in Fascist Italy during the Resistance, this thesis demonstrates a more diversified and nuanced experience of the Resistance that has been neglected in general Italian historiography.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family as without their continuous support, none of this would have been possible. A huge thank you to my mum, dad, sister, brother-in-law and my fiancé, I love you all endlessly!

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## Table of Contents

<b>List of illustrations .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Gender and Fascism .....	10
Gender .....	14
Feminism.....	16
Testimony.....	17
<b>Literature Review and Cultural Context.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Immediate Post-Resistance Period, up to the 1960s .....	25
1960s and 1970s .....	32
1980s and 1990s .....	35
21 <sup>st</sup> century.....	38
<b><i>Cavani's La donna nella Resistenza: A Visual Medium Exploring Women's Experience of the Resistance</i> .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Liliana Cavani.....	45
Defining Documentary .....	47
Publication .....	48
The Collective Experience.....	48
Gender .....	50
Embodied Witnessing .....	57
<b><i>Bianca Guidetti Serra's Compagne: Using Multiple Women's Voices to Redefine Women's Experience of the Resistance</i>.....</b>	<b>65</b>
Literature Review .....	66
Bianca Guidetti Serra .....	68
The Format of the Text.....	70
Gendered Political Narratives.....	72
Collective and Individual Experience.....	78
<b><i>Menapace's Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza: A Modern-Day Reflection on the Neglect of Women's Narratives in the Resistance</i> .....</b>	<b>85</b>
Literature Review and Purpose of the Text .....	87
Reflecting on the Resistance.....	90
Motivations for Joining the Resistance and the Child's Perspective .....	96
Broadening the Gendered Political Narrative .....	101
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>109</b>
Primary sources .....	109

Secondary sources .....	109
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## List of illustrations

Figure 1Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia, (n.d. ) Monumento alla partigiana veneta (prima versione) .....	29
Figure 2 Fig. 2.Ivaser, (2018) Monumento alla Partigiana Murer .....	30
Figure 3 Fig. 3. Pivari, F. (2015) Monumento al partigiano, Giacomo Manzù [photograph] ..	33

## Introduction

“Per molti anni, la partecipazione delle donne alla Resistenza è stata relegata”

(Smuraglia, 2016, p.9)

The Italian Resistance took place between 1943 and 1945, with Italy embroiled in a civil war seeking to drive out Fascist and Nazi occupation. Hereafter, this will be referred to as the Resistance. Italy had a history of Fascism long before the Resistance, with Mussolini as the ‘Duce’ who formed the National Fascist Party in Italy in 1921. Mussolini was then, after significantly coercing King Vittorio Emanuele, appointed as prime minister on 31 October 1922. It is the Resistance that marks the large-scale nationwide challenge to Fascism that took place within Italy in World War II. Daria Valentini describes the Resistance as the “complex process of armed opposition to Fascism and to the German occupation of Italy that followed the armistice with the Allies on September 8, 1943” (2016, p.133). The Resistance saw neighbour turn against neighbour, seeing Italy itself entangled in a civil war. Those fighting against Fascism in Italy were regarded as ‘i partigiani’.

Italy emerged from the civil war with Fascism overthrown, but the state was not eager to reflect on Fascism or the Civil War. In the immediate post-Resistance period in Italy, a legacy of neglect can be seen. As Richard Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani note, the “RAI... sought to screen out the Fascist past far more than it ever attempted to engage in a thoroughgoing and critical debate about the dictatorship” (2016, p.5) and “the memory they sponsored was one shot through with forgetting” (Bosworth and Dogliani, 2016, p.5). The RAI, the state broadcasting platform in Italy, was tasked with passing over Italy’s fascist past in the immediate post-Resistance period. Therefore, the Resistance can initially be seen as a movement that was ignored and neglected in Italy. This lack of acknowledgement only increases in the case of women. As Perry Willson notes, “gender history itself has not, until very recently, been given much prominence in ‘general’ Italian historiography” (2004, p.1). Given the lack of critical attention to the Resistance, even less attention has been given to women’s roles and experience. For this reason, this research focuses specifically on Italian women’s testimonies of the Resistance in Italy.



In terms of the number of women who participated in the Resistance, multiple figures have been suggested. For example, Jane Slaughter suggests that the number of female participants in the Resistance amounted to 55,000 women (1997). Meanwhile, Liliana Cavani suggests “70.000 presero parte ai gruppi di difesa, 35.000 in azioni di guerra partigiana” (1965, 04:32). More recently, Willson goes on to develop this by suggesting “if, however, a broader view is taken of what constitutes Resistance activity... gender disparity disappears, and it has been estimated that the women may have numbered as many as two million” (Willson, 2009, p.180). As Willson suggests, there is a clear gender disparity in Resistance research, as the male partisan hero has been its focus, leaving women neglected. The suggestion of two million also highlights the importance of the research presented here, as the experiences of as many as two million women have yet to be given the attention they deserve.

This thesis will acknowledge the initial silence on the Resistance and will then go on to explore the emergence of women’s oral testimony and written testimony as they come forward over the following decades. Through these testimonies, I will analyse women’s gendered political narratives and roles in the Resistance. This research will include three main sources which focus on women’s testimonial narratives: Liliana Cavani’s *La donna nella Resistenza*, (1965), Bianca Guidetti Serra’s *Compagne* (1977) and Lidia Menapace’s *Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza* (2014). These sources will be further explored below. This research will focus on the following research questions. How do these sources engage with gender-based societal assumptions about women’s roles in the Resistance? How do women construct their own identities and that of the collective? A clear aim of this research is to recognise, remember and reassert the female voices and experiences within the three sources. I will analyse the shifts in representation of women in the Resistance over time, and the way this contributes to social and scholarly debates and discussion. I will do this by specifically analysing working-class women. Working-class women have been chosen in particular as despite the expectation for women to remain in the domestic sphere, many working-class women had to work in order to support their families. In addition, some women were already outside of the domestic sphere before taking part in the Resistance and this nuance will be explored later in this thesis.

The three sources have been chosen due to the wide variety of working-class women they include and the different decades in which they were published. However, it is not the aim of this research to determine the historical accuracy of each source. I will analyse the sources through a testimonial lens, focusing instead on how the women are able to express themselves and how they describe their experiences. This is particularly important due to the neglect of women's experiences of the Resistance as well as the complex features of (female) testimony. This will be explored in the course of this thesis.

The first source is Liliana Cavani's *La donna nella Resistenza* (1965) which is a television documentary that focuses on multiple women's experiences of the Resistance. Cavani's documentary was chosen as one of the first video sources available specifically on women's experiences. The second source is Bianca Guidetti Serra's book *Compagne* (1977), a collection of women's political autobiographical writing. This source was chosen as it was released during the 'boom' of feminist studies on the Resistance. The 1970s are regarded as the years for the 'boom' of feminist studies, as "the emergence of social history 'from the bottom up' and women's history, feminine antifascism finally became a fully-fledged research topic" (Richet, 2016, p.154). Finally, the third source is Lidia Menapace's *Io partigiana, La mia Resistenza* (2014) with its recent publication offering a 21<sup>st</sup> century testimonial narrative on the Resistance. Thus, these three texts cover a significant period of Italy's post-Resistance period, from before the 1970s research boom, during this period, and also significantly after it. A range of perspectives and social contexts will be covered. Moreover, these three works represent a range of different media and genres: the differing formats and how they portray the Resistance will be explored further in the subsequent chapters.

This introduction is followed by a literature review and context overview, three chapters, which focus on the sources in chronological order, and a conclusion. In the remainder of the introduction, I will outline the theoretical framework and context for this research.

## Gender and Fascism

Now, I will first explore the context of Fascist Italy. Italy's complex history of Fascism must be explored before analysing the country's involvement in World War II. Long before World War II began in 1939, Italy was ruled by Fascism. The roots can be seen in World War I when Benito Mussolini began his Fascist organisation which eventually led to him being the Fascist dictator of Italy in 1925. It has been suggested that by 1922 the number of members supporting Fascism had "increased from 30,000 to 300,000" (Kumar, 2015, p.6). This is important to acknowledge, as many people became antifascist of the period of the *ventennio*. Throughout Fascism, "Mussolini wanted women to be Fascists first and women second, and he devised a new idealized model of femininity: the *donna fascista*" (Belzer, 2010, p.177). The *donna fascista* upheld Mussolini's Fascist ideals, as a "sposa e madre esemplare" (Curti, 1996, p.7) while supporting the Fascist party. World War II began in 1939, but it was not until June 1940 that Italy joined the War as a German ally, which led to a large number of German troops occupying Northern Italy. The Resistance is regarded as officially beginning on the 8 September 1943, when the Armistice of Cassibile was signed between Italy and the Allies.

The Resistance lasted over a year and a half, with the north of Italy particularly affected by the Civil War. The Resistance ended on 2 May 1945 due to the Surrender of Caserta, the written agreement which specified the surrender of German forces in Italy. After the liberation, the Resistance was neglected by the state, and this can be seen in how the national broadcasting channel of Italy, the RAI, did not address the Resistance in the immediate post-Resistance period. Academics were largely concerned with the active male combatant's role (Kelly, 2009, p.335-336), which was a popular image in the public sphere, leaving women's narratives unheard and unacknowledged. Politicians adopted and supported an antifascist memory that "quickly turned into the dominant public and social memory of the new Italian state" (Sierp, 2009, p.4). It should be noted that "in a civil war the defeated are often denied the right to memory and are excluded from the 'public' view of the past" (Pezzino, 2005, p.397). This disassociation with the defeated might have dissuaded many women from coming forward since some may not have been Resistance

fighters from the start or may have switched sides. Having briefly considered the context of the time here, I continue to explore this context in more depth alongside my discussions of the primary texts, in the chapters that follow this. Now, I will go on to look in particular at women's experience of Fascism.

Victoria De Grazia is a key contributor to the discussion of the role of women under Fascism, especially with her text *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (1992), which highlights how women were relegated to the home in that period. De Grazia demonstrates how women were ruled by Fascism and their experiences of Fascism were "enormously varied" (1992, p.xii). Analysing women's testimonies of the Resistance sheds light on how experiences under Fascism and before inspired women to participate in the Resistance; thus their testimonies too are extremely varied. I have chosen three sources published over the course of 50 years to provide a fuller picture on women's varied experience. This wide time frame and comparative context aims to provide a comprehensive overview of women's experiences of the Resistance. Considering texts produced over such a wide frame of time is also interesting as it will show what different viewpoints and experiences come forward over the passage of time. In addition, it will show how public discourse around these issues has changed.

On the one hand, Fascism restricted women to the domestic sphere. Strict Fascist gender roles can be seen here, as "a woman's proper place was in the home and a man's at the helm of the family" (Willson, 2004, p.9-10). De Grazia adds to this, that "Mussolini's regime stood for returning women to home and hearth, restoring patriarchal authority, and confining female destiny to bearing babies" (De Grazia, 1992, p.1). Willson goes on to highlight that during Fascism, "the 'separate spheres ideology'... saw women's true place as in the home and men's as in the public domain" (Willson, 2004, p.3). This is particularly useful to this research as it highlights the social context the women were influenced by and for some, the social context that they were speaking out against.

On the other hand, academics have suggested that the antifascist Resistance gave women the opportunity to exert their agency. For example, "by contrast to Fascism, which 'restricted women to a narrow, passive, limited existence as baby-makers', the antifascist

democratic front ‘created a new and active model for women’” (Balfour, 2018, p.730). The ‘new and active model’ suggests that women before did not have agency or the freedom to express themselves. For example, the Gruppi di Difesa della Donna (GDD), an antifascist female movement originally founded by members of the Partito Comunista Italiano, “encouraged women to act collectively, leading them from private concerns for their individual families to public protests as groups of women” (Alano, 2003, p.622). Therefore, antifascist activism will be considered when analysing the impact on women’s sense of their own role as represented throughout the three sources.

Isabelle Richet develops a perspective on antifascism activism as she observes: “a new historiographical trend that insisted on the need to study the ‘antifascists’ rather than antifascism” (2016, p.155). Here there is a double challenge for this research, as Richet suggests that to study the antifascists is a new historical trend, while the female antifascists remain neglected. However, there is an issue in finding female antifascists as “many did not identify themselves as partisans: they saw their commitment to the Resistance as acts of ‘love’ or ‘kindness’ rather than as ‘political choices’” (Kelly, 2009, p.337). Here, the influence of the social context of the time can be seen as women were restricted to the domestic sphere, to be seen only as maternal reproducers for the nation, even when they were engaged in antifascist activism.

Additionally, women should not be generalised as one collective category all desiring similar levels of independence (Behan, 2009, p.173). As such, this research aims to develop an understanding of the different reasons why women participated in the Resistance and what their experiences were while doing so. This specific focus on women is essential as Richet highlights that there is a

long list of works dedicated to women in the Resistance and feminine antifascism, but many of them are autobiographical testimonies often written in an emotional and sacrificial vein, and Gabrielli can rightly conclude that there has been a ‘missed encounter between women’s history, gender history and the history of antifascism’ (Richet, 2016, p.153).

She then goes on to highlight the limits of these sources, noting that they “rarely asked the most relevant questions about their motivation for joining the struggle, the particular forms they gave their opposition to the regime and the link – or the lack of link – they established between the struggle to free the country from dictatorship and the struggle for women’s emancipation” (Richet, 2016, p.153). Therefore, in analysing women’s narratives in particular, especially with a more modern focus, considering recent developments in the works of testimony and gender, as well as the wide time frame, this research will focus on the variety of motivations women had for joining the Resistance. In addition, there is an interesting contrast here as Richet proposes that they are rarely asked about their motivations for joining. In contrast, all of the selected sources in my research explore their motivations for joining. Furthermore, this highlights the contrasting discourses and research available on women and the Resistance.

Fascism restricted most women to the domestic sphere. However, many working-class women were already outside of the domestic sphere due to them having to work to support their families. For example, many women interviewed in Guidetti Serra’s *Compagne* (1977) explain how before even becoming involved in the Resistance, they were working in the factories from as young an age of 12. Working-class women are the focus of this thesis as many were already outside of the domestic sphere. Therefore, this is an interesting focus to see how they considered their antifascist involvement and how antifascism affected them given they were already in the public sphere. This thesis, through the inclusion of three prominent texts, aims to identify and amplify the voices of working-class women and their Resistance experiences, which complicate the notion that women were confined to the domestic sphere by Fascism and escaped from it through antifascist resistance.

## Gender

Having explored some issues relating to women and Fascism, I will now provide an overview of the supporting gender theory for this research. I acknowledge the vastness of this area of study and consequently the limits of this overview. When exploring gender theory, it felt pertinent to set out my definition of gender as it is embedded throughout all the following sections. For the purposes of this project, gender will be defined as “a social category imposed on a sexed body” (Scott, 1986, p.1056). This is particularly important given the already explored social context of the time, that most women were confined to the domestic sphere.

In terms of women and the Resistance, it is essential that we “gender the front” (Wingfield, 2006, p.1), which Nancy Wingfield describes as “deconstructing the notion that wartime heroism is exclusively masculine” (2006, p.1). This must be taken into consideration in this feminist research, especially as the immediate post-Resistance period focused on the male partisan hero. This gendered memory was challenged by feminist researchers in the 1970s, “whose aim was to shed light on an ‘authentic’ female experience” (Wingfield, ,2006, p.4). Wingfield goes on to highlight that “the first step, however, is to render women visible” (Wingfield, 2006, p.4). The rendering women visible exemplifies the aim of this thesis, in order to identify and reassert female Resistance voices and experiences. Given this silencing and lack of acknowledgement of women, for feminist researchers there can be seen “an obligation to elicit the unspoken (and perhaps unspeakable) private story” (Coslett, Lury and Summerfield, 2000, p.3). I posit, however, that it is not just that their stories are unspoken but that they are not heard. For example, given the social context of the immediate post-Resistance period, such as the neglect of the Resistance, even when it eventually opened up to explore men’s experiences, society was not ready to hear about women’s experiences and as such they were left unspoken or were not listened to. Wingfield highlights how women have not just been ignored but are seen as completely invisible.

For some women, the war did signify a change in viewpoint on normative gender roles as “with the return of soldiers from the fighting front, women had learned to question

traditional gender roles in civilian life and the workplace” (Wingfield, 2006, p.5-6). This research will analyse how some women had already transgressed their traditional gender roles. Women’s role as active female combatants challenged traditional gender roles as “they defied the masculine norms that identified heroism and courage with men” (Wingfield, 2006, p.7). Therefore, women challenged the traditional discourse of heroism being strictly equated to only men. However, “although asserting their agency in extraordinary ways, these female combatants proved unable to change gender norms” (Wingfield, 2006, p.7). Yet, while these women may have been unable to *change* traditional gender norms, they were in fact able to *transgress* them, which should be both recognised and acknowledged.

The work of Mirna Cicioni will be engaged with, as she calls for an extensive gendered approach as “how what we know about the involvement and the role of women changes what we know about the Resistance as a whole, namely, how the Resistance was affected, militarily and politically, by the participation of women” (In Davidson and Wright, 1998 p.617). Cicioni suggests that in analysing the Resistance through women’s experience, we will have a greater understanding of the event as a whole. Cicioni echoes Wingfield’s earlier statement, that since men have been the predominant focus for accounts of wartime experiences, in this case the Resistance, there is another side to the Resistance that has yet to be fully acknowledged. In sum, this research is crucial in today’s society as “feminism and feminist research have been at the forefront of challenging the silencing of women’s voices in society and research” (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p.66). This research aims to give a voice to women’s underrepresented experiences of the Resistance.



## Feminism

Having considered the Resistance in light of gender theory, I now briefly analyse Feminism in Italy. Feminism in Italy is a continuously developing area that some have suggested lacks research: Maud Anne Bracke's *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy 1968-1983* (2014), is an in-depth study of second-wave feminism in Italy. Research on this period is relevant to this study as for two of the sources it provides the context of the period where they are able to speak out about their experiences. Knowing this context is essential as it may have influenced the women to come forward and tell their stories. Bracke's research is the first to use both oral history interviews and archive sources in conjunction (Bracke, 2014, p.i). Bracke goes on to suggest a decline in remembering feminism in Italy and "its fragmentation the following decades, as well as... its long-term defeat" (2014, p.3).

Most importantly, Bracke posits that "younger generations of feminists and scholars have crystallised their critiques around the need for thorough, source-based investigations which take in a plurality of perspectives" (2014, p.4). Therefore, within feminist studies, there is the need to explore individual experiences in order to provide a wide range of perspectives. The need for such a range is reflected in this research, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of women's experiences of the Italian Resistance. Giovanna Parimigiani posits that despite the success and accomplishments of the 1970s, "the vast majority of the Italian feminist movements... chose to continue their political activities in the private rather than in the public sphere and disappeared from public space by the beginning of the 1990s" (2019, p.54). The legacy of this aspect of Italian feminism can be seen here, that despite their public progress there was a shift towards women continuing their feminist activism privately. This shift stands in contrast to the public progress of the 1970s, such as the legalization of the abortion law in Italy in 1978. The 1970s indeed did mark a significant progression for feminism in Italy. However, following this period, such public advancements did not continue and there was a 'disappearance' from the public sphere and the legacy of a 'long-term defeat'. In regard to the Italian Resistance, it could be suggested that given the decline of public feminist research post-1970s, that this is a possible reason for the lack of progression in research for women's roles and experiences of the Italian Resistance. Moreover, it could be linked to the reasons for a decline in the publication of non-academic

texts, with sporadic publications since the end of the Resistance, with the most recent being Menapace's *Io Partigiana. La mia Resistenza* in 2014. This decline could be linked to the passing of time and the age of former partisans.

In addition, I have chosen to engage with Judith Butler's gender theory throughout this research. Some of the sources include essentialist language and as such, when looking for alternatives, Butler provided an interesting point of discussion. For example, she states "to say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the "appearance" of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth" (2015, p.32). Therefore, I chose to read the sources in light of Butler's framework as there is the possibility that gender can at times be seen through our acts, but it is certainly not *defined* by our actions. There is much more that constitutes our gender than just the way we act, and chapter 3 will explore this further.

## Testimony

Before going on to analyse the three main sources, the concept of testimony must be explored. The texts will be analysed as testimonial narratives, and the complications of testimonial narratives will be explored in this section. For example, the sources will be analysed as testimonial narratives considering the following: issues of credibility, their autobiographical nature, as well as the collective element of the sources and how the women are speaking in a contested territory.

A clear definition of testimony is necessary here. Sara Jones describes testimony as "the subjective account of a personally experienced event by that same individual in written or spoken form and directed towards an implied or actual audience" (2014, p.25). An important aspect to consider, then, is that the testifier anticipates that they will have an audience engaging with their testimony. The testifier, then, is aware that the testimony they are creating is going to be viewed and interacted with by the audience. Consequently, this could affect the way that they, the testifiers, present themselves. Across the three testimonies, there are different anticipated audiences. For example, the audience for Cavani's documentary in 1965 and Menapace's book in 2014 will be vastly different. Jan

Assmann goes on to highlight the importance of testimony and historical events, as she states that the use of testimonial narratives “is less to tell us what happened than what it felt like to be in the centre of those events; [to] provide very personal views from within” (2006, p.263). Therefore, Jan Assmann exemplifies the aims of this research through testimony, that it is not the historical accuracy that concerns my analysis of women’s narratives but rather how it was for the women to experience such events and how they describe these events many years later and what this tells us. Moreover, “narrative memory is never innocent. It is an ongoing conflict of interpretations” (Balfour, 2018, p.732). In light of this, it must not be forgotten that these women are each testifying to these events and what they determine as their truth cannot be acknowledged as universal truth. It is through the women’s individual and personal testimony that we have access to a first-hand experience of the Italian Resistance. This personal testimony will be discussed throughout all three sources. Moreover, I acknowledge the importance of trauma theory within testimony and will explore this further in chapter 3. A key point of discussion will be the media of these testimonial narratives, and these will be explored further in each individual chapter.

An issue closely tied with testimony is the issue of credibility. As this testimony takes place in an oral format in two of the sources<sup>1</sup>, “the first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events as such than about their meaning... the only problem posed by oral sources is that of their credibility” (Portelli, 1981, p.99). The problem of credibility is doubled in the case of women, as Leigh Gilmore explores. Gilmore highlights the risk that “women’s witness is discredited by a host of means meant to *taint* it: to contaminate by doubt” (2017, p.2) and she goes on to add that “shaming, victim blaming, discrediting, and denunciation attach to women’s testimony so predictably, and are so regularly associated with it, that these negative affects function as prolepsis: they are a threat that prevents women from testifying” (2017, p.7). Gilmore highlights the judgement that comes with women testifying. Not only that, but the expectation of such judgement also often prevents women from testifying in the first place. I posit that these risks were felt by women after the Italian Resistance. Moreover, not only were women speaking in a

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<sup>1</sup> Cavani’s as a video and Guidetti Serra’s initially as a transcript

contested territory, but the fact that they are women also potentially taints their testimony as they are further doubted. Gilmore presents the issue of credibility, that “gender, race, and sexuality coincide with the construction of reliability and credibility before the law and in the intimate publics of press and media” (2017, p.13). Therefore, in this research, not only do the women risk judgement and social shaming, but they risk not even being believed in the first place.

When considering testimony, it is important to consider the autobiographical nature of the sources. This thesis includes autobiographical writings of two types “memoirs written after the wars, focusing on wartime experience [...and] post-war oral testimonies of people who lived during World War II” (Wingfield, 2006, p.17). This creates an interesting area to analyse as all are post-war reflections on the Resistance. In light of this, they have perhaps had the chance to process or begin to understand what happened to them and around them.

Gilmore notes that there is an “ongoing historicization of the autobiographical motif in which a self-representational ‘I’ emerges in a range of genres” (2017, p.11). Graziella Parati expands upon this and adds a feminist perspective, that:

autobiography as a genre allows for a constant redefinition of its boundaries and limitations. Autobiography is a hybrid and malleable genre that partakes of other genres and becomes a literary space where a woman can experiment with the construction of a female ‘I’ and, sometimes, a feminist identity (Parati, 1996, p.2).

I support Parati’s definition and propose that this extends to autobiographical sources as well. Parati’s definition will be adhered to throughout this research that when considering the autobiographical sources, there is the construction of a ‘female I and sometimes a feminist identity’. Gilmore adds to the link between testimony and autobiographical texts, that it is “characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts” (2017, p.3). Therefore, the inclusion of autobiographical narratives supports the aim of this research and enables the women to put themselves in a position of agency in order to create the ‘construction of the

female 'I' and a feminist identity'. I will engage with the 'construction of the female 'I' and a feminist identity' primarily in chapter 3.

Moreover, the women involved are not just testifying to a singular event but are testifying to a collective experience. It is important to consider collectivity as:

singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole (Sommer, 1988, p.108).

Therefore, the women speaking out about their experiences should be regarded as an identifiable individual speaking out to a collective experience and event. This collective element will be specifically focused on in Chapters 3 and 4, where the women in Cavani's documentary speak out not just about their own experiences, but the experience for other women as well. However, we are witnessing the testimonial 'I's account of events. Therefore, "the very act of rewriting history through the first person will inevitably colour the narrative with the same blush of intimacy and particularity that makes the autobiographer glow as she distinguishes herself from the rest" (Sommer, 1988, p.110). Beverly posits that the testimonial narrative is "a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative [that] evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences" (2003, p.34). Robert Sommer highlights this difference, that "one way of marking the difference between women's testimonials and autobiographies [...] is precisely the testimonials' insistence on showing relationships" (1988, p.129). John Eakin highlights this further, as he states, "autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others" (2019, p.43). It is interesting, then, that two of these sources are compilations of testimonies that are put together to suggest a collective remembering. A further issue with autobiographical sources is the difficulty "to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously 'my' experience when 'our' experience is also at stake" (Gilmore, 2017, p.5). Consequently, the sources must be analysed considering the implications of both a testimonial and autobiographical I.

When analysing testimonial narratives, it is essential to look at the context in which the women are speaking in. For example, in terms of testimony, “any act of witnessing, confession, or testimony – even in ‘historical’ cases – relates to disputed, unstable, conflicting, or transitory realities” (Frosh and Amit, 2008, p.96), which Jones goes on to highlight that “the witness always speaks in contested territory” (2014, p.25). The concept of contested territory will be engaged with throughout this thesis, as over the 50-year span of the sources there is a changing contested territory into which the women are speaking. The women can be seen as speaking out against the socio-economic context of the time of Fascism. When considering contested territory, it is essential to look at the cultural memory of the Resistance:

the concept of cultural memory encapsulates the stories and images that influence how individuals understand history. Cultural memory is shaped by historical scholarship, of course, but also mediated through school curricula, monuments, museums, the mainstream media, as well as works of literature, film, and television. Cultural memory is selective: it compresses historical diversity into compelling stories that require limited further explication (Stone, 2017, p.3).

Katherine Stone proposes that gender shapes this cultural memory, that “ideas about masculinity and femininity determine whose stories are deemed significant, which narratives circulate as part of cultural memory, and how they are interpreted in relation to wider history as well as the socio-political imperatives of the present” (2017, p.3). This study investigates how remembering women’s participation in the Resistance has been affected by a gendered cultural memory. My research in particular builds on recent scholarship, that not only analyses women’s accounts to understand their own motivations and contributions but goes on to compare them across half a century.

The discussion on the contested territory will be explored further in the following literature review and cultural context section, taking into consideration the different contested territories the women are speaking in from the end of the Resistance to the publication of the final source in 2014. Following the literature review, this research will analyse the sources in chronological order. The third chapter of this research will focus on Cavani’s *La*

*Donna Nella Resistenza* (1965). When analysing this source, it will draw on Mirna Cicioni's gender theory and Jolly's theory of embodied witnessing. The following chapter, chapter four, will focus on Guidetti Serra's book *Compagne* (1977) and will draw on the theoretical frameworks relating to the collective and individual experience. Then, chapter five will focus on Menapace's *Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza* (2014) and will draw upon theoretical frameworks relating to the significance and empowerment of the autobiographical "I".

## Literature Review and Cultural Context

In this literature review and cultural context, I provide an overview of the shifts in the representation of women in the Resistance over time, and the way these shifts were caused by trends in scholarly and social discussions. I do this chronologically, progressing by decade from the 1950s until the present day. This highlights the contested territory into which my primary sources were published. To do this, I will look at a variety of sources such as fictional sources, autobiographical sources as well as critical literature available on the Resistance. I will demonstrate a shifting discourse about women in the Resistance, public and scholarly, from the 1950s up until Menapace's 2014 text. I will show that there are very few literary texts on this topic, and that those that do exist have received little to no academic attention. I am then going to show how cultural representation developed over time and as such will highlight what has come to light and what has changed over the decades. Ultimately, by looking at and comparing multiple first-hand testimonies of the Resistance, I will highlight how there has been a sporadic production of texts over the years, with only certain texts surviving the test of time and being republished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while others have been overlooked. This literature review will highlight some of the key scholarly debates regarding representation of women in the Resistance and how their participation has been documented.

Initially in the 1950s and 60s, there were only a few autobiographical texts focusing on women's representation in the Resistance, with little academic response. This is contrasted with the 1970s and 80s, where there were demands from academics for more representation of women in the Resistance with a few more autobiographical works coming to the fore. However, this call remained mostly unanswered, and it was only at the end of the 1990s and at the turn of the twenty-first century that both academic and autobiographical works highlighting the depth of the invisibilisation of women's representation in the Resistance were published. Finally, this literature review will conclude with the present day, highlighting a shift in women's representation, as they are now more often portrayed as having had an active role in the Resistance. For example, early autobiographical writings on the Resistance show a lack of attention on women's experiences. The turn of the twenty-first century signifies a change in the discursive context,



that goes on to consider the impact of the silencing on women and the variety of their lived experiences of the Resistance. These issues will be explored further later on in the literature review.

In order to analyse in more detail, the literature and context of the time, it is essential to engage with cultural memory. It is not within the scope of this research to provide an extensive and elaborate discussion of cultural memory; however, I will provide a brief description which will inform this thesis:

cultural memory is shaped by historical scholarship, of course, but also mediated through school curricula, monuments, museums, the mainstream media, as well as works of literature, film, and television. Cultural memory is selective: it compresses historical diversity into compelling stories that require limited further explication. (Stone, 2017, p.3)

Therefore, when looking at the context of the time and how the Resistance was remembered within it, it is essential that monuments, the media and literature are all considered as factors which play a part in what is remembered and what is neglected, ignored or forgotten. Jan Assmann provides a detailed analysis of cultural and communicative memory. Jan Assmann defines communicative memory as including “those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications” (1995, p.126). Cultural memory in contrast is defined as:

characterized by its distance from the everyday... Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance) (Jan Assmann, 1995, p.129).

It is important that when looking at the literary productions of the period, I take into consideration the cultural memory of the period and the context. Considering the cultural

memory is essential as this can influence the discourses that have managed to emerge, or, in some cases, why some discourses have not come to light.

### Immediate Post-Resistance Period, up to the 1960s

Before exploring the literary productions of this period, it is pertinent to explore the context of the time. In the immediate post-Resistance period, after liberation day on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1945, particular narratives about the war were being forged which did not tell the complete story. To describe the tumultuous period in Italy, Filippo Focardi argues that:

Between 1943 and 1947 anti-fascist forces in Italy successfully elaborated a collective memory of the war which they imposed as the public memory of the new state and as the dominant social memory. The key features of this narrative were a portrayal of the Italians as 'victims' of fascism and of a war desired by Mussolini... and a glorification of the role played by the Italian people in the struggle against Nazi Germany and its fascist allies after the armistice. (2003, p.41)

Focardi highlights a dynamic contested territory; while the Resistance, the civil war in Italy, was over, the memory of the civil war was still being disputed. Paolo Pezzino highlights the complexities of the multiple contested memories of a country involved in civil war. He states

Rather than admit that the conflict involved members of the same community, once the civil war was over the adversary was denied the status of an enemy and was degraded to the level of traitor and lackey of the foreigner (2005, p.397).

Pezzino demonstrates a complexity in the cultural memory of the Resistance, that failed to acknowledge fully that fascists and anti-fascists are members of the same country and community. Rather than refer to the Fascist supporters as enemies, they are referred to as the lackey of the foreigner. Rosario Forlenza highlights how memories are in tension with one another, as he states "the country was simultaneously loser, occupied, resister, victor. This situation accounted for the variety of conflicting and fragmented memories and

identities that emerged after the war” (2012, p.74). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect different narratives and versions of events of the civil war.

Moreover, there is another issue present on public discourse about the Resistance. The Resistance is remembered in a variety of ways as it is

unable to establish itself as a founding myth in the collective memory of the Italians... in part because of the differing and at times absolutely conflicting definition of the term and the reality on which it was based, namely an armed struggle that was simultaneously a war of liberation, civil war and class war.  
(Pezzino, 2006, p.399)

Therefore, there was ongoing debate to define the Resistance and what it was fighting for. This is exacerbated as there is no single figure to whom the victory can be attributed, leading to a variety of different narratives. Due to the various aspirations and goals of the Resistance, this also influences when and how it is remembered. A clear distinction can be seen here, that in the competing cultural memories, Italians are depicted predominantly in two ways. For the antifascists, they are victims. Mussolini is seen as betraying the Italians and ultimately leading Italy into war and chaos. This is worsened with his alliance with Hitler, which forced Italy into a war in which they initially had no part. For the antifascists, “the war conducted alongside the Allies after the armistice was described in epic terms as a ‘Second Risorgimento’ of the Italian nation, as a ‘war of national liberation’ supported by the entire populace rallying around the regular troops and the partisan divisions” (Focardi, 2003, p.44). This view on the Resistance is supported by national holidays that promote this image. For example, the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1945 is referred to as the day of Liberation in Italy. In 1946, this date was officially declared a national holiday and is still celebrated today. It is important to note that Focardi is commenting from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective on what he understands to be the immediate post-Resistance context.

Evidently, this is a distorted one-sided version of events as

There were highly significant omissions: for example, the existence of a popular consensus for fascism; the enthusiasm with which many Italians had welcomed the prospect of war alongside Germany in the hope of a rapid victory; and the civil war character of the Resistance, which could not be reduced simply to a struggle against the foreigner and his few fascist 'servants' (Focardi, 2003, p.48).

Focardi touches upon the variety of narratives perpetuated in the immediate post-Resistance period. Focardi highlights the complexity of a country involved in a civil war, that both sides are fighting for what they believe to be right and disseminating their narrative as the truth, particularly in the immediate post-Resistance period.

In contrast, the cultural memory adopted by the fascists is one in which they are depicted as strong nationalists. The fascists

upheld the reasons for Italy's participation in the war alongside Germany, confirmed the support of a vast part of the nation for the 'Axis war', and praised the heroism displayed in combat by the Italian soldiers (Focardi, 2003, p.52).

In light of this, the fascists promoted and lauded the heroism of the Italian combatant soldier. Moreover, in regard to what this meant for the cultural memory of the time, Focardi explains:

certain neo-fascist themes, such as the celebration of wartime heroism, the nostalgic recall of bygone power, and the criticism of the Resistance as a movement monopolized by the Left, were accepted by broad sectors of Italian public opinion (Focardi, 2003, p.53).

In light of this, there was more than one discourse on the war. Given that this was a civil war, there is a conflict between the cultural memories of the opposing sides. The fascists supported and praised the heroism displayed by their soldiers, which as Focardi suggests,

was accepted by much of the public. However, Focardi states that it is 1960 which “is generally identified by Italian historians as the year in which the anti-fascist memory of the war was revived” (2003, p.41). Therefore, there is a conflicted cultural memory, as the fascist heroism displayed is praised, while the anti-fascist memory of the war was strongly revived from the 1960s onwards.

In terms of the context for women, after the victory they were expected to return to their domestic roles they had held before the war. In addition, even though women had been fighting for freedom it did not mean any guaranteed changes to their normative gender roles. For example, “in post-war Italy in 1945, a ‘partisan’ was defined as someone, who had born weapons for at least three months and was part of an armed formation recognized by the *Corpo Volontari della Libertà* (Volunteer Corps for Liberty, CVL)” (Boçari, 2021, p.22). In light of this, many women, and some men, were not recognised as partisans due to this set criteria. In the following years, many women did not consider themselves partisans as they had not had a fighting role. Moreover, many women during the Resistance participated as a *staffetta* and did not carry arms. However, Jona Boçari argues that this set construction of the Resistenza memory was intentional “in order to respond to the needs of Italian post-war reconstruction” (Boçari, 2021, p.15). Therefore, the Italian population displayed a need for stability and not altering the stereotypical discourse, which included maintaining stereotypical gender roles and to do this, the potential exclusion of women from the classification of the partisan.

As previously highlighted, the cultural memory of the mid 1950s was conflicted but the anti-fascist memory was revived. This revival can also be seen in cultural memory through the monuments that were erected, including in relation to women.

In 1954, Leoncillo Leopardi was commissioned to design a statue to commemorate the female partisans in Venice. The statue can be seen as innovative for its time, as *“La Partigiana”* totally eschewed the traditionally monumental in order to explore a new approach to such commemorative works, both in content and artistic language. This female figure is neither a mother nor a victim; she is a young woman fighter advancing alone through the mountains” (The Venetian Partisan, n.d.). The work was completed in 1955, however due to controversy over the colour of the red ‘neckerchief’ the female was wearing, it was not unveiled until 1957. The ‘red neckerchief’ was seen as controversial due to the possible political affiliations. In terms of cultural memory, the female partisans were able to see a part of their Resistance experience reflected in this statue. Thereby, their own bravery and courage was also publicly acknowledged. Unfortunately, in 1961 the sculpture was bombed by neo-fascists, with little left to be salvaged. The original statue with the red neckerchief that had been rejected was taken to the Ca’ Pesaro museum in Venice, where it remains today.



Figure 1 Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia, (n.d. ) *Monumento alla partigiana veneta (prima versione)*

In 1961, Augusto Murer was commissioned to design a new statue. However, this statue is vastly different. Murer’s statue depicts a partisan woman lying down with her hands tied together at the water’s edge. The contrasts in the representation of women in these two statues, from Leopardi’s active female fighter to Murer’s partisan laying with her hands tied, suggests a possible shift in the cultural discourse. For example, initially in the first statue the woman can be seen as actively fighting, whereas Murer’s statue depicts a more passive woman, potentially even a victim. Therefore, it is possible to suggest a shift in cultural memory, that initially women’s activism was acknowledged, but they were also seen as

victims. The involvement of women in these monuments suggests a space for women's narratives of the Resistance to be remembered. However, the bombing of the original statue and its subsequent replacement highlights a shift in women's representation and civil unrest long after the end of the Resistance.



Figure 2 Fig. 2.Ivasser, (2018) Monumento alla Partigiana Murer

Having just analysed some aspects of the cultural memory of the immediate post war years, I now go on to explore the production of fictional texts during this time.

While the RAI ignored the Resistance in the immediate post-War period, this was not the case for the production of fictional texts. In terms of women's representation, one of the first writings by a woman on the Italian Resistance can be seen in Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949). This was released only four years after the end of the war. The text can be seen as a plea for the recognition of women's voices through the voice of a fictional female protagonist. While acknowledging this fictional text, the form of the source must be considered as it is important to note that "literature and literary analysis, rooted in cultural history, can shed important light on the moral and conceptual issues that fall outside the parameters of traditional historical scholarship" (Stone, 2017, p.4). Viganò's novel was well received at the time of publication and in 1949 was awarded the Viareggio Prize in literature (Ruberto, 1997, p.2) and has since reached canonical status (Adani, 2020, p.9). In light of this status, the novel has been widely spoken about as "people referred to Agnese as a symbol of women's contributions to the Resistance" (Perry, 1999, p.448-449). Agnese is portrayed as a mother to the Resistance fighters, looking after them while carrying out *staffetta* duties. In the novel, Agnese has conformed to her traditional gender role to be a mother, not in the domestic sphere, but in the non-domestic context of the Resistance. This role is developed as Agnese takes on messenger duties. In addition, the perception of

Agnese as just a mother is expanded as she is responsible for killing a German soldier. Viganò not only managed to publish her novel during a time of near silence on the Resistance, but she was able to write a novel with longevity that is still widely read. For example, it is still listed on many curricula in Italian schools. Therefore, this fictional protagonist resonated with the audience of the time and continues to do so today. However, it should be acknowledged that this is one singular voice at the time of publication, which has received canonical status. A potential research question to be considered throughout this research, is whether *L'Agnese va a morire* has ended up eclipsing other voices, or if fiction is easier to digest than testimonial accounts.

Scholarship on the Resistance in this period is also limited, and even within this limited scholarship, much less attention was devoted to women's roles in the Resistance. When this topic did arise, the focus was on the male partisan hero and the active male combatant (Kelly, 2009, p.335-336), with women's roles either ignored or limited to the household. As Richet notes (drawing on Perrot), "until recently, in the historiography of Italian antifascism 'silence has been the usual treatment accorded to women'" (Richet, 2016, p.152). It was not until the 1990s that an explicit acknowledgement of silencing in the previous years can be seen. Drawing on De Grazia, Michael Kelly notes that "women's involvement in the Resistance overturned conventional roles and therefore evoked little sympathy from male partisans. Women's contribution to the Resistance was thus 'silenced'" (De Grazia in Kelly, 2009, p.338). De Grazia suggests that the lack of focus and critical attention was caused by the fact that women were acting. Kelly explores one aspect, historiography, "which, until recent years, has favoured a masculine-dominated military-political history" (2009, p.339). Therefore, the memorialisation of women has tended to be overlooked due to women being ignored in the historiography and the perceived unusualness of women going beyond their perceived traditional role.

One prominent autobiographical work by a female writer is Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* (1956), which was a first-hand account of her experience of the Resistance. During the Resistance, she took notes in her own code about the daily events of the Resistance, as well as her own thoughts and feelings. Later, her diary was decoded and Einaudi published the memoir in 1956, not long after Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (1949). There is an interesting



contrast here, as the passage of seven years allowed the publication of a first-hand account of the Resistance. A shift can be seen here, as in 1947 it was a fictional female protagonist, whereas here it is an autobiographical writing by a woman. The book engages with the daily lived experience of Resistance fighters, with a specific focus on the trauma mothers faced when their sons went to fight in the Resistance. It should be noted that this text reproduces the idealised vocation of women as grieving mothers.

## 1960s and 1970s

Before analysing the publications of the 1960s and 1970s, it is pertinent to look at the context of the time. For example, after the tumultuous conflicts in cultural memory, not only between the fascists and antifascists but amongst the differing views of the antifascists, the 1960s onwards are marked by a more united and concise memory. For example, Pezzino highlights that since the 1960s, there has been a “popular, national character of the Resistance, which was portrayed as the struggle of an entire population to liberate the country from the German invader and its few Fascist allies” (2005, p.397). In this memory narrative, Italy was seen as a nation fighting for its own freedom. However, this does not capture the complex lived experiences of Italians in their daily lives. More than this, there is a total neglect of the experiences of the fascists. For example, some Italians consciously and knowingly allied themselves with Mussolini. Moreover, “in a civil war the defeated are often denied the right to memory and are excluded from the ‘public’ view of the past” (Pezzino, 2005, p.397). The dominant public memory can be seen as supporting the antifascists, as especially for Italy establishing itself as a new nation, it wanted to leave its fascist past behind.

A shift in the cultural memory can be seen in these years, as “in the late 1960s and the 1970s the student and worker movement developed the idea of a ‘Resistenza tradita’ (betrayed Resistance): from their point of view, the Resistance had been a class war rather than a patriotic war, a popular radical uprising that had never been realized” (Forlenza, 2012, p.75). This period marked the era of the ‘betrayed Resistance’, as the participants felt neglected by the government. However, “the anti-fascist patriotic narrative of the Resistance was never replaced by a dominant alternative memory. On the contrary it was

confirmed and relaunched in the mid- to late 1950s” (Forlenza, 2012, p.75). During the 1960s and 70s some nuance can be seen in the cultural memory, such as the possibility of a betrayed Resistance, however the dominant cultural memory of the antifascists still prevailed.

In terms of monuments involving women and the Resistance, in 1977, Giacomo Manzù sculpted *Monumento al partigiano* in Bergamo. This piece was his gift to the city. The sculpture depicts a male partisan hanging upside down by his feet, with a woman stood next to him with her arm outstretched. The following script is on the monument “partigiano ti ho visto appeso immobile. Solo i capelli si muovevano leggermente sulla tua fronte. Era l’aria della sera che sottilmente strisciava nel silenzio e ti accarezzava, come avrei voluto fare io” (Pivari, 2015). There are a variety of readings of the woman in this statue, for example “the iconography of Manzù’s female figure can be read as blending grief, bereavement, gratitude to a hero, and the espousing of a new identity as a widow (or grateful survivor)” (Beale in Polezzi and Ross, 2007, p.137). Elvira Cassa Salvi’s essay, *Monumenti alla Resistenza en Europa*, highlights a shift in representation, that statues and monuments from WW1 were concerned with the glory of the soldier, but World War II shifted to representing the pain and the suffering (in Micheli, 1985).

Beale adds to this, “women are included in some monuments and in the pain, which they suffer as protagonists or on someone else’s behalf” (2007, p.145). The inclusion of women in the monuments can be seen as providing women with a space to be remembered in the cultural memory of the time. Alternatively, through portraying them as suffering, it can be suggested that in contrast to the heroism displayed of their male counterparts,



Figure 3 Fig. 3. Pivari, F. (2015) *Monumento al partigiano*, Giacomo Manzù [photograph]

they can be seen as having a more passive role.

In regard to women's representation, there was Cavani's documentary in 1965, *La donna nella Resistenza*. Cavani interviewed a group of women about their experience of the Resistance, and, to my knowledge, this is the first video resource available on women's role in the Resistance. The source will be explored further in chapter 1. The development of these publications is interesting to note, as the first woman protagonist of a Resistance text is a fictional character, Viganò's protagonist Agnese. This is then followed by a first-hand account through Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* (1956), which is followed ultimately by a television documentary. Therefore, a development can be seen as women are increasingly able to use their own voices to share their experiences of the Resistance. While the fictional account is still a woman's voice, the documentary provides an immediacy to first-hand accounts of the Resistance, not mediated through a fictional protagonist.

The 1970s are regarded as the turning point for women's studies as "the emergence of social history 'from the bottom up' and women's history, feminine antifascism finally became a fully-fledged research topic" (Richet, 2016, p.154). Moreover, there was a veritable 'boom' in feminist studies, which could have raised the awareness even further. However, it is difficult to see the effect of this turning point on women's autobiographical Resistance writings. One significant publication was in 1976 *La Resistenza taciuta* (Bruzzone and Farina) which is the account of 12 partisan women recounting their Resistance experiences. Richet regards this book as "opening the floodgates" for reconstructing the feminine Resistance (2016). The book engages with a variety of themes such as women as mothers but also women who chose to fight in the Resistance. The longevity of this book cannot be denied as it was republished by a new publisher in 2016. This republication highlights a renewed interest in both the book and the topic of women's roles in the Resistance. However, despite the general feminist boom of the 70s, there is still a lack of representation of women in the Resistance and I will explore this lack of representation in the next sections.

The lack of representation of women can be seen in the academic response academic responses during the 1960s and 1970s to the Resistance. For example, Charles Delzell presents a comprehensive overview of antifascist publications covering the three decades after the Resistance (1975). However, while he provides an in-depth detail about men's publications, he pays little to no attention to women's publications in the thirty years post-Resistance (1975). Therefore, while Delzell successfully highlights the range of men's publications in the thirty-year post-Resistance period, he demonstrates the contested territory into which women were speaking as little attention was paid to their experiences. However, it should be noted that just because Delzell is genderblind this does not suggest that all critics and scholars of the period were genderblind. For example, there was the emergence of conferences and the first historical studies of women's participation in the Resistance. Therefore, while it has been previously suggested that a focus on women began in the 1960s, I propose that there was an inconsistency and ignorance in regard to analysing and representing women's experiences in the 1970s, which still exists and was only beginning to be addressed at the turn of the twenty first century.

### 1980s and 1990s

In terms of the context of the 1980s and 1990s, the antifascist patriotic memory still prevailed. However, this was called into question due to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. For example,

the most direct impact of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism was recorded in the crisis of the Italian political system in the first half of the 1990s. The foundation of the political legitimacy of the post-war Republic started to be questioned, leading to intense debates over what had actually happened during the war, over who was right and wrong and according to which ethical/political principles the events should be judged. (Forlenza, 2012, p.75)

Given that the memory of the Resistance itself is still being contested at this time, it is the same for the memory of women in the Resistance.

The 1990s signify an essential advancement in women's Resistance narratives. Cicioni highlights that our understanding of the Resistance is incomplete, and that in fact by analysing women's contributions to the Resistance, it will transform our understanding of the Resistance as a whole (Davidson and Wright, 1998). Therefore, the analysis of both women's gender roles and social roles will broaden our understanding of the Resistance. The present project is essential in order to proffer different and more nuanced understandings of the Resistance. Therefore, the turn of the century highlights the theme of explicitly focusing on women's contributions in a more nuanced way.

While there is a lack of testimonies from women in the Resistance in the 1990s, there is more scholarship available in this decade. I acknowledge the possibility that there may be fewer testimonies in this period due to the passage of time, that there were fewer women survivors able to testify to this experience. In terms of critical literature on women's roles in the Resistance, a major text is Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone's *In guerra senza armi: storie di donne 1940-1945* (1995). This book looks at both archival work and biographies in order to explore women's roles in the Resistance, focusing on Turin and the Piedmontese countryside. The book is a collection of autobiographical accounts, and it debates the use of violence, as well as highlighting the importance and value of grass roots forms of Resistance as well as organised Resistance. The book then critically analyses and engages with not only the key theme of motherhood, loss and the *staffetta*, but goes beyond this to explore gender relations in Italy after the Resistance. Bravo and Bruzzone develop their work further, by critically analysing women's criminal activities during the war, from infanticide to the women who volunteered with the Fascist army. Above all, the book calls for more studies on the Resistance, in particular women's contributions to the Resistance. This book aims to bring to light not just women's experiences, but also the civil Resistance and its major contribution to the success of the Italian Resistance. This was one of the earlier works that emphasises the role of women, while bringing to the fore the civil Resistance, which helps broaden our understanding of working-class women and their contributions. However, the book does not only analyse the civil resistance but raises other important ideas, such as that of the war as a shortcut or barrier to modernisation, why men have been the focus of study, as well as the nature of armed resistance and political strategies.

Therefore, while the book does not explicitly look at working-class women, it is indeed a good starting point for disseminating and representing women's testimonies to their experiences in the Resistance and highlights a growing shift in focus for cultural memory. A development in the critical literature can be seen here, as the aforementioned text by Bravo and Bruzzone, began discussion on women's roles, and Cicioni adds to and emphasises the importance of this and suggests that women's contributions will provide a different picture of the Resistance.

The late 1980s and beginning of the 90s signify more research dedicated to women. For example, there is Luisa Passerini's *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (1987). The oral histories of 70 workers, both men and women, are included in this text. They explore their early lives as well as the fascist period. Their oral narratives are combined with the texts that display context of the time. They call for reflection on the past, and how there is a need for the present to change. Above all, the book highlights how the repercussions of Fascism are felt by the working class. Research on women's roles and experiences in particular begin to be explored more by De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (1992) and Willson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (1993). De Grazia focuses explicitly on women's experience of the Resistance, above all highlighting how no two women's experiences were the same, and this experience varied according to women's social class. Willson focuses on the contrast between Mussolini's regime calling women home to the domestic sphere, and the reality that many working-class women had to continue working to support their families. Marco Bresciani argues that research specifically on women under Fascism began to be more visible in the 1990s, as he states, "since the early 1990s fascist studies have been deeply reframed by women's history, gender history and body history with the aim of integrating political and ideological history with the analysis of deeper, underlying cultural patterns" (2021, p.119).

To my knowledge, however, none of the sources, explore the topic of sexual assault within the Resistance. However, this could be due to the sensitive nature of the topic itself, with people not able to come forward or voice their experiences. There is limited information available on the experience of homosexuals within the Resistance. With feminist

researchers in the 1970s calling for more research, there is still a need for more research for a more comprehensive overview of the lived experiences of working-class women through testimonies and autobiographical narratives.

## 21<sup>st</sup> century

In terms of the context of the time, in 2003 Focardi makes the bold statement that in cultural memory in Italy,

the story of the fascist war, the Axis war, has... remained practically intact. Its postulates, namely, that all guilt and responsibility lay with the Duce and Germany, that the Italian people were against the war alongside the Germans, and that the Italian soldiers were intent solely upon alleviating the suffering of the invaded peoples, remain unchallenged. This is a sugar-coated and conciliatory version of a dramatic and morally embarrassing historical reality in which the Italians were not victims, but aggressors, a reality with which the country has consistently failed to come to terms (Focardi, 2003, p.62-63).

In his 2003 essay, Focardi presents the Italians as aggressors, that they were not passive victims in the civil war but aware and playing an active role in their demise. This is an interesting context in which to locate the contested narrative of the Resistance as the Italians had previously been conveyed as oppressed victims or lackeys of the foreigner. Focardi's academic writing highlights a new narrative that has the possibility to seep into public memory. However, Focardi suggests that this did not happen. In addition, he too is guilty of universalising rhetoric, speaking of 'the Italians' and not 'some Italians'.

Alternatively, Forlenza suggests that throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the idea of the Resistance as another Risorgimento emerged, and argues that "Italy embarked on a long period of historical and political self-assessment, in which public debate became focused on the notion of "nation," on the country's identity and history and how to link the past meaningfully to the political present" (2012, p.102). This is a development from Focardi's 2003 statement, as he suggests that Italy has begun to question its own identity and history

and how this links to the present. Above all, Italy can be seen to have a divided memory, where the memory of the Resistance is repeatedly called into doubt in more recent years.

One transformative critical text is by Wilson, which highlights the cultural memory of the Resistance in 2009. Wilson not only focuses on women, but in fact questions what constitutes women's Resistance activity and aims to broaden the understanding of Resistance activity to be more inclusive. This is a key area that will be developed in my research, as many women did stay home but helped to hide the partisans, which means we can consider them Resistance activists. Therefore, my research will adopt this approach and will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Resistance. Wilson posits that a more extensive view should be taken as to what constitutes Resistance activity and that in light of this the women involved in the Resistance could be as high as two million (Willson, 2009, p.180).

It is essential to consider cultural memory for women. More recently, the impact of the neglect of women's narratives has been explored. For example, women have also been influenced by the absence of women in cultural memory. Stone posits that "the inadequate models of gender immortalized in cultural memory impact on the attempts of female writers to understand their own family pasts, out of which their own sense of gendered subjectivity emerges" (2017, p.19). Therefore, women are influenced by the aforementioned gender discourse, and it could affect when and if they come forward to recount their experiences. Moreover, the issue with collective memory is that "collective memory... is both selective and essentially gendered" (Wingfield, 2006, p.10). This gendered collective memory has silenced women's voices, leaving their recollections of the past either untouched or not acknowledged.

In terms of autobiographical writing by women beyond the 1970s, a sporadic production of texts can be seen, with Marisa Ombra releasing her memoir *La bella politica* (2009) followed by *Libere Sempre* in 2012. *La bella politica* includes discussions about women's roles in the GDD (gruppi difesa della donna) and women's involvement in the immediate post war period. *Libere sempre* has autobiographical themes, as it is Ombra writing a letter as a girl during the Resistance, reflecting on her experiences, to a girl in the early twenty-first



century. *Libere sempre* explores a variety of themes, such as anorexia during the Resistance, her role as a *staffetta*, as well as adapting to life after the war. Ombra considers the range of possibilities available to women now that were unimaginable during her time as a teenager. The most recent first-hand account of the Resistance is Lidia Menapace's autobiographical narrative *Io partigiana, La mia Resistenza* released in 2014. Menapace explores her role and participation in the Resistance. Then, at the end of her autobiographical narrative, she reflects on women's representation over the years. Menapace challenges certain academic responses to women's representation. This source will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

More recently, a piece of Italian Resistance history has been written in a biography style by an English writer. In 2019, Caroline Moorehead released *A House in the Mountains: The Women Who Liberated Italy from Fascism* which explores the Italian Resistance through the lives of four partisan women, Ada Gobetti, Bianca Guidetti Serra, Frida Malan and Silvia Pons. In order to create this piece of non-fiction, Moorehead relied heavily on the participants' works and diaries, such as Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* (1956). Moorehead's work was then translated into Italian, *La casa in montagna: Storia di quattro partigiane* in 2020. Her text can be seen as a source that is disseminating texts that have been lost over the passage of time. Moreover, her work can be seen as an internationalisation of Italian cultural memory. All of these sources are needed to shed more light on women's participation in the Resistance. Therefore, while the 70s demanded more critical attention to women's activism in the Resistance, the turn of the century did include some detailed literature, but ultimately highlights that there is still more work to be done.

Finally, I discuss the academic response in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2001 when exploring the impact of antifascism, John Whittam states "more specific themes also require further attention and refinement... It is to be hoped that historians like Victoria De Grazia, Luisa Passerini and Perry Willson will continue to shed light on the role of women" (2001, p.171). Whittam simultaneously acknowledges the growing current field of work while calling for more attention to it. Therefore, there are continuous calls for more research, but this has received little academic response. The turn of the century saw a different approach to women's experiences of the Resistance, as more sources look at first-hand accounts of the

women themselves such as diaries or interviews to provide a broader understanding of the Resistance (D'Amelio, 2001, Alano, 2003, Ferrari, 2009, Sczurko, 2023). This shift in scholarly representation has been reflected in the public sphere, with more autobiographical narratives coming to the fore which will be explored in more detail in the chapters of this thesis.

In the case of women, it appears that it is not until recently that they have been at the forefront of research, despite a resurgence in the 1970s. Richet proposes that the main problem with the sources is that they “incorporate sexual inequality and marginalise or undervalue feminine sources” (2016, p.153). Therefore, Richet highlights a prominent issue for women and fascism, that they were subjugated in an essentialist manner under the regime and continued to be so well after the regime as well. Richet and Stone all highlight how despite the call for more attention to women's roles in the 1970s, a neglect can still be seen well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, a focus on women's testimonies and autobiographical narratives are essential not only to increase women's representation, but to reframe the understanding of the Resistance by considering the lived experiences of a variety of women.

Dan D'Amelio's 2001 article calls for an explicit focus on women to highlight their lived experiences and how their contributions led to the success of the Resistance. To do this, D'Amelio focuses on selected women's testimonies of the Resistance, where they highlight their contributions as *staffette*, active combatants as well as their experiences of torture. Moreover, D'Amelio considers how women's involvement not only led to the success of the Resistance, but how “it also marked the beginning of a new era of greater emancipation, which the many thousands of women in “la Resistenza” won for post-war Italian women” (D'Amelio, 2001, p.140). Therefore, D'Amelio touches upon a variety of women's lived experiences of the Resistance and increases women's representation.

One key source on women's narratives at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be seen in Jomarie Alano's article, *Armed with a Yellow Mimosa* (2003) which focused not only on the contributions of individual women but on the significance of the women's defence groups

during the Resistance. For example, Alano not only looks at women in the Resistance, but puts a particular focus on the GDD and ultimately posits that they have been neglected and the network has “not received the attention it deserves as a training-ground for women’s political participation in post-war Italy” (2003, p.616). This political group activism is particularly prominent in the area of Turin, as many strikes that were organised were organised through these defence groups. It is important that women’s defence groups are considered as for some women this began their involvement in the Resistance and led to them being politically involved after the Resistance as well.

The lack of available literature and autobiographical sources can be seen as a continued injustice to women’s contribution to the Resistance and this research aims to combat this. A more recent area of research that has been called for is the need for the analysis of grass root narratives of the Resistance (Willson, 2009, p.198 and De Nardi, 2015, p.241). This means paying attention to the working-class civilian women who participated in the Resistance while going about their everyday lives. The analysis of working-class women will broaden the range of perspectives of women who participated in the Resistance, while increasing the understanding of their experiences and what contributed to and can be understood as Resistance activity. In addition, it will broaden our perception of the Resistance as a whole, perhaps changing or altering what we currently know (Wilson, 2009). This proposed area of research is invaluable as it shows the development in the analysis of women’s contributions to the Resistance. In addition, through analysing a range of autobiographical accounts, this research will provide a direct insight into the first hand lived experience of the Resistance for many women. Moreover, the acknowledgement of this area of research highlights that there is still more to be done in terms of hearing women’s individual testimony to the Resistance.

Overall, this literature review highlights the initial neglect on women’s representation, the call for more attention in the 1970s, and how there has ultimately been a sporadic production of texts and academic responses over the years. Throughout the previously highlighted literature on the Resistance, slow and gradual release of publications can be seen, resulting in many gaps on women’s experiences of the Resistance. Above all, the women can be seen as speaking in a variety of contested territories. However, recently

there is more nuanced critical analyses that are starting to be published<sup>2</sup>. Now, I will go on to analyse the primary texts while considering the social context of the time. To begin with, I will analyse Cavani's *la donna nella Resistenza* (1965).

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the following texts: Willson (2009), Alano (2003) and D'Amelio (2001).

## Cavani's *La donna nella Resistenza*: A Visual Medium Exploring Women's Experience of the Resistance

The following chapter will critically explore Cavani's television documentary, *La donna nella Resistenza* (1965). The documentary has a duration of 47 minutes, in which around 20 women are individually interviewed and asked questions by Cavani about the Resistance, while Cavani herself remains off screen. The questions are then voiced by the narrator, Riccardo Cucciolla throughout the documentary. These interviews were initially streamed on the RAI in 1965 and the documentary is still available today on other outlets such as Youtube. During this chapter I will be analysing the interviews in light of Rosemary Jolly's notion of "embodied witnessing" (2011), Cathy Caruth's trauma theory (1995), Bill Nichols work on documentary (2010) and Sara Jones mediated remembering community (2012). In addition, I will engage with Nichols (2010) to explore the genre of documentary and how the source has been constructed.

In particular, I will demonstrate how Cavani creates a heavily mediated source that attempts to broaden the understanding of women's experiences of the Resistance and does this by drawing on women's already socially accepted roles in society. For example, the role of the mother. I posit that she does this due to the social context of the time. Stereotypically, women were restricted to the domestic sphere, and Cavani presents women as maternal throughout her documentary while presenting them as antifascist. In this way, the documentary does challenge the discourse about women's roles in the Resistance, but does so within already existing frameworks, rather than subverting these frameworks completely. The interviewees are speaking into a social context, a pre feminist moment, with Cavani's aim to bring these voices into the public sphere. I propose that Cavani presents the interviewees as latching on to an acceptable existing narrative, such as women as maternal, and showing how it was not that much of a progression to the political sphere. Above all, it is a way of inserting this into the discourse of the time as Cavani is attaching their contributions to a role that is already available for women. In order to demonstrate this argument, this chapter is divided into two key themes that the women present: resisting normative gender roles and embodied witnessing. The nature of the visual medium will be explored further in the embodied witnessing section. Therefore, the research will proffer a

greater understanding of the Resistance as a whole by focusing on women's testimonies and experiences.

## Liliana Cavani

Before analysing the source, it is pertinent to explore Cavani's own history. Born in 1933, Cavani was raised during the war with her maternal family being both antifascist and working class. In 1961, Cavani began working for the RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana) as the director of historical documentaries and she held this position until 1965. It was then in 1966 that she released her first full length feature film, *Francesco Assisi* (Cavani, 1966). One of Cavani's well known works was *Il portiere di 45 notte* (1974)<sup>3</sup>, which focuses on a Nazi concentration camp officer and his relationship with one of the prisoners. In 1965, Cavani's *La donna nella Resistenza* was released to commemorate 20 years of freedom from war and Fascism. Therefore, Cavani's position of power must be acknowledged as she played an important public role in the official discourse on the Resistance through the RAI. The documentary forms part of a series, '*Prima pagina – programma di attualità*'. She made another documentary for the series, *Il giorno della pace* (1965), where two generations reflect on World War two. This documentary is significantly less known, despite being released in the same year, with little to no critical literature available. (Brignoli, 2015 and Serantoni, 2013).

Cavani's 1965 documentary, *La donna nella Resistenza* (1965) has been well received and is still appreciated today in scholarship as it was "il primo documento dedicato esclusivamente all'esperienza delle donne italiane nella lotta al nazifascismo" (Brignoli, 2015, p.159) and has been highly praised: "fu la prima ad alzare il velo di reticenza e di ipocrisia calato sulle donne partigiane, ridotte nell'immaginario collettivo a crocerossine, semplici assistenti, anziché vere combattenti" (Comune.milano.it, 2020). This 2020 text presents Cavani's documentary as the first to reflect on women as active participants in the Resistance. Indeed, it is interesting to note the limited available literature around the release of the documentary and that it is not until the turn of the century that Cavani's documentary is

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<sup>3</sup> Cavani returns to the topic of the Resistance in this film as it focuses on a concentration camp survivor and her relationship with an SS officer after the war during the 1950s.

considered in this regard. The documentary has received praise due to its representation: “ha ben rappresentato il fenomeno della “Resistenza taciuta” ed il ruolo di tali figure femminili” (Serantoni, 2013, p.26). Therefore, the source is important as Cavani herself shows an awareness of women’s neglected roles as she states “si può affermare che il sacrificio delle partigiane non è stato ricompensato come sarebbe stato giusto” (ANPI.IT, n.d.). The documentary demands an acknowledgement of women’s sacrifice and contributions made during the Resistance.

This source was chosen for this thesis due to its specific focus on working-class women: “sono donne del popolo, intellettuali, borghesi e tutte, per scelta della regista, non note, sono cioè donne che non hanno avuto un prosieguito pubblico dopo la Liberazione” (Brignoli, 2015, p.160). This is crucial as at the time the main focus was on commemorating the men involved in the Resistance, leaving the women often overlooked or ignored, as explored in the literature review and context section. In addition, it was essential to focus on the working-class women as they did not always have the resources to make their voices heard and some were illiterate. Francesca Brignoli highlights that not only are the women unknown, but also that they had no public follow-up after the Liberation: that is, after the Liberation their contributions to the Resistance largely went ignored. Therefore, the selection of women in Cavani’s documentary is relevant to this research as not only are they not famous or well-known, but they are also women who perhaps have not had the opportunity to share their story, or an adequate social setting to be heard.

## Defining Documentary

Moreover, it has been essential to explore the genre of documentary when exploring the source. Nichols defines documentary as “neither a fictional invention nor a factual reproduction, documentary draws upon and refers to historical reality while representing it from a distinct perspective” (2010, p.6-7). The filmmaker is creating a particular narrative due to the way they construct the documentary and what they include. In Cavani’s documentary, she puts together multiple women’s testimonies, having them cut from one to the other and between each other. The interviewees are answering the same question that was asked by Cavani. The narrator guides us through the documentary, asking the questions posed by Cavani. Each element of the documentary has been made and edited in order to provoke a certain response in the audience and present a certain narrative. In this case, Cavani has asked specific questions to each of the women in order to create a succinct and coherent discourse. The documentary is a construct, designed to tell a particular story. The role of the filmmaker, in this case Cavani, must be considered to evaluate how she has constructed the narrative and what message she is trying to send. Given that the documentary is set up with facts on the statistics of participants and then the letters, it gives the sense that the rest of the documentary is going to be factual and authentic. The letters are from members of the Resistance to their loved ones, often before their execution. These letters are read out by the narrator during the introduction of the documentary. The impression on the reader for the rest of the documentary is that it is a factual piece of work.

In addition, when considering the source as a form of documentary, it should be taken into account that “the presentation of self in front of a camera in a documentary might be called a performance” (Nichols, 2010, p.8). The women are in front of a camera, voicing their interpretation of the event. It can be suggested that the women are presenting a version of themselves that they would find acceptable to be viewed and judged by others. Throughout the documentary, there are reconstructions or real footage of women during the war. As the viewer, I was unable to tell if the footage was real or not. The impact on the viewer is that they believe they are witnessing actual Resistance footage, further adding to the presentation of the documentary as factual. Then, after listing some statistics about women’s participation and casualties, Cucciolla, the narrator, asks a question and different



women are presented in front of the camera answering. This occurs in short excerpts, with some women on screen at multiple times in the documentary as they are asked different questions. Some of the questions included in the television documentary are: in terms of why they joined the Resistance “cosa fu che le mosse?” (LDNR, 1965, 4:40) and “la lotta partigiana era in contrasto con la femminilità?” (1965, 42:15).

## Publication

The broadcast during 1965 of *La donna nella Resistenza* is significant as it was released before the ‘boom’ in feminist studies in Italy. Moreover, from the 1970s, as previously noted “feminine antifascism finally became a legitimate fully fledged research topic” (Richet, 2016, p.154). Richet writes in both French and English and is a professor at a university in France. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the use of the term “feminine antifascism” could be an issue of translation. However, if intentional, the use of the phrase ‘feminine antifascism’ raises the question, what does Richet mean when they say femininity? The phrase could be considered problematic due to the following questions it raises. For example, is feminine antifascism only an act with which women who participated in the Resistance can engage? Or is it the idea of a ‘feminine’ way of doing so? The question of femininity will be explored later in this essay. Above all, this phrasing highlights the problematic ways the topic is still being discussed in 2016. Given Cavani’s privileged position as a director commissioned by the RAI just before the ‘boom’ in feminist studies and activism, she had the opportunity to challenge or even change the RAI’s discourse and I posit that Cavani started the new trend of feminist Resistance studies.

## The Collective Experience

On the other hand, while speaking about their own individual experiences, Cavani highlights how the women are testifying to a collective experience. The women in the documentary are able to do this as “the singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole” (Sommer, 1988, p.108). The women do not aim to replace each other with their testimonies, but instead are able to stand as individual women testifying to the same event. This can clearly be seen in

the format of the documentary. All of the women are asked the same questions, and some even have similar visual reactions. In turn, this creates the impression of common memories. The effect on the viewer is that they are seeing an experience of the Resistance that is then confirmed and verified by other witnesses. Therefore, the viewer is left feeling that what they are viewing is fact.

The format of the documentary suggests a collective element. For example, by intercutting their stories Cavani not only highlights their individual contributions but highlights the importance of women's collective experience. Similarly, Guidetti Serra in chapter three focuses on women's collective experience by grouping women's individual Resistance autobiographies into a book. Like Cavani, the stories are interlinked, with women describing the same role or event. The interweaving and linking of the stories in both Cavani and Guidetti Serra's sources is essential to analyse, as together they are creating a collective identity for women in the Resistance. This can be referred to as what Jones describes as a "mediated remembering community" (2012, p.201) which "not only creates a further sense of authenticity or authority for the narratives, as they appear to overlap and support each other, but it also allows... wider political relevance" (Jones, 2012, p.201). Instead of one woman's response, Cavani intercuts multiple women's responses, suggesting a collective memory. The effect on the reader is that not only is this a factual documentary, but also one where the women are in agreement with each other; in this way, Cavani presents a collective narrative. This is pertinent as it is being launched into a social context where women's testimony is often not believed. I propose that this is the case for Cavani's documentary, that by having a unified individual response that creates a collective element, it creates a political impact and relevance. This wider political impact will be explored further in Chapter five.

Cavani includes the response of a woman speaking out about women's generalised experience and feelings. For example, in response to why she joined the Resistance, one unnamed woman at the beginning of the documentary states "le donne hanno sentito che non potevano aderire ad una dittatura ad una forma di governo che imponeva loro che per prendere degli atteggiamenti che erano contrari a quello era il loro profondo contesto morale" [sic] (Cavani, 1965, 04:55). This woman is positing an essentialised women's

viewpoint on the fascist regime that suggests a collective experience, which doesn't bear out in reality. It suggests an essentialist viewpoint on the Fascist regime as the unnamed woman is speaking out on behalf of all women under Facism which as previously mentioned, does not bear out in reality. However, it is interesting to note that from this unnamed woman's perspective, she believes that women as a whole stood up against Fascism as it went against their morals. Moreover, regarding the end of the war on the return from the concentration camps, one woman comments "noi eravamo come delle persone fuori dal tempo perché noi ricordavamo il dolore" (LDNR, 1965, 40:13). This signifies a collective experience for the women who survived the concentration camps, that upon returning back to their normal lives they felt that they were out of time and place. The woman is speaking from an individual perspective but presuming it is a collective experience.

## Gender

In the documentary Cavani asks a series of questions focused on gender, eliciting responses as to why women joined the Resistance, what they feel about their gender roles as well as what it was like being a woman in a position of leadership. The following section will draw upon Joan Scott and Cicioni's aforementioned gender theory, and show how, through specifically analysing women's contributions, we gain a greater understanding of the event as a whole. In addition, I will demonstrate how Cavani emphasises women's maternal and domestic role within the Resistance as this was a socially accepted role for women at the time. Through focusing on women's roles, this section will demonstrate Cavani's essentialised view of gender, while ultimately highlighting a tension to Cavani's gender narrative.

Throughout the documentary Cavani draws on women's maternal role to present a politically active side to women. I propose that Cavani draws on the accepted social role of women as maternal in order to highlight how women were politically active. Due to the social context of the time, such as women not having the right to vote and being accepted as maternal figures, it was the most acceptable way for women to be presented as politically active as well. One interviewee, Marcella Monaco highlights a development to

her maternal role to not only to protect her own children, but to help the children of those oppressed. For example, she describes the following event. A truck is taking a Jewish father and his six-year-old daughter away, and Monaco offers to take the daughter to protect her and in regard to this states “quel vergognoso periodo” (LDNR, 1965, 31:01). The adjective shameful highlights the disgrace and disgust she felt at the event happening in her own country that even inflicted suffering upon children. Her action highlights a multifaceted maternal aspect to women, as “women were presented, and presented themselves, as acting as mothers, whether they were sheltering an escaped Allied prisoner in their homes or camping out with an armed brigade in the mountains” (Willson, 2009, p.189). Monaco was able to rescue the child and look after her in her own home with her own children, where the child’s own mother later found her via the Red Cross. Cavani presents women as politically active through their maternal role, which may have been considered as more socially acceptable. This is important to note as “women stressed motherhood because it was the strongest female image on which they could draw, and the only socially acceptable one in which women could be stronger than men” (Willson, 2009, p.195). Cavani can be seen as stressing their motherhood to try and present a radical and politically active woman in a social climate where women were typically not considered as such.

In addition, Cavani presents a familial gendered narrative for women joining the Resistance. One of the first questions posed in the documentary is why women joined the Resistance. A few of the first women who speak are unnamed and their responses challenge the view that women joined because of their fathers and brothers. One of the unnamed women at the start of the documentary exemplifies this view. Her immediate response to the question is how she could not understand why she had to reject her Jewish friends: “non riuscivo a rendermi conto del perché io avrei dovuto rifiutare alcune amicizie” (Cavani, 1965, 05:22). Antisemitism gradually rose in Italy as “although Fascist racism was not initially antisemitic as in Germany, notions of racial superiority became increasingly current during the Ethiopian war and after 1938 policy was explicitly anti-Semitic” (de Grand, 1976, p.957). One clear reason for her joining the Resistance is the unjust treatment of her Jewish friends. She then adds that her brothers’ return from Russia and their retellings of the atrocities they had witnessed perpetrated by the Germans added to this desire to join the Resistance (LDNR, 1965, 5:28). Therefore, this interviewee highlights how women may have been

influenced by their family, but how their own personal affiliations and opinions motivated them as well. Therefore, women can be seen as making such a decision for themselves, and not only to follow their family. In this way, Cavani begins to emphasise women's growing agency during the Resistance to make such decisions and act outside of the domestic sphere. She thereby highlights how women progressed beyond normative gender expectations and pervasive historical narratives, as women are often not given credit for their own political and ideological autonomy. Cavani is creating the narrative that women joined the Resistance for a variety of reasons that may not have been previously considered.

Cavani incorporates narratives that expand on the reasons for joining the Resistance – for example, through one of the interviewees, Norma Barbolini – in order to add to the discourse on why working-class women in particular joined the Resistance. One of the first named interviewees, Barbolini states that she joined the Resistance due to the unfair factory conditions and pay, and ultimately “noi abbiamo desiderato vivere in un mondo migliore” (Cavani, 1965, 07:20). This highlights a reality for a lot of working-class women under Fascism, and Cavani highlights a clear reason for women joining the Resistance here, a desire for better working conditions and a better world. In the context of fascist propaganda, “after 1935... women were no longer considered as individuals having professional goals but rather as producers of soldiers” (de Grand, 1976, p.963). A normative gender role can be seen for women here as one of their main expected roles was to add to Italy's population. However, the reality for working-class women was that they had to provide an income for their family. Barbolini here provides an insight into the collective women's experience; that is, that they considered themselves fighting for a better world. This collective element can be seen through her use of “noi” (Cavani, 1965, 07:20). In this way, Cavani shows that women had already had a significant presence and role outside of the domestic sphere. This desire for better conditions can be seen in the many strikes that took place throughout the Resistance, especially around Turin which is where many of the factories were located (as noted in the discussion of Guidetti Serra's work in Chapter 3). Therefore, Cavani presents women as not only having joined the Resistance due to family reasons but because of their own personal and political reasons. Cavani emphasises women as active political participants outside of the domestic sphere, with the agency to make their own decisions for joining the Resistance.

A question raised when analysing women's contributions to the Resistance as portrayed by Cavani is the relationship between women and femininity. In light of the fascist social context of the time, women were expected to be the maternal caregivers of the family. Therefore, Cavani's documentary directly asks the question "la lotta partigiana era in contrasto con la femminilità?" (1965, 42:15), to which one unnamed woman responds "direi proprio di no... non è che la femminilità si perdesse in quei momenti... ci dava certi intuizioni" (*LDNR*, 1965, 42:48) and goes on to suggest that it in fact made them (women) more useful. Cavani's wording of this question will be analysed first. By stating "in contrasto con la femminilità", Cavani suggests an essentialist quality that all women have to be something normatively defined as "feminine". Cavani evokes normative gender roles here as she poses the question of whether the Resistance was in contrast to being feminine. However, she may have phrased the question this way intentionally in order to elicit and encourage a response from the interviewee that focuses on gender roles. The unnamed woman highlights how being a woman also means being able to do this kind of work. For example, she reframes the stereotypical characteristic of female intuition as a strategic Resistance tactic. In light of this, this woman suggests that the inclusion of women was an essential asset to the Resistance. Moreover, both the question and response reveal that most women's understanding of 'being' a woman and embodying femininity was much more complex and nuanced than the Fascist or even Resistance norms of gender. It should be noted, however, that Cavani poses this question at the very end of the documentary. In addition, by asking and incorporating responses that deny any need to renounce femininity in order to be involved in the Resistance, Cavani is reconfirming the idea that women ought to value their femininity above all else. An ambiguity can be seen here, as at times during the documentary women begin to challenge their maternal normative gender role. However, it is here at the end of the documentary that Cavani is ultimately reinforcing the idea that women should want to be feminine and being in the Resistance was no barrier to this. The effect on the viewer is that women's previous explanations and involvements in the Resistance were only permitted as they ultimately remained feminine. Again, I propose that Cavani does this due to the context the documentary was being published into and potentially her own ideas on gender, which were perhaps also of their time.

Perhaps, given these essentialised views on gender, the documentary should be considered with Judith Butler's gender theory. In terms of gender, she questions the idea of gender as performative (2015, p.32). As aforementioned, Butler suggests that gender cannot be defined simply by our actions and that it is more than this. The women in the documentary embody Butler's statement, that the interviewees should not be defined by a narrow model of femininity, and in their actions, which transgress this model (in some ways), they redefine and enlarge the idea of 'woman'. For example, they expand the traditional normative gender role that women are stereotypically defined by and instead suggest how women have transgressed this role. Above all, the women demonstrate that it is not their actions that should be considered what makes them women, but rather they complete these acts *and* are women.

Indeed, Cavani's documentary begins to challenge the perceived normative gender roles for women in the Resistance, and in fact highlights how women progressed these roles and how some women were active combatants. Given the release of the documentary in 1965, where women still did not have the vote in Italy, it is interesting to see how Cavani begins to present the women as active fighters but ones who feel the need to occupy a traditional gender role in order to be heard and understood. By doing this, I propose that Cavani is promoting this narrative in order to highlight how women's actions were just as valuable as their male counterparts. Cavani exemplifies this through one interviewee, Barbolini, who participated in a brigade headed by her brother, and she herself was later in charge of it. In reference to her leadership, she states "ero sicura che i partigiani mi avrebbero anche appoggiata" (*LDNR*, 1965, 13:58). Slaughter suggests that women "could take pride in and even marvel at the unprecedented number of women who... engaged in political and military activities historically considered beyond the range of usual female experience" (1997, p.119). Barbolini can be seen as engaging in such an activity. The concept of the 'usual female experience' suggests that military roles or any kind of political engagement were outside of women's normal limits. Therefore, Cavani shows that through the Resistance, some women were able to progress their normative gender roles but, crucially, to some degree, felt it compatible with their understanding of femininity. Cavani demonstrates how women were integral to the success of the Resistance and that they have yet to be fully recognised in society for this. In particular, society "did see a 'widening of the

female sphere'... the urgency of the situation enabled them to transgress the boundaries of 'respectable' feminine behaviour" (Willson, 2009, p.181). Therefore, the Resistance helped create a space for women to progress their traditional gender roles and Cavani's documentary is the beginning of work to explore this idea.

However, generally speaking, it was no easy feat for women to have a combatant role as "initially, partisan commanders did not want women in their units" (D'Amelio, 2001, p.128)., it is through this active combatant narrative that Cavani attempts to insert women as active combatants into the Resistance discourse. The presence of a woman in the brigade may perhaps have been unexpected. However, Kelly later goes on to propose a challenge to this as he states: "at least at the inter-personal level within the brigades, women were held in high esteem and with great affection by their male counterparts" (2009, p.339). Therefore, in some brigades women were made to feel welcome. Barbolini suggests this throughout the interview, and even when her brother was unable to lead due to a severe injury and she takes up leadership, her comrades continue to support her and with her leadership they were able to win the battle at Cerré Sologno. This was a significant battle between the partisans and the Fascists that took place near Modena on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1944. Her value is clear as there was a bounty on both her and her brother's head for "400,000 lira" (Cavani, 1965, 15:00). The effect on the viewer is that if the enemy saw her value, why has it not been acknowledged by the victors after the Resistance? Through this narrative, Cavani is attempting to challenge the lack of acknowledgement for female combatants after the Resistance. In terms of context of the time, many women had not been allowed to participate in the victory parades and women still did not have the vote. Cavani is trying to challenge the general discourse of the time, that women were only restricted to the domestic sphere. However, I do acknowledge the social political and economic impetus of the time to return women to the home. Instead, through the interviewees and their accounts of their combatant role, Cavani 's documentary begins to present the discourse of women as active combatants.

Cavani presents a domestic gendered experience of the Resistance through women's roles as *staffette*, as Cavani does not present the women as close to violence and death. Throughout the Resistance, the *staffette* were used as messengers and were integral in



maintaining communication lines as well as transporting arms and correspondence. Fraser names just some of the required duties of the *staffette*: “si occupavano di approvvigionamenti, comunicazioni, raccolta di informazioni e propaganda” (Fraser, 1994, p.162). One unnamed woman states that she joined the Resistance as a *staffetta* because “questi ragazzi... avevano bisogno anche dell’apporto delle donne” (LDNR, 1965, 8:13). Through this interviewee, Cavani emphasises how the partisans had a need for women’s support. Therefore, Cavani raises the question of how successful the Resistance would have been without women. D’Amelio posits that for women during the Resistance “one of their most crucial and dangerous functions was working as *staffette*” (2001, p.130-131). Women were essential for this role as they were not often presumed to be carrying out domestic tasks, where the women in the documentary highlight that this is not the case. In carrying out the duties of the *staffetta*, women were often required to cycle miles in a variety of conditions in order to keep key lines of communication open, thus highlighting the strength and determination required carrying out this role. The role was held in high regard as “initially it was given to older and more experienced women” (Behan, 2009, p.163-164). I posit that if the aforementioned duties were conducted by a man, there would be no doubt over the importance of this role. I propose it is only due to women’s status as having ‘secondary’ or ‘support roles’ that they have not immediately been regarded with such importance and were actually invaluable in securing the success of the Resistance. For example, “le attività della maggioranza delle donne ‘resistenti’ sono state rappresentate come esterne, o di supporto o di sfondo, alla ‘vera’ Resistenza” (Fraser, 1994, p.154-155). Therefore, Cavani presents a domestic gendered experience of the Resistance, as Cavani does not present the women as close to violence and death, even though this was a part of their *staffetta* role. For example, if they were found to be working as a *staffetta*, or participating in the Resistance in any form, they would either be tortured for any information they could provide on Resistance activity, killed or both. Through not mentioning these dangers in the documentary Cavani presents a domestic gendered experience of the Resistance. I propose that due to the social context of the time, Cavani could not risk alienating her audience and through presenting the women as performing roles familiar from the domestic sphere, the documentary would be accepted into the social context of the time.

## Embodied Witnessing

The following section will focus on the visual medium of the source and Jolly's embodied witnessing. Jolly describes this as "when stigmatisation of the body is involved in past and present harm, the embodied victim-survivor is... constituted as an embodied subject only through the assertion of the impropriety of that body in acts of what we might call secondary stigmatisation" (2011, p.308). There is thus an added element to the witnessing in Cavani's documentary as we, and the interviewees, are embodied people, and the trauma is often physical. As the viewer we can see the interviewees' physical reactions to talking about and reliving their trauma. The following section will focus on how Cavani presents the trauma suffered by the interviewees.

Cavani visually highlights the trauma women suffered during the Resistance. Here, Cavani begins to challenge the gendered narrative of women as safe and protected in the domestic sphere. For example, some women are so affected by the torture and suffered such trauma that they are left unable to speak about their experiences. Cavani exemplifies the trauma women faced through one interviewee, Tosca Bucarelli. She was involved in the Paskowsky bar attack in the Piazza Repubblica in Florence on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1944. She and a fellow male partisan, Antonio Ignesti, planted a bomb in the bar, however when it failed to detonate and risked being discovered she put it in her bag. They fled but ultimately Bucarelli was captured and later tortured. She states, "la prima sera sono stata picchiata molto da un capitano delle SS tedesca... [long pause] invece gli interrogatori successive furono fatti tutti dai fascisti" (*LDNR*, 1965, 20:05). Bucarelli identifies a difference here, that the first interrogator was a SS German captain and the remainder of her interrogators and torturers were "fascists". This suggests that some were fellow Italians. This highlights the number of Italians that supported Fascism. Caruth states that "the danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much" (1995, p.154). Through voicing the events she suffered in the past, there is the possibility that she is forced to not only understand what happened but to relive the trauma, pain and suffering she experienced again<sup>4</sup>. By remaining in the domestic

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<sup>4</sup> I also acknowledge that trauma therapy includes re-narrating the past as one of the ways in which survivors may get beyond reliving the psychic wounds

sphere, it was expected that women would be protected from the public sphere of the war. However, Cavani demonstrates that this was not the case. By including this section in her documentary, Cavani seeks to evoke feelings of empathy for women's suffering in the Resistance. Therefore, Cavani adds a complexity to the domestic gendered narrative that not only did women suffer, but sometimes at the hand of their fellow Italians. The impact on the viewer is to make them consider their perception and understanding of women in the Resistance.

Moreover, before Bucarelli adds the sentence about being tortured by fascists, there is a long pause. Cavani includes this pause and does not edit it out and consequently highlights a struggle to articulate the trauma and this may suggest that Bucarelli is still affected by the event years later. Given that Bucarelli was able to talk without hesitation about the torture from the German soldier, this suggests that she may have been able to process this event but suffering the torture and interrogations from her fellow countrymen is something that continues to haunt her. As Aleida Assmann notes, "the witness to atrocity is... both the person who experienced the ordeal and the person who testifies to it" (Assmann, 2006, p.269). Bucarelli can be considered as repeatedly witnessing the event, not only when it initially happened but when she is later speaking about it as well. This creates an interesting dynamic in analysing her response, as she is not just speaking about the event but simultaneously reliving the atrocity as well. By leaving this moment of silence in the documentary, Cavani is leaving the viewer to reflect on Bucarelli's contributions to the Resistance, and in turn making the viewer question their understanding of women's contributions overall.

Cavani highlights how some women are aware of their inability to talk about their torture. Gilda Larocca is unable to talk about her torture, only commenting on the fascists who conducted it: "non mi hanno risparmiato" (Cavani, 1965, 17:39) and when asked to expand upon her own torture, she comments "non c'è la farei" (Cavani, 1965, 17:45). While attempting to explain such torture, her voice is hesitant and she is looking into the distance, not often looking directly at the camera. By looking into the distance, the impression on the viewer is that Larocca is lost to her thoughts, potentially reliving her trauma in front of the camera. However, to put it into words is still too painful, even after 20 years. Again, the

silence and visual pain on Larocca's face makes the viewer question why women's involvement has not been commemorated before. Jolly's embodied witnessing can be seen here, "the flush of shame, bodily restlessness, and a bowed head indicate the subject's awareness of her/his own un-speakability as a deeply embodied experience" (Jolly, 2011, p.308). Therefore, there is an added richness to this source as we are able to physically see the interviewees and their embodied experiences and reactions to the trauma they suffered. This visual medium has a great impact on the viewer, leaving them to acknowledge women's sacrifices. Through exploring trauma, Cavani is able to evoke questions in the viewer as to why women have not been commemorated sooner.

Here, Caruth's trauma theory can be seen, that "that the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (1995, p.8-9). Therefore, Larocca is still impacted and continues to be impacted by this traumatic event, and the trauma she experienced will continue to return regardless of the time or the place. Here an inherent issue can be seen, that even despite the passage of time or different location many women still struggle to talk about the events of the Resistance. Moreover, it is important to note that as the audience, we do not know what these unvoiced memories are, and they are left both unknown and unheard. The unknown element must be taken into account here since as Caruth suggests, "the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another" (Caruth, 1995, p.11). Similarly, it is through the viewer's watching of and listening to the documentary that the viewer is also a witness to the impact of the trauma suffered by the interviewee. The importance of the documentary as a visual medium is essential, as the viewer has a mediated visual access to the women's experiences and their trauma. These sources are gathered and collected through the speaking to another, not only are they contributing to a female experience of the Resistance but also the processing of the traumatic event experienced. Cavani includes these visual depictions of trauma to evoke a reaction in the viewer. The impact on the viewer is to make them question why these experiences of trauma have only started to be disseminated 20 years after the end of the Resistance.

Sommers highlights the importance of the struggle of speaking out, as she states, “testifying is always a public event” (1998, p.114). Regardless of the number in the audience, there will always be someone listening to the testimony. This suggests that as it is “always” a public event, there is constantly the fear of speaking out, being doubted, or being ignored. She then adds to this by stating “autobiographers can enjoy the privilege and the privacy of being misunderstood, whereas those who testify cannot afford or even survive it” (Sommers, 1998, p.130). Therefore, not only have the women suffered and continue to suffer the trauma of the event, but they are continuously at risk of being publicly ridiculed. This is particularly poignant for women, as “it is no secret nor a provocative assertion that men’s voices, primarily white European, have prevailed throughout history” (Yoke and Ward, 2017, p.1). Not only have women struggled and continue to struggle to get their voices heard, but they are under constant scrutiny in their testimony. Gilmore exemplifies this, as when discussing women’s testimony, she states “women’s witness is discredited by a host of means meant to taint it: to contaminate by doubt, stigmatize through association with gender and race, and dishonor through shame” (2017, p.2). Thus, this is why a feminist analysis of women’s Resistance writings and other forms of testimony is so important as “in reading these texts with the objective of discovering a feminist voice, it is possible to identify and recognize moments in which Italian women, not merely and no longer passive recipients of oppression, actively reflect, anticipate, and create the various feminisms of their era” (Yoke and Ward, 2017, p.1). We will never have a complete understanding of what happened in the Resistance, which therefore makes what they can tell us and their experiences all the more valuable.

As previously shown, many women were expected to be maternal caregivers and remain at home in the domestic sphere under Fascism, however the women in Cavani’s documentary highlight how women were still subject to violence and trauma, such as through seeing their family members tortured and killed. The link between the domestic sphere and trauma could be suggested in the setting of the interviews, as most of the women are interviewed in a domestic background such as the home but are voicing horrific trauma. The effect on the viewer is clear, that despite most women being restricted to the domestic sphere, it did not protect them from trauma. Cavani shows that women’s roles and contributions to the

Resistance have been trivialised due to gendered stereotypes and that in contrast, they have suffered just as much as their male counterparts.

Cavani emphasises another difficult element of embodied witnessing that the viewer witnesses, as the unnamed woman states “se cominciamo a dubitare noi stessi di quello che era avvenuto, ci si chiedeva se era vero forse era falso, sì era un sogno... il corpo portava i segni di questa violenza” (LDNR, 1965, 40:32). Again, Jolly’s embodied witnessing (2011) can be seen here: “the victim-survivor, then, as an aspect of her resilience, produces a coherent, ‘processual’ narrative alongside ongoing embodied suffering that cannot (yet) be processed due to the ongoing nature of the violation” (2011, p.315). Jolly presents a simultaneous process here, that the victim-survivor is able to voice some of her experiences while an embodied suffering is also present. After leaving the concentration camps, the women bore physical signs of the experience. Jolly highlights how it is difficult to process embodied suffering at the time of the traumatic experience as the bodies still show the signs of suffering. Jolly refers to people who have suffered such trauma as ‘victim-survivors’ which is a crucial element to note as while they are victims who have suffered sometimes unspeakable trauma, they should be acknowledged as survivors of such suffering as well. Cavani presents women here in two ways. Women who survived the Resistance and suffered trauma should not only be seen as victims for the horrors they suffered, but also survivors for what they have managed to live through and move beyond. Therefore, Cavani highlights how the woman in the documentary is now able to talk about her own embodied suffering due to the passage of time that has allowed her to process the traumatic event. There is a contrast here, that while the women were physically outside of the concentration camp, the normalcy in the outside world made them begin to doubt whether the traumatic events happened at all. In addition, this highlights the uniqueness and versatility of each women’s experience of the Resistance. For example, the passage of time has enabled some women to voice their experiences, while others are still unable to talk about them.

Cavani highlights how some women were driven to suicidal thoughts and acts while under capture in the Resistance. One interviewee, Larocca, states “sono arrivata al punto di cercare di ammazzarmi, prima buttandomi da una finestra” (LDNR, 1965, 18:14). It could be suggested that because this was something in her control, unlike the torture being done to

her where she had no control, she is able to talk about it. By Cavani including this in her final cut of the documentary, it again forces the viewer to consider and reflect on women's contributions to the Resistance, and why their narrative has not been more widely spread in society. Moreover, even though Larocca is talking about her personal experience and how she was driven to attempt suicide, on another level this narrative evokes obliquely the voices of women who felt similarly. Not only is she speaking out for some women's experiences who are not in the documentary, but she is speaking out about an experience for some that is unspeakable. It should be noted that "documenting trauma also requires the development of frameworks that are sensitive to the social and political contexts in which testimonies and narratives circulate, and to the ways in which particular memories and narratives are rendered 'unspeakable'" (Kennedy and Whitlock, 2011, p.254). Cavani's inclusion of this suicide attempt highlights the delicacy needed in eliciting this trauma, while offering an invaluable insight into an often "unspeakable" aspect of the Resistance. The "unspeakability" is highlighted through Jolly's aforementioned "embodied witnessing" (2011), as at times Larocca is unable to look at the camera and is hesitant to speak. While Larocca struggles to articulate the trauma, we as the audience may never hear it but her body continues to bear the signs and effects. Therefore, Larocca is able to offer a partial<sup>5</sup> insight into the collective trauma women experienced during the Resistance and how they were driven to suicide through voicing her own individual experience. As previously highlighted, multiple women at times are unable to voice their experiences and remain silent while looking into the distance. Through interweaving the interviews, Cavani is creating a collected and unified experience of the women, in this case the torture they suffered. The effect on the reader by having multiple accounts of this is that it was experienced by many women and is a collective experience of the Resistance. Cavani has begun to demonstrate the depth of the trauma women suffered and their sacrifices, yet as previously explored, at the end of the documentary links their experiences back to maintaining their femininity. An ambiguous gendered narrative can be seen throughout the documentary, that at times Cavani develops women's roles and experiences and at other times links them back to their normative gender role.

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<sup>5</sup> Partial as at times she is unable to voice some experiences and we the audience have no way of knowing what these are.

The function of Cavani in the documentary is significant in this regard. Gilmore suggests that “testimony moves— sometimes haltingly, sometimes urgently— in search of an adequate witness. An adequate witness is one who will receive testimony without deforming it by doubt, and without substituting different terms of value for the ones offered by the witness herself” (2017, p.5). Therefore, the role of Cavani in interviewing the women in her documentary is essential, as it could be that the women only felt comfortable testifying in front of her. In addition, it may be that Cavani has linked the women to their femininity at the end of the documentary due to the context of the time, so that it would be published and could begin the search for an ‘adequate witness’, who could later expand on the ideas Cavani has proposed. Moreover, I posit that there is also an “adequate witness” required in the broader audience, an ‘adequate’ audience, who will listen to these experiences and value them for what they are able to say and not what is left unsaid while acknowledging what the women themselves experienced.

To conclude, Cavani successfully broadens the understanding of women’s experiences in the Resistance while drawing on socially expected gender roles. However, Cavani is ultimately limited due to the social context of the time on how much she can broaden these experiences, and perhaps, her own approach to gender which was also informed by the time. This can be seen through the repeated references to women as domestic and maternal, and at times contradictory and inconsistent messages about whether women did progress socially sanctioned gender roles or not. Moreover, Cavani highlights that the risks they faced and the trauma they suffered and relived later on and how it can be seen as equal to that of their male partisan companions. The documentary, in presenting these developed gender roles, highlights just how overlooked women’s roles have been and how much more analysis and investigation is needed. Cavani presents a detailed argument as to why women joined the Resistance, highlighting both their individual and collective nuanced reasons. Cavani’s television documentary exemplifies the aim of this research, to remember and reassert women’s voices and to gain a more nuanced understanding of women’s experience of the Resistance.



Throughout the documentary the interviewees are able to assert their own individual experiences and voice their own stories while simultaneously speaking out for a collective female experience. By analysing these testimonies in light of trauma theory, there is an inherent value to the experiences that they can voice and those that they are still unable to speak about, despite the passage of twenty years. Moreover, by analysing the testimonies with Jolly's embodied witnessing (2011), we are able to see the importance not just in what the women say, but in their physical gestures and what their bodies are telling us as well. Therefore, the documentary unearths a plethora of interesting areas of research for women in the Resistance that deserved to be looked at. Without a doubt, Cavani's documentary shows a gender disparity in the commemoration of the Resistance, and that much more research is needed so that women's roles and contributions are not trivialised. Above all, Cavani's documentary highlights the necessity in recognising women's voices and experiences from the Resistance. This is especially prominent as through these narratives, there is a multitude of ways women have contributed to the Resistance, regardless of whether it is big or small. Women's contributions not only helped to liberate Italy, but to liberate themselves and transcend normative gender roles, which in itself demands to be honoured and celebrated. Now, I am going to analyse the Guidetti Serra's *Compagne* (1977) that was released 12 years after Cavani's documentary and released into a different social context.

## Bianca Guidetti Serra's *Compagne*: Using Multiple Women's Voices to Redefine Women's Experience of the Resistance

The second primary source to be analysed is *Compagne* (1977) by Bianca Guidetti Serra. *Compagne* (Guidetti Serra, 1977) is a collection of interviews Guidetti Serra herself carried out with women living in Turin, all of which focus on their political activism in the Resistance. The majority of the 48 women interviewed are communists, with some being socialists and only three not being formally registered to any political party. All of the women are working-class.

In each account, the interviewee details their political contributions throughout their lives, many of which focus on the Italian Resistance. This source was chosen due to its specific focus on working-class women during the immediate post-Resistance period.

Born 19 August 1919, Guidetti Serra was raised in Turin, Italy and led a life of political activism.

I propose that through this constructed narrative Guidetti Serra is trying, through a multiplicity of voices, to present a gendered political perspective. Similar to Cavani, Guidetti Serra does this using a mediated remembering community (Jones, 2012). Where Cavani does this within already existing frameworks, Guidetti Serra is able to develop this further. This is an important element to analyse, given that Guidetti Serra's text is being released into a more open social context in 1977. Therefore, I will demonstrate a progression in the gendered political narrative, especially in comparison to Cavani's documentary. To demonstrate this, I will draw upon the work relating to *testimonio* (Beverley, 2004 and Reyes and Rodríguez, 2012) and Olick's collective memory work. Kathryn Reyes and Julia Rodríguez propose that "*testimonio* is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret. The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action... The *testimonio* is political" (2012, p.525). I will use the theory of *testimonio* to demonstrate how Guidetti Serra constructs a gendered political perspective on the Resistance. Guidetti Serra is representing multiple female figures to create the idea of a female experience of the Resistance. The social narrative that emerges seems to indicate that the women are step marginally outside of normative gender roles.

This chapter will be structured into the following sections. First, I will provide a literature review and a background on Guidetti Serra. Then, I will analyse the format of the source. To do this, I will engage with Valerie Raleigh Yow's work on oral history (2005). The rest of this analysis is structured into two key parts. In the first section I will look at the multiplicity of voices and how they contribute to a gendered political narrative. In particular, I will focus on how this has developed from Cavani's documentary. Then, I will focus on Guidetti Serra's mediation of the source and women's individual and collective experience of the Resistance. I will adhere to Sommer's definition of the collective and the individual experience (1988). By engaging with Sommer's work, I will demonstrate how women's individual experience adds to women's whole collective experience of the Resistance without being subsumed into that collective experience. Above all, the analysis will demonstrate the impact of the social context of the time and how working-class women's testimony of the Resistance and their voices have been left unheard. This is particularly important as working-class women in history have not had a voice due to a variety of reasons such as issues of illiteracy, misogyny, and patriarchal oppression.

## Literature Review

Guidetti Serra's book was well received at the time of publication, with one review praising it as "molto rappresentativo di una storia "di classe" (Rivista di Storia Contemporanea, 1978, p.132). Pantaloni posits that Guidetti Serra's *Compagne* (1977) marked "l'avvio di un filone di studi "di genere" della Resistenza" (2021, p.2), with Gabrielli stating that "sarà questo volume ad aprire la pista a una ricca e feconda fioritura di ricerche" (n.d., p.397). However, the passage of time has highlighted that while there was a call for more research on women in the Resistance around the publication of Guidetti Serra's text, this was not replicated in the following decades. In fact, given the lack of material available, such as multiple pieces of primary literature being out of print, it suggests that the call for more research has mostly gone unanswered. A poignant problem is highlighted here, that while this book may have been a significant start, just like Bruzzone's and Farina's *La Resistenza taciuta* (1976) released in the same decade, they have not been followed up. Therefore, there is an awareness of the need for more research, but this has not been addressed.

Originally, the text was released during the rise of the second wave of feminism in Italy. During the 1970s, “Italy saw a veritable boom of historical publications related to women’s wartime experiences” (Bonfiglioli, 2014, p.64). However, this boom has not been replicated in the following decades and while some sources have been produced to analyse women’s contributions, these can be seen as small echoes rather than subsequent booms. While fascism put a hold on the advance of women’s rights, the 1970s saw significant developments such as a law for divorce (1970) and a law regulating abortion (1978) being introduced. The social context is invaluable here, as the book was released during a transformative period for women’s rights.

Even more recently in the twenty-first century, academics are keen to acknowledge the longevity and the impact of Guidetti Serra’s text as it has been regarded as a “major contribution(s) to a feminist historiography of the Resistance” (Mosco and Pietro-Pirani, 2017, p.58). For example, Bonfiglioli states that not only is it an important text but that it “challenged the traditional representation of women’s participation in the resistance as secondary to men’s and motivated only by family connections, an image that had also prevailed in left-wing historiography” (2014, p.64). In light of this, it felt important to include this primary text as an example of a work demonstrating how women progressed their normative gender roles in the Resistance. However, it is interesting to note that this book is no longer in print, with the publisher Einaudi no longer publishing new copies. Therefore, while this source is regarded as a significant contribution to understandings of women and the Resistance, it appears that it has been slightly left in the past. The lack of availability of this source reinforces how the ‘boom’ in feminist studies was not reciprocated in Italian Resistance women’s studies, and further highlights the importance of this project and a call for more in depth research and attention.

## Bianca Guidetti Serra

I will now give a brief overview of the author, Bianca Guidetti Serra. Guidetti Serra herself was born in Turin on 19 August 1919. She died in Turin on 24 June 2014. Guidetti Serra was a lawyer and remained politically active after the Resistance. She participated in the Italian Resistance with her code name as Nerina. Guidetti Serra was active during the Resistance around the area of Turin. In 1938, Guidetti Serra sided against Fascism due to the enactment of the race laws (Campobello, 2021, p.1). She was not alone in this, as she took this stance with her friends, one of whom was Primo Levi. During her Resistance activity, she was a strong supporter of the GDD (gruppi di difesa della donna) and promoted the group with fellow female Resistance participant, Ada Gobetti. After the Resistance, from 1947 to 2001 Guidetti Serra continued her work as a lawyer.

Initially, Guidetti Serra's work on the text began as documenting women's Resistance and GDD activity in Turin. Turin itself was an active city in the Resistance and played an essential role as it had a Fiat factory and was a centre of arms production. Any strikes staged were significant in affecting the war effort. The geographical location is important as it is close to the borders of France and Switzerland. Turin was a waypoint for escaping allies. Guidetti Serra herself reinforces the importance of Turin, as "Torino è, infatti, il luogo d'azione" (1977, p.xi).

Before analysing the text, it felt pertinent to set out Guidetti Serra's own relationship with the interviewees. Guidetti Serra already had connections with the interviewees, many of which were due to their work together in the Resistance or their similar political affiliations. It is significant to note the choice of these women, that is, that Guidetti Serra was already familiar with them or friends with them. Therefore, Guidetti Serra already having a connection with the interviewees could have been an advantage to fostering more fulsome responses.

Alternatively, the pre-existing relationship with the interviewees could broaden or limit the scope she has intended. For example, it is possible that these women may not have felt comfortable speaking to a stranger about such personal and traumatic events and this may

have only been possible through Guidetti Serra. Thus, Guidetti Serra's particular subject position has allowed her to provide a comprehensive and detailed study of the area of Turin. In addition, Guidetti Serra shares lived experiences with the interviewees. This connection can influence dialogue. Alternatively, by only including people she knew there is the possibility that other women willing to speak out were missed. However, Guidetti Serra acknowledges this potential limitation of her work, that while she provides an insight into the working-class women of Turin, logistically it was not possible to interview all those whom she found. In light of this, it was simply a case of interviewing those she found first. In the preface she states "a molte di loro... per ragioni di tempo e di spazio editoriale non ho sentito, chiedo scusa" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.ix). This self-awareness is important to take into account, as it suggests that Guidetti Serra was aware of the lack of women's voices and was actively fighting to increase their voices and visibility.

Moreover, Guidetti Serra is acknowledging that there are lots more women's voices that have not been heard. Therefore, she is suggesting that her work is not the final piece of work on the subject but is in fact the beginning. Her acknowledgement of the incompleteness of this work highlights an immediate need to the reader that more needs to be done. This asking for forgiveness suggests that Guidetti Serra is respecting and valorising the experiences of the women who are not included in this book. This suggests an author that is aware of the cultural significance and impact that her work could have on the audience by acknowledging women and other women who have had a similar experience. Guidetti Serra is aware that her book is not complete, (not complete in the sense that it does not provide a comprehensive overview for all women), creating the idea of a humble and self-aware interviewer. Here, Guidetti Serra successfully uses her own voice to highlight that this work is not meant to speak out for all women and is not meant to be excluding in any way women's experiences that are not included. If anything, it can be read as a call to academics to continue her work and keep providing a voice to Italian Resistance women and their experiences.

## The Format of the Text

Before continuing to analyse the source, the role of the interviewer, in this case Guidetti Serra, must be considered. An interviewer's control and management of the interviews, either consciously or subconsciously, can affect the outcome of the interview. However, Guidetti Serra's immediate acknowledgment of this at the start of the book not only shows a prepared and aware interviewer, but immediately prepares the reader, the witness, for the autobiographies that they are about to read. In addition, the testimonies are a mediated source. Guidetti Serra has ultimately asked the questions and has then produced the transcript, which should be taken into account. This section will explore how Guidetti Serra constructs the multiplicity of women's voices and the gendered narrative that she ultimately produces.

The testimonies will be considered as *testimonios*, which Beverley describes as follows:

The word *testimonio* in Spanish carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense – *dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness. Testimonio's ethical and epistemological authority derives from the fact that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in his or her person... the events and experiences that he or she narrates (2004, p.2)

Beverley thus suggests that the witness has knowledge and authority, as they lived through the events they are narrating. I acknowledge that Beverley defines *testimonio* in terms of a genre emerging from a precise historical, political and cultural context, in this case Latin America in the 1970s. However I propose that this description can add further depth to my own analysis. For example, I will analyse the testimonies in terms of individual accounts of a life that speaks to an experience of injustice and sometimes for a collective. Thus, it is important to highlight that through analysing them as *testimonios*, I am not concerned with their historical accuracy, as the witnesses are not testifying to the universal truth of the event, but rather their truth and experience of the event (2004, p.7). Therefore, when considering this source, it is the impact of Guidetti Serra mediating and putting these

testimonies together that is going to be analysed. I propose that Guidetti Serra creates a gendered narrative through her mediation of these testimonies.

The form of the source should be considered. Portelli posits that “written and oral sources are not mutually exclusive” (1981, p.97). Yow defines oral history as “the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form” (2005, p.3). In addition, Yow states “we construct narratives from our memories” (2005, p.35). As such, the interviewees have created a narrative from their experiences that they are going to share with the interviewer. Therefore, it is essential to highlight that initially the source began as a series of oral interviews, which Guidetti Serra recorded and then transcribed and edited with the interviewee’s consent. In light of this, aspects of the interview such as tone, changes in rhythm, hands, and facial gestures are unable to be replicated in the written product. However, Guidetti Serra herself acknowledges this, that they are obvious irreproducible aspects, and instead posits her book “di un ‘parlato’ trascritto e non di uno scritto” (1977, p.xix). Therefore, Guidetti Serra immediately describes her book as a type of ‘parlato scritto’ of the interview. It is not only an oral source, but more than a written source. For example, it is not formal, and it can be seen as a form of written conversation. By doing this, Guidetti Serra is aware of the limitations of her source. For example, she does not include the facial or hand gestures of the interviewees, but never had the intention to due to the “parlato scritto” nature of the text. Here, Guidetti Serra is confessing to a degree of editing of the source. The gesture to somewhat ‘immortalise’ oral sources must be commended, especially as they are not as common today for this particular historical topic. Consequently, the inclusion of this source epitomizes the aim of this essay, to bring the role and experiences of grassroots women in the Italian Resistance to the fore of Resistance research.



## Gendered Political Narratives

The following section will focus on the multiplicity of women's voices and how Guidetti Serra develops their gendered political narratives. This will be looked at especially in comparison to the social context of the time and in contrast to Cavani's documentary. To support this research, I will draw upon Beverley's discussion of *testimonio* (2004) and Sommer's collective autobiographical framework (1988). Guidetti Serra, like Cavani, begins to collate women's narratives within the existing gender essentialist framework. However, it is clear that Guidetti Serra aims to expand and develop this. The women will be considered with Butler's gender theory, that gender is performative (2015), as explored in the previous chapter.

Firstly, Guidetti Serra promotes the gendered political narrative through the autobiographical nature of the testimonies. For example, it has been suggested that there has been a lack of focus on why women joined the Resistance (Richet cited in García, Yusta, Tabet and Clímaco, 2016, p.153). However, Guidetti Serra emphasises an immediate political awareness as she notes that for the women, their antifascist decisions were made before the Resistance, during, and after. As such, "è nata una sorta di autobiografia 'politica' di ciascuna donna" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.vii). By describing it as a 'political autobiography', it should be noted that the book does not aim to explore each woman's personal life, but to describe their political contributions throughout their lives. In light of this, Guidetti Serra states "mi si possono addebitare i difetti che caratterizzano le 'autobiografie' sollecitate" (1977, p.viii). Immediately at the start of the book Guidetti Serra makes the reader aware that while producing this book of testimonies, she is aware of the risks and issues in oral autobiography. This is an interesting choice as she continues with the form of the book. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Guidetti Serra felt that the benefits to the book form of autobiography far outweighed the risks. She presents a variety of risks, from memory to language issues, to benefits such as voicing potentially unheard narratives and exploring an active Resistance site such as Turin. A direct contrast to Cavani can be seen, as at the end of her documentary Cavani puts a gendered narrative forward, that the women remained 'feminine' while carrying out their Resistance duties. In contrast, a development can be seen, as Guidetti Serra begins her narrative with

the women as political actors. This explicit focus on their political contributions demonstrates a shift in the social context, that women could now begin to be considered as politically active.

To begin with, through the testimonies, Guidetti Serra explores how the domestic sphere was also political for women. In this case, Guidetti Serra highlights how many of the women comment on how they were influenced by their father. For example, one interviewee, Cesarina Carletti, states “vivendo con mio padre che era anarchico mi sono formata” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.376). The influence of family cannot be denied here. It is interesting to note that this is a present-day reflection by Carletti on her childhood. Despite the passage of time, she was aware of politics when she was growing up. However, it highlights that Carletti is aware of the role her father played in her political views. The influence can be seen as when she refuses to enlist in the ‘giovani italiane’, a fascist group for children, “mio padre mi ha presa, mi ha baciato e ha detto: sei proprio come me” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.376). It can be seen that there is a sense of pride on his part. Therefore, whether her father intended to influence her or not, he is ultimately proud that she has a similar if not the same political view. This refusal to join the fascist party when she was only a child suggests that she was impacted by her father’s political affiliations and acted accordingly. Guidetti Serra presents the domestic sphere as political for women, even when they were growing up.

Guidetti Serra develops this argument further, by showing the domestic sphere not just in childhood, but adulthood. Another interviewee, Teresa Cerutti in Ruffa, comments that while her father was not a political man but an antifascist nonetheless, his imprisonment affected her as “forse anche questo ha influito su di me” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.417). Guidetti Serra presents women as influenced to participate in the Resistance due to the treatment of their family members. Cerutti in Ruffa highlights her involvement in the Resistance not as a result of her political affiliations, but seeing her father imprisoned. She thus suggests that her father’s detainment was the start of her antifascist political affiliation. She then goes on to add that “e io, senza sapere niente, ero dalla parte di mio padre” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.417). This is interesting to note as she is reflecting from the present day and suggests that at the time, she did not realise she had followed in her

father's political footsteps. In light of this, it can be suggested that Cerutti is presenting herself as a passive subject, that 'senza sapere niente', she had politically aligned herself in a similar way to her father. It should be noted that, through Guidetti Serra's construction of the source, these women draw a specific focus to how they were influenced to participate during the Resistance throughout their childhood, which is a key comparison with Menapace's own autobiography discussed in the next chapter.

However, I aim to expand this viewpoint and posit that Guidetti Serra emphasises their gendered political narrative through their roles as mothers. While Cavani presents an essentialist viewpoint, Guidetti Serra's work can be read through Butlers' framework of gender as performative; that is, it is the women's actions that should be focused on. Their gender role has been given to the women, and in many ways the women can be seen to be resisting the performance. In addition, the women can be seen to be subverting this performance while still retaining elements. For example, they perform the role of the mother but outside of the domestic sphere in the context of the Resistance. This role has been subverted by doing it in the context of violent activism. I propose that Guidetti Serra has focused explicitly on the mother's political activism in order to present, through the multiple voices, a gendered political narrative. Consequently, it is not just their male family member's influence but the entire family. This is an important nuance that should not be overlooked as the role of the mother should be acknowledged. In the case of working-class women, they were often required to work themselves outside of the domestic sphere in order to provide for the family. This role passed down to their daughters, with some of the interviewees working as young as the age of nine. For example, Edera Felici states "mia mamma era tessitrice, aveva partecipato ai primi scioperi di Torino negli anni prima della prima guerra mondiale... Era dell'83.... Mi raccontava diversi fatti" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.252). Here, the role of the mother as the storyteller and political educator can be seen. The role of the mother passing down family stories cannot be understated, and neither can their consequent influence on their children.

Angela Bassino also acknowledges this in her testimony, as she states "io mi ricordo molto bene delle lotte, del primo sciopero delle tessili di Torino... deve'essere del 1902... Me lo ha raccontato mia madre" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.466). However, Bassino was born in 1913, so

while she initially states that she remembers the strikes very well, it is in fact her mother's telling of the strike action that she remembers. This is important to note as there is a double issue of memory here, there is a reliance on her mother to recall it correctly and tell it to her daughter, and then for her daughter to remember it perfectly as well. However, this emphasises the role of mothers as storytellers, and the influence of Bassino's mother on her political affiliations as she was raised surrounded by her mother's legacy and strike accounts. Even this form of oral narrative from mother to daughter can be seen as a form of autobiographical narrative. Moreover, Bassino is presenting her participation in the Resistance as taking part in the family legacy, that her mother was politically active, and she also presents herself as such. In addition, "women's oral tradition often countered narratives of female powerlessness" (Guglielmo, 2010, p.20). Therefore, by women passing down their histories and stories it gives them a voice and challenges the silence they are treated with in society.

However, it should be taken into consideration the "blush of intimacy" explored by Sommers earlier (1988, p.110). This blush of intimacy allows us to see how Bassino depicts her own participation and motivations for joining the Resistance, and how highly she values the role of her own mother. For example, this can be seen in Bassino's testimony, as during one of her mother's strikes there was a flag and Bassino remembers in particular that "è stata proprio mia mamma a portarla" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.467). Here Guidetti Serra emphasises Bassino's fondness for her mother and her political activism. The fact that Bassino recalls it many years later highlights the influence that mothers had on their children, in particular their political affiliation and decision to join the Italian Resistance. Guidetti Serra successfully creates, through the voices of Bassino, Cerutti in Ruffa, and Felici a gendered political perspective on women's motivations for joining the Resistance through their political activism as mothers in the Resistance.

In contrast to Cavani, Guidetti Serra presents women as workers, regardless of them being feminine. Through Guidetti Serra's editing of the autobiographical narratives, she brings to light one of the key roles of women during the Resistance: women as nurses. One interviewee, Bassino, states "a me piacerebbe sentire tutti questi partigiani che ho curato" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.466). Given that this is the first line Guidetti Serra introduces

Bassino with, not her childhood or her date of birth, Guidetti Serra creates the effect on the reader that even many years after the end of the Resistance, Bassino is proud and still impacted by her role as a nurse. Therefore, it can be suggested that through her editing, Guidetti Serra is presenting this woman as primarily talking about her role as a nurse. The impact of this cannot be overstated, as Guidetti Serra is presenting women as not just maternal caregivers, but to have brought this role outside of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere. Therefore, it can be suggested that Guidetti Serra highlights a development to women's maternal role, that they are considered as politically active within their own right, rather than within existing frameworks. The decision to include the role of the nurse in the first line has a direct impact on the reader, that the woman involved was proud to be a nurse and still concerned about her patients. This is further suggested as she goes on to describe some of her patients such as Giuseppe, "ha un'adorazione per me, perché doveva perdere una gamba, tramite la pressione che ho fatto, si è salvato" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.466). Her role as a nurse was invaluable and has stayed with her, as she remembers not only saving his leg but also his name. Guidetti Serra emphasises the importance of women's role as nurses, since "offrivano cure mediche, come anche in precedenza avevano fatto" (Calzamiglia, n.d., p.10). Here Calzamiglia highlights the progression of women's normative gender roles, as even before the Resistance women were expected to be maternal and help those who were ill. However, Guidetti Serra emphasises women's gendered political narrative, how women have transformed this normative gender role in order to help and support those in the Resistance.

In addition, Guidetti Serra presents a gendered political narrative which sometimes shows an awareness of women doing something beyond their normative roles. Guidetti Serra highlights this through one interviewee, Bassino, who is aware of the value of her contributions as "dal municipio di Torino mi è stata consegnata la medaglia d'argento come attestazione del mio contributo" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.466). Guidetti Serra's inclusion of this creates a dynamic contrast in cultural memory as women's contributions to the Resistance have been largely ignored in Italian historiography, yet she was able to receive a medal from the state. Therefore, through including multiple voices, Guidetti Serra is drawing attention to an uncomfortable reality for women, as Bassino's contributions have been mostly neglected by history but in the immediate post-Resistance period she received

a medal commending her contributions. Therefore, by including Bassino's testimony Guidetti Serra highlights the value of women as nurses in the Resistance and the conflicting cultural memory that women lived through. Guidetti Serra highlights an inconsistency in women's narratives and how a few women were acknowledged for their contributions but were then neglected and struggled to have their experiences voiced.

Reyes and Rodríguez highlight the power of testimonies, that "the testimonio is intentional and political" (2012, p.525). Guidetti Serra is not only drawing attention to the lived experiences of her interviewees, but through this gendered political narrative she is highlighting the struggled lived reality after the Resistance for women and the struggle for acknowledgement. The multiple voices used confirm the gendered narrative that Guidetti Serra has created. For example, Bassino received a medal for her contributions but then women's contributions remain largely ignored in general Resistance historiography. In contrast to Cavani, Guidetti Serra is highlighting a political gendered narrative on the Resistance, which she does not redefine at any point by questioning whether the women remained 'feminine' while being politically active.

Guidetti Serra emphasises the narrative she constructs about women through the women's own actions. When describing one of the sabotages she helped the partisans undertake, Lucia Bianciotto states "mi ricordo... non è che l'azione l'ho fatta io... Avevo la borsa con l'esplosivo" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.336). In terms of understanding her own Resistance contributions, she believes that she did not undertake action. This raises the question of what women understood to be Resistance activity and participation. This is reflected in the academic research, as there are varying definitions as to what constitutes a Resistance fighter. However, her importance and involvement cannot be denied as it was Lucia herself carrying the bomb. Therefore, the immediate post-resistance discourse commemorating the heroism of men could have had an influence on Lucia. Consequently, Lucia may not see her own actions in the same regard. Without her carrying the bomb, the sabotage could not have gone ahead. Guidetti Serra's inclusion of this narrative helps highlight the collective experience of many women, that they did not consider their actions as relevant to the Resistance which highlights an incomplete collective experience. Therefore, Guidetti Serra presents a gendered narrative of the Resistance. In this case, a passivity, that if women did

continue with their normative gender role, then they were also able to have some political agency as well. A transference can be seen of their domestic role into the political sphere, and if they continue with this role then it is perceived as more socially acceptable to be politically active.

### Collective and Individual Experience

Having considered how Guidetti Serra develops the gendered political narrative, I will now demonstrate how women's individual testimonies contribute to women's collective memory of the Resistance and add to the gendered political narrative. Guidetti Serra is representing multiple female figures to create the idea of a female experience of the Resistance. In order to do this, Sommer's individual and collective theoretical framework will be drawn upon (1988, p.100-130), as well as Olick's theory of collective memory (1999) and the mediated remembering community (Jones, 2012). I will engage with a key issue in testimony, the issue of credibility as highlighted by Jones (2014) and Aleida Assmann (2006).

It is important, then, for Guidetti Serra's mediation of the source to be analysed. The women are not remembering together, but they did experience the events together, which adds to the element of collectivity. The idea of creating a collective should be noted, as through the inclusion of multiple sources Guidetti Serra is creating a collective sense of memory rather than individual. Jones' mediated remembering community, first presented in chapter 3, will be engaged with again here. As I have and will continue to demonstrate, Guidetti Serra is layering these individual testimonies together in order to create a cohesive gendered political narrative. The testimonies, as shown below, overlap and confirm each other's narratives. The effect on the reader is clear, that through Guidetti Serra's mediation, the reader is receiving a clear and unified response on women's political experience of the Resistance. Jeffrey Olick explores collective memory, and highlights a subcategory, that "the first kind of collective memory is that based on individualistic principles: the aggregated individual memories of members of a group" (1999, p.338). Therefore, it is the individual memories of people that are adding to the whole collective memory. Guidetti Serra is drawing upon the power of the group in collective rather than an individual memory. The power of the group suggests that these women's experiences are not just the account of

one person but are actually part of the experience of the collective group of women across Italy who participated in the Resistance and should not be neglected or ignored any longer. Yow states

But we also remember as a group; that is, we listen to people who have shared the same experience with us, and we gain a feeling of identity with them when we remember as people in our group remember. This phenomenon is termed collective memory, or social memory (2005, p.36).

The power of the collective here is clear, that Guidetti Serra, through mediating the women's individual accounts alongside one another, is presenting a dynamic and unified collective experience. Similar to Cavani, Guidetti Serra is collating these testimonies together in order to create a gendered political narrative. Due to the more open social context of the time, however, Guidetti Serra is able to do this in a more direct manner.

It is interesting then, that Guidetti Serra includes a unique testimony that is not supported by the other interviewees. Guidetti Serra draws upon one woman's individual experiences of torture to highlight an exceptional experience of the Resistance. It is through this interviewee that Guidetti Serra creates a nuanced gendered narrative of the Resistance. The woman goes by the name of B.N. and is the only chapter where Guidetti Serra has written a small foreword. In this foreword Guidetti Serra explains how this was one of the first women she interviewed, and it later became clear after other interviews that due to the torture this woman suffered, "è indotta alla delazione" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.512). Guidetti Serra goes on to state that even after learning from other interviews that she did inform on her comrades, she chose to keep this interview in as "consente una visione del Quadro generale anche sotto questo drammatico, mortificante ma reale aspetto. Ho però eliminato ogni 79elemento che consenta un'identificazione diretta o indiretta" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.512). Therefore, this source is even more valuable as it provides a greater understanding of women's participation in the Resistance and the torture they suffered. In addition, through this individual experience, Guidetti Serra is adding a very real important aspect to women's collective experience that will be relatable for some women. In Cavani's documentary, some women describe how they were tortured but would not give



information on their comrades. Here, Guidetti Serra provides another stark reality, that due to the torture suffered, some women did inform on their comrades. Therefore, by choosing to keep this testimony in the collection, there is an added richness to Guidetti Serra's source as it gives a voice to an experience that is not always talked about and could be considered weak or shameful. The inclusion of this source adds to the impression that Guidetti Serra does not censor her findings and in fact she presents it as an important aspect of a larger picture and understanding. Moreover, Guidetti Serra shows an awareness of the complications the interviewee herself could face and actively chooses to remove any information that may lead to her identification. Therefore, here the use of anonymous testimony is essential as it is able to protect both the woman and her story. This individual experience highlights a very real and relatable aspect to be included in women's collective experience.

However, by including this testimony, Guidetti Serra highlights the risk of narrative memory, as "narrative memory is never innocent. It is an ongoing conflict of interpretations" (Kearney cited in Balfour, 2018, p.732). An element to take into account when analysing the testimonies is that each woman will experience the event differently. In light of this different experience, each woman will recount their experience differently or highlight different elements. Aleida Assmann is a key source to engage with here, as she highlights how testimonies in general serve "less to tell us what happened than what it felt like to be in the centre of those events; [to] provide very personal views from within" (2006, p.263). It should be noted that this research is not concerned in discerning the historical accuracy of their experiences, but rather understanding how the women felt about and how they describe their experiences.

In addition, Guidetti Serra includes anonymous testimony to present women as a collective. One of the interviewees does not want to be named, and Guidetti Serra instead names her as "non vuole essere nominata" (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.441). It is interesting to note that Guidetti Serra still included this piece. For example, It has been suggested that "anonymity also has the power to support women's collective action" (Gordon, 2019, p.543-544). It should be noted that Cavani's documentary, *La donna nella Resistenza* (1965) as previously highlighted, also includes women who do not want to be named. However, there is an

interesting comparison here, as while they are not named, they allow their faces to be shown. In Cavani's documentary, the women do not want their names to be shared but are happy for their faces to be. In contrast, there is nothing to identify the women in Guidetti Serra's text. Therefore, both Cavani and Guidetti Serra highlight the benefits of anonymous testimony, that while we may not know their name, we are still hearing experiences that otherwise may have remained unvoiced. Steven High adds to this, as in terms of oral testimony he states, "the loss only occurs when the oral record is not created" (2015, p.1303). Therefore, High highlights how the anonymous testimony is still just as valuable as the person is testifying to their own individual truth, which would only be considered as a loss if it were not recorded in the first place.

Guidetti Serra's inclusion of this testimony highlights the collectivity of women. For example, the anonymous testimony states "non riuscirono ad entrare perché la padrona di casa alla sera sbarrava il portone con dei travi" (1977, p.443). Therefore, women can be seen as a collective, as the actions and involvements of other women are included in her testimony.

In addition, through the same anonymous testimony Guidetti Serra is presenting women as a collective. For example, she states "davanti al cimitero siamo arrivate solo noi donne" (1977, p.443). This is in regard to the anonymous testifier attending the funeral of the Arduino sisters. The Arduino sisters, Vera and Libera Arduino, had been active in the GDD and had been executed by the fascists due to their antifascist involvement. There was a funeral for the sisters in Turin, which many antifascists attended to support their fallen comrades. Due to the fascists waiting at the entrance, only the women were able to enter. Therefore, women are presented as a collective, 'solo noi donne' at the funeral. As such, it is pertinent to analyse the power of the group and its impact. The women can be seen as a unified group, attending to honour their friends. In terms of Guidetti Serra's gendered narrative, by presenting the women as a collective Guidetti Serra is highlighting their unity. An invisibilisation of the political militancy of the women can be seen. For example, women were allowed to attend the funeral when men were not as the women were not perceived as a military threat. Indeed, since men were not allowed to go, the men were seen as a threat. Guidetti Serra emphasises the gendered political narrative for women through these

testimonies, suggesting that they were underestimated as they were not seen as a threat, either as individuals or as a group.

Guidetti Serra highlights the collective experience of women through the GDD groups. Giespina Scotti notes the first time she entered the group, what her roles were and how she was in contact with well-known Resistance figures such as Ada Gobetti. In terms of her role, she states “come Gruppo di difesa provvedevamo alla ricerca dei viveri, procurarci il pane, i tagliandi e tutte quelle robe lì” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.368). This role can also be a progression of women’s maternal role, as instead of providing for the family they are now providing for the Resistance. Here an important element to analyse is women’s collective experience through their participation in the GDD groups and the strikes. Gilmore states that within memory, there is a difficulty “to clarify without falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously “my” experience when “our” experience is also at stake” (Gilmore, 2017, p.5). Therefore, a collective element can be seen here, as the women are trying to describe their individual experience of the Resistance while also participating and adding to the collective memory of the GDD groups.

However, Guidetti Serra highlights through the individual experience of the Resistance, the collective trauma some of the women suffered. For example, Odinea Marintze highlights how she was carrying out a mission when she realised a fellow woman in the Resistance was in fact a spy and she was captured and tortured. She states “mi han portata al Nazionale legata come un salame. Subito sul Corso mi hanno legata e mi hanno buttata sopra un camion. Mi han bendato gli occhi” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.400). Therefore, this highlights a difficult reality for those participating in the Resistance in knowing who to trust. Through Marintze highlighting her betrayal by another female Resistance participant, it highlights another underexplored area of research, such as the women who were in favour of Fascism or those who betrayed their Resistance peers. By Marintze comparing herself to a piece of meat she is highlighting how she was treated less than human by the enemy. She then goes on to describe her torture “ho tutte le vene rotte nel piede, ho ancora il segno.... Poi sangue dalla bocca, dall'orecchio. Le mani poi, avevo gonfie così... Non potevo neanche più muoverle. Insomma, è stato un brutto momento” (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.401). Jolly’s embodied witnessing, just like in Cavani’s documentary, can be seen again here as

Marintze's body still bears the signs of her trauma to this day. She concludes this description of her torture with a brief statement, that it was a bad time. This perhaps suggests that she does not want to talk about it more but acknowledges the significance of her suffering. Through this individual account of trauma suffered, Guidetti Serra is adding to the collective experience of women in the Resistance that others may relate to.

Guidetti Serra draws attention not only to the trauma they suffered, but also women's memory of concentration camps. Guidetti Serra presents a gendered narrative on women's suffering and trauma during the Resistance. For example, not only does Marintze describe her torture when she is initially captured and questioned above, she describes her later experience at the Ravensbrück concentration camp. She states "io mi domando ancora oggi come hanno avuto il coraggio di distruggere della gente a furia di... come debbo dire... di spalare, di fare delle buche... che a loro non gli servivano mica niente" and then goes on to describe her scars, the hunger suffered and the marches (Guidetti Serra, 1977, p.403).

Despite the passage of time, she still asks herself how those in the concentration camps were able to do this to other people. This questioning to herself perhaps highlights a struggle to process the trauma of the event. However, this was not just suffered by a few women as "in 1939, the SS had the largest women's concentration camp in the German Reich built in the Prussian village of Ravensbrück" (Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, n.d.) and between 1939 and 1945, around 120,000 women and children were registered as prisoners at the concentration camp (Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, n.d.).

Women's collective and individual experience should be engaged with here. Sommer presents a clear analysis of women's collective experience when looking at an individual account, as she states in terms of an individual account "her singularity represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole" (1988, p.108). Therefore, through Marintze describing her own individual experience of a concentration camp, she is adding to the collective experience as well through the exploration of her own experience. This is a direct link to chapter 3, as one of the women states that she also went to Ravensbrück. However, due to the trauma she suffered she is unable to say any more about it. These are two individual experiences that do not try and subsume the collective experience but add to it as identifiable and distinguishable individual experiences as she is one individual.

To conclude, Guidetti Serra has mediated these texts to highlight a gendered political narrative, placing an emphasis on their collective unity and the development of their maternal and domestic role. She constructs these narratives as raw testimonies, but they are still mediated to construct a gendered political narrative. Ultimately, Guidetti Serra has highlighted, through a multiplicity of voices, an apparently direct access to a multiplicity of experiences of the Resistance. Through including working-class voices, Guidetti Serra is promoting the experiences of a social class that has been mostly neglected. The construction of this narrative is dynamic, as they are first hand testimonies that began as interviews which have then been mediated by Guidetti Serra to create a gendered political narrative. Drawing upon these sources as *testimonios* further supports the gendered narrative, as the interviews have been used to create a political impact. Guidetti Serra draws upon their individual experiences to promote the gendered collective experiences of women during the Resistance. In addition, Guidetti Serra is able to provide a more nuanced and broader understanding of women's experience of the Resistance, as she explores this within a more open social context. Guidetti Serra is highlighting a collective experience through voicing distinguishable individual experiences. Guidetti Serra has successfully drawn upon individual experiences to create a collected experience, which then aims to inform the collective memory of the Resistance. While Cavani is restricted to exploring the Resistance within already existing frameworks, Guidetti Serra is able to develop this further, especially due to the difference in social context. For example, Guidetti Serra, through her text, has begun to broaden our understanding on the variety and nuance in women's experiences of the Resistance. However, due to the context of the time, she is still somewhat restricted as women were still limited by their normative gender role. Indeed, the following chapter on Menapace, will provide an interesting contrast as this text was released in 2014.

## Menapace's *Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza*: A Modern-Day Reflection on the Neglect of Women's Narratives in the Resistance

*Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza*, an autobiographical account by Lidia Menapace, was released in 2014. Menapace splits her autobiography into different chapters, starting with a general introduction to her book and her early life, to then discussing her partisan activity. The book can be seen as an autobiographical account of her Resistance life, as it does not describe in much detail her later life and political activism after the Resistance. The title of the book highlights the intention of the book to focus explicitly on her Resistance activities. The form of this autobiographical text differs slightly to the traditional format of an autobiography, as Menapace includes multiple '*schede*' throughout her book when describing the general history of the time. The '*schede*' are mini chapters that comment on historical events, people and legislation during the Resistance. The impact of these on the reader is clear, as not only do they read these events from her point of view but also have a wider contextual understanding. The reader understands the general context of the event through the '*schede*', but then goes on to hear about Menapace's personal experience of it.

This source has been chosen due to its recent publication in 2014 and due to its specific focus on one individual woman's experience of the Resistance. Whereas the previously two analysed sources contain multiple women's narratives, Menapace only includes her own narrative in the form of an autobiographical text. The differing format of the sources will be explored further below. Even in 2014, Menapace is writing in a contested cultural context, but this has significantly opened up to discuss women's narratives more than in the previous two sources in 1965 and 1977. The significance of writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in comparison to the 1960s and 1970s can be seen, as it is reflected in the way Menapace questions historians' reflections on women and the Resistance and how Menapace contests the absence of men and the narratives around heroism. This chapter is structured in three main sections. The first will analyse how Menapace reflects on her experience of the Resistance. The final two sections will focus on how Menapace uses the child's perspective and how she redefines women's experience of the Resistance. This source is invaluable due to the in-depth experiences voiced by Menapace about her early childhood and how this affected her view of Fascism and influenced her Resistance participation. In contrast, Cavani's *La donna*

*nella Resistenza* (1965) focuses primarily on the interviewee's active Resistance participation, with little time dedicated to their childhood.<sup>6</sup> There is an added richness to Menapace's autobiography in the inclusion of these aspects, as it helps us to understand women's contributions beyond the maternal role. Born in 1924, Lidia Menapace grew up and was surrounded by an antifascist family during World War II. Menapace studied at the Catholic university of Milan. At age 19, Menapace joined the Resistance. She led a life of political activism. It should be noted that Menapace's political involvement continued after the Resistance, as she served in the Senate from 2006 to 2008, where she represented the Communist Refoundation Party. Sadly, Menapace died on 7 December 2020 from Covid-19.

This source is particularly engaging as Menapace refused to bear arms, so it proffers an insight into how Menapace presents a Resistance fighter who will not use weapons. This is interesting, as women in the other texts were leading brigades and carrying bombs. I will analyse this source considering the complications of autobiographical sources. I will draw upon Gilmore and the aforementioned "self-representational 'I'" (2001, p.11). I will explore the autobiographical "I" that is constructed in the text. I will engage with and explore Parati's notion of autobiography and the "feminist identity" (Parati, 1996, p.2).

The suggestion of an autobiographical 'I' from both these academics will be advantageous to this study to provide a unique viewpoint, but also demonstrate how this autobiographical 'I' empowers Menapace to voice her own experiences and judgements especially in the context of the post-Resistance period. This will be engaged with in the second part of this chapter.

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<sup>6</sup> I acknowledge that the time constraint of a 45-minute documentary may be the reason why it was not possible to include information on the childhoods of the interviewees.

## Literature Review and Purpose of the Text

*Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza* has received little critical attention, despite Menapace's death in December 2020. While it has received praise from some blogs and newspapers, it has remained largely ignored by academics. One blog describes the book as "una fondamentale testimonianza, storica e coinvolgente, corredata da schede di approfondimento che guidano nella lettura anche un pubblico di giovani" (Il Ghigno Libreria, 2017). This book is directed to a younger audience (Menapace, 2014, p.13) and as Ghigno Librerie further highlights, to educate them. This is particularly important due to the inclusion of the 'schede' written by Menapace herself. The source can be seen not only as an autobiography, but also as a learning resource for younger generations. In light of this, Menapace can be seen as a feminist public intellectual. A public intellectual will be defined as "those writers, scholars and artists who make public statements which involve an element of political protest ... and whose intervention in the public sphere is legitimised, directly or indirectly, by their intellectual endeavour or status" (Marshall, 2015, p.71). Menapace is using her status in order to create an awareness in younger generations, especially a feminist awareness. Therefore, Menapace's text follows in the tradition of, for example, the school editions of Primo Levi's texts. In the preface of Levi's 1972 school edition, he states "ho accettato volentieri di curare un'edizione scolastica di *Se questo è un uomo*" (Levi, 1972, p.1180). I propose that through the inclusion of Menapace's *schede*, she is looking to create an educational resource for the future generations on women's narratives in the Resistance. Indeed, it is possible to suggest that Menapace is perhaps drawing on two colossal figures, Levi and Italo Calvino, two recognised writers who survived World War II. Italo Calvino himself was involved in the Resistance, using the battle name 'Santiago' and joined a secret Communist group. Levi was also involved in the Resistance and due to his participation was imprisoned in Auschwitz. Levi survived and wrote down his experiences of the Resistance in his autobiographical book *Se questo è un uomo* (1947).

Interestingly, Menapace chooses to begin her autobiography with the words of Calvino, an extract of the text *Oltre il ponte* which was written in 1958. One of Calvino's key Resistance texts is *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947), which is narrated by a young boy and set in World War II. The text engages with a male experience of the Resistance, as the protagonist



seeks to find a sense of belonging with the partisans. Calvino's text was well received at the time of publication; one review praises it for exploring "per la prima volta la vita dei partigiani (qui, sulle montagne liguri) è veduta senza fanfare eroiche né ideologiche, nella sua aspra e miserabile realtà" (Fortini, 1947). The reception of this in Menapace's work as an oblique intertext creates a dynamic comparison with Menapace's own work, as hers was not released until 2014, with significantly less critical attention. This intertext can be seen as Menapace has referenced explicitly *Oltre il ponte*. I posit that, while we may not know Menapace's intent, through this intertextuality she is setting her text in dialogue with Calvino's text. Moreover, it prepares the reader for what to expect, that this will be a literary text detailing an experience of the Resistance. The significance of beginning Menapace's own autobiography with Calvino's poem, *Oltre il ponte*, should not be underestimated, as the lyrics detail an ex-partisan describing the Resistance and their experience to their young daughter. There is an interesting gender dimension here, as the poem was released in 1958 and Calvino decides to address the poem to the fictional narrator's daughter. Therefore, the poem engages with memory and gender, as he chooses to pass down the wartime experiences in this poem to a girl. Therefore, it sets the tone for the autobiography, of an elder not only describing their experiences of their former years, but a warning of mistakes not to be repeated. Menapace is attempting years later not to rewrite history but to add the female perspective on the Resistance, weaving both together to create a greater understanding. Here, Menapace is attempting to raise awareness of the female perspective. Particularly through the inclusion of the *schede*, Menapace aims to convey messages of the Resistance to a younger generation with a didactic view and in this way, she can be seen as a public intellectual.

Menapace can be seen as carrying on the tradition, like the women in the other two sources of using testimony to write and speak herself into history with a gendered focus. As such, Stone's concept of a gendered cultural memory can be seen, as "ideas about masculinity and femininity determine whose stories are deemed significant, which narratives circulate as part of cultural memory" (2017, p.3). Menapace herself can be seen as trying to write women into this cultural memory.

The academic Carlo Smuraglia, who writes the forward in Menapace's autobiography, states "un altro libro sulla Resistenza? Per me è doppiamente benvenuto... è il libro di una donna,

che è stata partigiana. Ed è noto che su questo tema c'è ancora tanto da dire" (Menapace, 2014, p.5). In her recent PhD, Chiara Concolino, goes on to suggest that very few know of this autobiography, especially in comparison to the well-known status of many male autobiographies such as Beppe Fenoglio, Carlo Cassola and Primo Levi (Romanistiky, 2021, p.6). The lack of awareness of this autobiography seems strange as the book was released with many presentations, such as one in Apulia immediately around its publication date on 25 July 2014 (Redazione, 2014). Even two years later, the book was presented again in Puglia on 16 April 2016 (Comune di Copertino, 2016). More recently in 2017, the book continued to be the subject of presentations and was being discussed in Bolzano (Provincia autonomi di Bolzano, 2017). Moreover, Menapace herself was giving presentations on the book in 2017, such as in Bari in Maiolati Spontini in the south of Italy (ANPI Mediavallesina, 2017). This creates an interesting dynamic as the book was very much still in circulation and had enough attention and demand for events to be hosted around it. Despite this, it still does not form the subject of much academic critical literature.

In addition to her autobiography, in 2015 Menapace released *Canto il merlo sul frumento*, subtitled *il romanzo della mia vita*. This was another autobiography published only a year after *Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza*. *Canto il merlo sul frumento* (2015) focuses not only on Menapace's Resistance participation, but on her later life. For example, it focuses on her post-Resistance experience, such as her work as a lecturer at the Università Cattolica in Milan and how she was the first female councillor in the Province of Bolzano. However, this second autobiography has also received little to no critical attention, which possibly suggests that little academic Resistance research focusing on women's contribution to the Resistance is being conducted.

*Io partigiana, la mia Resistenza* has received praise for its diverse form, as the book is "46 pagine che (purtroppo) scorrono veloci sotto gli occhi di chi legge: un libro un po' memorie un po' compendio di storia con le tante *schede* esplicative dei diversi temi, fatti, persone, ruoli e accadimenti" (Fiorletta, 2015). Through the *schede*, Menapace references key political songs and events, such as the song *Bella Ciao* and the Repubblica di Salò.

The book has been highly praised for the themes it brings into discussion such as the "ruolo primario delle donne, il fatto che non fu solo lotta armata, ma anche impegno solidale,

sperimentazione di democrazia, aiuto ai combattenti, ai fuggiaschi, ai prigionieri in fuga, a chi subiva gli effetti brutali della barbarie” (Biagioni, 2020). In her autobiography Menapace not only focuses on her contributions to the Resistance, but on how the women around her were able to contribute as well. This book has been chosen due to its recent publication, differing format, and how at the end, Menapace reflects on women and the Resistance.

### Reflecting on the Resistance

In the following section, I will focus on the end of Menapace’s autobiography, where she reflects on women’s historiography and the Resistance. To do this, I will engage with Parati’s autobiographical ‘I’ (1996) and Wingfield’s gendering the front concept (2006). In addition, Menapace critiques how other historians have presented women and the Resistance, and I will analyse this below.

Menapace ends her autobiography by addressing the lack of acknowledgement for women’s roles. She states

Una questione non risolta nella Resistenza e nella sua storiografia è quella del riconoscimento del ruolo delle donne. Non si è ancora chiusa e definita, credo anche perché non ci fu un solo modo di essere resistenti nemmeno per gli uomini: anche tra noi donne (Menapace, 2014, p.113).

Menapace is emphasising that we need to ensure that we are not approaching men or women’s contributions in a reductive or stereotypical way. It is important to note that with the book being released in 2014, almost 70 years have passed since the end of the Resistance. During this time, Menapace notes how the role of women has yet to be defined. According to Menapace and in line with the findings of this thesis, despite 60 years of research, the role of women in the Resistance still remains ambiguous. In light of this, Menapace creates a tone of urgency as despite all the women committed to and sacrificed for the Resistance, they are still not fully acknowledged for their roles. In addition, it is through the aforementioned quote that Menapace is able to draw attention to the plethora of ways women were able to resist. Menapace highlights an issue here, that because of the variety of ways women resisted, it is difficult to provide an inclusive definition. Here, the

advantages to the use of the genre of autobiography can be seen. Menapace is using her own voice through autobiography to draw attention to the fact that not only have women not been acknowledged, but through this feminist standpoint there is more ways than one that women resisted, just like the male participants. This echoes Scott and Cicioni's viewpoint, that through specifically analysing women's contributions, in this case to the Resistance, we have a fuller and more complete understanding of history as a whole. Stone notes that women's writing can be seen as "a form of counter history that corrects the distortions of a gender-blind master discourse" (2017, p.15). Stone refers to this as 'genderblind', that history is being written without any acknowledged of the importance of gender in historical experience. This research demonstrates the importance of analysing women's narratives.

Menapace goes on to compare her reflection with other Resistance historians reflecting on women's roles, as she states "una illustre storica italiana, Anna Bravo, ha proposto che ci si riconosca un *maternage* generale, argomento che è molto apprezzato" (Menapace, 2014, p.113). This idea of a 'general maternity' can be seen as applying women's maternal role to any setting and context. Benefits can be seen in the suggestion of recognising women with the concept of 'general maternity', as it highlights how women deployed their identities as mothers in different contexts, not only to protect their family but also fellow Resistance fighters. Wingfield's "gendering the front" (2006, p.1) can be seen here, "deconstructing the notion that wartime heroism is exclusively masculine" (2006, p.1). Bravo is creating an awareness that through a general *maternage* women were in fact present and active and deserving of wartime heroism. However, Bravo is suggesting that the women are deserving of this due to their role as mothers. This suggestion is problematic, as women are not seen outside of their normative gender role.

Menapace herself reflects on Bravo's general *maternage* as she states, "devo dire che non mi convince, mi sembra quasi fatta per allontanare da noi altri possibili 'ruoli' femminili, forse è un mio pregiudizio, ma fondato su esperienze" (Menapace, 2014, p.115). Menapace feels that defining women's roles as a "general maternity" can be restricting to the roles that many women were doing that fall outside of this category. The roles women took on during the Resistance are touched upon in Cavani's documentary as one of the questions

was whether the Resistance “era in contrasto con la femminilità?” (Cavani, 1965, 42:15). Both Menapace and Cavani highlight how women can still be conventionally feminine but also transgress this role to carry out tasks stereotypically considered male and do things outside of their gender normative roles. However, nuance can be seen here, as Menapace is highlighting her view that these are roles that women tended to play. It is interesting to note that Menapace has put roles in quotation marks, which suggests that she is questioning the idea of particular roles for women. A contrast can be seen here, as while Cavani uses essentialist language, Menapace is questioning women’s feminine roles in the Resistance. As explored in previous chapters, this essentialist perspective on women’s contributions is problematic, as the women are seen as inherently feminine and maternal. Just because they do these tasks, it does not reduce their femininity in any way.

On the other hand, just because a woman does conduct a task considered feminine does not mean that she should be excluded from Resistance historiography or be defined only as maternal. By using the “construction of a female ‘I’” (Parati, 1996, p.2), Menapace is using her voice to speak out to construct an idea for women’s collective identity, that ‘noi donne’ had multiple ways of resisting that differed for each woman. Through her autobiography, Menapace is highlighting her own experience of the Resistance. This is acknowledged by Menapace herself in the title of her autobiography, as by calling it *lo partigiana, La mia Resistenza*, she is not trying to cast her experience as universal for all women but more to add her individual experience of the Resistance to provide a more complete picture of women’s experiences of the Resistance.

The significance of the titles across all three texts is important to acknowledge. For example, Guidetti Serra’s *Compagne*, a collection of mini autobiographies, interweaves testimonies to provide a fuller understanding of women’s collective experience. Similarly, Cavani’s *La donna nella Resistenza* is a collection of testimonies, with an added visual medium that focuses on each individual woman’s testimony to add to women’s collective experience. Menapace’s reflection is humble as she highlights the possibility that “forse è un mio pregiudizio” (2014, p.115). Therefore, Menapace herself is presented as a self-aware autobiographer, conscious of the fact that as she lived through the experience herself, she could be biased. There is the suggestion of a connection between Menapace’s self-critique

and her feminist aims. In light of this, Menapace upholds the feminist aims of this research, by reflecting on her own experience of the Resistance to highlight the diverse ways that women participated in it.

Moreover, Menapace proposes a reason as to why she believes women have not been remembered in Italian Resistance historiography. She states “sono convinta che i capi della Resistenza preferirono che il loro potere e rappresentatività non fossero condivisi con le donne e si presero tutto” (Menapace, 2014, p.115). This is a bold statement that suggests a hint of anger and discontentment. Menapace suggests that the male leaders of the Resistance took everything and were not willing to share it with the women who had participated in the Resistance. She acknowledges that men are in a position of power, that it is up to them to decide what is remembered in general Italian historiography. She highlights that there was a choice, but in her view, men preferred that the role and sacrifices of men were acknowledged before those of women. By saying that they (men) took everything, it raises the question of what ‘tutto’ includes. For example, in Menapace’s view, not only did the men take the ‘credit’ for the success of the Resistance, but to this day they continue to occupy most of the historical memory as well. Therefore, in her choice of words, Menapace is highlighting what she feels is a great injustice to women who sacrificed just as much as their male counterparts in the Resistance. Menapace concludes, however, that there was an intentional political agenda from the start among leaders of the Resistance. This creates an interesting discussion point, as neither Guidetti Serra nor Cavani mention this. The effect on the reader is anger, as Menapace is suggesting that the lack of remembrance for women was intentional. Therefore, Menapace’s reflection years later has potentially a demoralising effect on the reader. Her assertive tone suggests that women were never intended to be remembered from the start, and this neglect and lack of remembrance has continued for over 70 years. Therefore, Menapace’s autobiography is a call to researchers, academics, young people and the general public to acknowledge the experiences of women during the Resistance and the sacrifices that they made. In addition to this, her statement is significant as she is looking back at the male historical heroes and daring to criticise them. There is an injustice here, as the women are not – according to Menapace – acknowledged on equal footing, even though they made similar sacrifices. In light of this, Menapace’s viewpoint calling for women to be recognised can be understood.

The difference in the genre of the source can be seen here, as an autobiography can be more direct whereas an academic text can be more objective. This links to the advantages of first-person testimony and the autobiographical 'I', as she is speaking with a lot of authority as she is the one who lived through it. Alternatively, it would be interesting to consider whether Menapace would have the same authority, if she were a fascist remembering the same period. It is due to the fact that Menapace was on the victorious side as well. Wilson also supports the agency Menapace has, as "language gives form to events and to the perception/representation of events in order to construct a narration, and in the narration a subject" (2004, p.11). In light of this, through Menapace voicing and writing her own experiences, she echoes the feminist autobiographical 'I', as it is through her constructing her own narrative, she is asserting herself as a subject that deserves to be heard. This can be seen across all three sources, as through each woman voicing their own experiences, they are not only calling attention to their own individual experiences but highlighting themselves as active<sup>7</sup> subjects as well. When detailing experiences of the Resistance, everything is direct from her as a first-person witness. This leads us back to Yoke and Ward's suggestion, that "the more interesting question ... is not whether or even *why* women are silenced, but *how* exactly this tradition of silencing affects the ways women write both with and against genre and the canon" (2017, p.33). I acknowledge that this is difficult to measure, but it raises dynamic questions about how women have been affected by the silencing around women's involvement in the Resistance. I posit that it is only due to the passage of time from the event and distance from it that Menapace's autobiography is able to be published and she is able to cast these strong assertions. She is able to speak strongly about both her individual experience and her individual opinion on the Resistance's legacy for women. Menapace carries the weight of several decades of invisibilisation of women, that both the previous sources of Cavani and Guidetti Serra had hoped would come to the fore. This can be seen in the text itself as Menapace states at the beginning of her book "questo libro è rivolto alle ragazze ed ai ragazzi, una testimonianza che li aiuti ad orientarsi nella modernità confusa e smarrita" (Menapace, 2014, p.13). In the introductory

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<sup>7</sup> See aforementioned Stone (2017) who highlights how men were seen as the active participants in history while women were seen as secondary citizens with only reproductive responsibilities.

paragraph of Menapace's autobiography, she makes the above statement to direct her book toward the youth of today. Menapace's autobiography can be seen as an autobiography directed specifically to describe her experience of Fascism and the Resistance. Above all, she highlights how her experiences and what she has learnt through the Resistance are still relevant and useful.

Menapace is not the first to express these ideas as historians have suggested similar. For example, it has been suggested about the historiographical silence around women and antifascism that "the victors have strived to impose the memory of the armed combatants as the only legitimate one, thereby ignoring all other forms of opposition to the regime" and that if women were at all mentioned, "the experience of female activists told the story of rebellious women who had challenged – often without being aware of it – traditional gender roles, and such images became embarrassing in the post-war context where traditional family values... ruled supreme" (Garcia, Yusta, Tabet and Climaco, 2016, p.154). Therefore, they suggest that the post-war context influenced the lack of acknowledgement for women's roles, that the stereotypical gender role for women as primarily maternal was the dominant discourse. While Menapace herself refused to bear arms, as will be explored later, one of the women in Cavani's documentary was in charge of troops and led a battle. There is a call here to further explore the 'all other forms of opposition to the regime', especially those conducted by women.



## Motivations for Joining the Resistance and the Child's Perspective

Having considered how Menapace has reflected on her experience of the Resistance, I will now go on to analyse how Menapace presents her childhood. Menapace presents a gendered political experience of her early years and highlights these as integral to her subsequent Resistance participation. Menapace presents her childhood as an important element to analyse as not only does she highlight her reasons for joining, but she provides historical context as well. An analysis of the text proffers invaluable insights into children's experience of fascism and how it potentially influenced them to join the Resistance in light of the social context of the time. The theoretical frameworks to be drawn upon are Stone's 'cultural memory' (2017), Balfour's work on memory, and Andrea Peto and Ann Pheonix's work on gender and memories (2019) to demonstrate the influence of the fascist state on Menapace's experiences and recollections.

Similar to the previous two chapters, Menapace presents – through the depiction of her family – a broadened gendered political perspective on why she chose to join the Resistance. Menapace's mother's family were anarchists and her father's family were anti-Nazi. She describes in her autobiography how, throughout her early years, her parents both challenge and question the official discourse of the regime. For example, her father answers her questions on why her Jewish friends are unable to go to school. When explaining how Menapace is still able to go to school, but her Jewish friends Esther and Ruth cannot, he states "mi vergogno a dirlo... e io mi vergogno di vivere dove una se si chiama Esther o Ruth resta ignorante" (Menapace, 2014, p.32). Therefore, her father expresses discontent and shame about the regime. By including these elements, Menapace presents her father's perspective as having a clear influence on her. Just like Guidetti Serra and Cavani, Menapace presents the family as integral to her own decision to join the Resistance. Therefore, a generational impact on Resistance participation can be seen. In addition, Menapace's father shows her a French newspaper, which goes against Fascist censorship at the time. For example, where the newspaper details high crime, Menapace questions why there is no such crime in Italy. Her father responds: "ci sono anche da noi, ma è vietato scriverne" (Menapace, 2014, p.31) to which she comments ""che Paese noioso" mi venne da pensare, e posso dire che sia stata la mia prima increspatura di coscienza politica!" (Menapace, 2014,

p.31). Menapace herself notes that this is her first demonstration of political activity. By describing it as an “*increspatura*”, Menapace highlights how this was the start of her political activity. She suggests that it is thanks to her father obtaining illegal newspapers that she is able to expand and transgress her political awareness beyond that of the fascist regime. Therefore, Menapace presents her father as a key influence for her politicisation.

In addition, Menapace includes a ‘*scheda*’ on the role of censorship during fascism. Here, she offers invaluable insight into the extremes of censorship in this period, such as censorship of the press and how books were removed from circulation. This censorship is referred to as the “war of propaganda” (Bonsaver, 2007, p.191-220). Here, Menapace is expanding her motivation. For example, it is not just due to her family but also how her family exposed her to the censorship of the time. Menapace emphasises the influence of the family to demonstrate the complex motivations that led to her joining the Resistance. It was the actions and beliefs of her family members that influenced Menapace, and how they educated her through bypassing censorship, allowing her to begin to develop her own political awareness. Menapace’s mother helps her to expand her political awareness. For example, upon returning home from school her mother told Menapace to rip up her report card that described her race: “mi disse di strapparla, perché non siamo animali e le razze sono solo equine bovine suine canine” (Menapace, 2014, p.32). This highlights her mother’s feelings about Fascist racial laws, that people are being defined and segregated like animals. Therefore – Menapace’s text implies –, the influence of parents on school children in expanding their political consciousness is an important aspect to take into account when analysing motivation for Resistance participation. Menapace emphasizes an expanded gendered political perspective here, that it is the political awareness of both her mother and father that clearly impacted her political awareness throughout her childhood. It is therefore interesting to consider how Menapace explains the fact that she remained antifascist, which can be seen through the previous discussion on her parents’ influence on her political activism.

Additionally, in analysing her Resistance participation, Menapace emphasises how her early education was an essential influence. For example, she states “l’insegnamento si faceva ogni anno più insistente dal punto di vista dell’indottrinamento politico, e la storia ci veniva

insegnata – ora me ne rendo conto – secondo una sorta di compresso tra il regime, la dinastia e la Chiesa” (Menapace, 2014 p.18). An essential aspect here is the reflection, that it is only many years later that she realises the opposing forces she was bound between, and which influenced her. Stone’s “cultural memory” (2017, p.3) should be engaged with here, as it is possible to suggest that cultural memory of the time, the ‘punto di vista dell’indottrinamento politico, e la storia ci veniva insegnata’ influences what Menapace is able to remember from this period. This is important to note as it is due to the passage of time, changed social and political circumstances and distance from the event that she is able to carry out this reflection. Fascism in fact changed school life, as “the curriculum became increasingly controlled by the state. The change signified the indoctrination and political formation of Italy’s youth and expressed Mussolini’s desire to change the school into a more virile, disciplined, and Fascist institution” (Nehrt, 2015, p.41). Therefore, due to the dominance and diffusion of Fascism in schools, it may have been a key factor for children supporting fascism.

Menapace highlights a gendered political narrative through her opinion on the Fascist uniform. Interestingly, this is not touched upon in Cavani’s documentary or Guidetti Serra’s collection of testimonies. For example, “le ragazze odiavano particolarmente la divisa da Piccola e Giovane Italiana” (Menapace, 2014, p.25). The uniform for girls was a black beret, a white long-sleeved blouse, a black skirt, long white socks, black shoes and white gloves. By using the verb “odiavano”, she suggests that they hated what the uniform stood for and the fact that it was imposed upon them. While this might be an overzealous generalisation, it highlights the dissent that not only Menapace expressed, but that she believed her peers to feel as well. The impact of this on the reader is that as an individual, Menapace is adding to the collective memory of the time. She is speaking out as an individual to suggest that all of the girls hated the uniform. Menapace’s subjective experience of the Resistance was that she felt her peers held the same hatred of the uniform as herself. In addition, by having this as a child’s view, it highlights the dissatisfaction with the regime from a young age and how Menapace presents that the idea that children believed the regime, and therefore wore its uniform, was hollow. Therefore, the effect on the reader is to believe that the other girls felt the same way about the Resistance as Menapace as, combined with the factual ‘schede’, Menapace’s autobiography is presented as factual.

Here one of the complications of the genre of autobiography can be seen. Gilmore's self-representational 'I' will be engaged with, as Menapace herself lived through this experience and as such has the authority to cast such judgements. However, it is up to the reader to understand that while this is Menapace's view and judgement, the historical accuracy cannot be seen as unquestionable. In terms of autobiographical memory, scholars suggest one main problem is accuracy (Berntsen and Rubin, 2012, p.3). Significant time has passed since Menapace's own experience of the Resistance; this should be considered but it does not negate or diminish the value of her autobiography. As aforementioned, the inclusion of the '*schede*' suggest that Menapace is juxtaposing a more traditional historical account with a first person autobiographical one. In light of this, by Menapace speaking on behalf of the other girls hating the uniform above, the effect on the reader is to believe Menapace as it is suggested that this is a factual account.

It is important to note that men wore black shirts and are known throughout history as the '*camicia nera*' (Willson, 2022, p.3). This highlights the marginalisation of women as, even if they wanted to, they were not allowed to wear the same uniform. Like men, women wore uniform and were encouraged to feel part of the Fascist party; however, the fact that their uniform was different emphasised their gendered and unequal status. Wearing a uniform was "the simplest way to visually denote loyalty to the ideals of Fascism" (Willson, 2022, p.8). Menapace presents a unified dislike of Fascist policies for girls growing up in the Resistance.

In addition, Menapace emphasises the use of the child perspective to highlight why women joined the Resistance. Menapace's motivation for joining the Resistance can be seen in the treatment of her classmates. Due to Mussolini's antisemitic policies, her Jewish classmates were unable to attend school anymore. Not understanding why her classmates are not present, she and her sister take the work their friends have missed to their house. There, the maid informs them that it is of no use, as they will not be returning to school as they are Jews. Menapace comments "*ricordo come fosse oggi che mia sorella e io letteralmente non capimmo... commentammo: 'che stupida ragazza di campagna, non sarà mica una malattia infettiva essere ebreo'*" (2014, p.32). Here Menapace highlights a childhood innocence and a limited understanding for children, that they were not fully aware of what Mussolini's

regime was doing. The impact of Menapace adopting the viewpoint of a child in her narrative is that it makes it clear to the reader that children did not fully understand the regime. In addition, with this text being directed at children, her lack of comprehension may be mirrored in that of her readers. Menapace is emphasising how irrational and unacceptable the Fascist policies were. I posit Menapace has done this intentionally to add more authenticity to the source as Menapace did experience this event as a child, thus making the reader believe more in her narrative. In addition, the children do not blame the regime, but blame the maid, suggesting that she is stupid and showing a lack of understanding on their behalf. The positioning of herself as a child demonstrates a naivety about Jewish children. Therefore, this adds to the text as it allows an emphasizing of the innocence of the child. Menapace did not have this discourse within her own family, and the unfairness is heightened as it is from the child's perspective. By Menapace positioning herself as a child and not understanding the reason why, it is her parents who explain it to her and who are consequently the voice of authority.

## Broadening the Gendered Political Narrative

Having just analysed the significance of Menapace's early years, I will now go on to analyse how she presents her narrative to challenge the maternal role in the cultural memory of the Resistance. In the following section, I will focus on how she describes the role of the *staffetta* and the significance of her decision not to bear arms.

Firstly, Menapace redefines the role of the *staffetta* beyond the maternal role and domestic sphere. Menapace reflects on the role of the *staffetta* during the Resistance, a role she herself took on. Menapace defines the role of a *staffetta* thus: "Il ruolo della staffetta era spesso ricoperto da giovani donne tra i 16 e i 18 anni... avevano l'incarico di garantire i collegamenti tra le varie brigate e dei contatti fra i partigiani e le loro famiglie" (2014, p.68). Menapace here defines the *staffette* with an age range and describes them as having responsibilities. By highlighting how young many of them were, she highlights the risk that adolescent women just out of childhood were taking. This highlights Menapace's autobiographical presence, as she was physically there herself and a this was role she carried out at this age. She then goes on to add the other responsibilities of the *staffette*, such as acting as nurses, transporting hidden goods and above all how they "percorrevano chilometri in bicicletta, a piedi" (Menapace, 2014, p.69-70). This highlights the physical endurance required by the *staffette*, as they were required to carry out these roles in a variety of weather conditions. There is a physical strength to this role due to the distance required to travel in a short amount of time.

Moreover, Menapace highlights a contrast since before defining the role of the *staffette*, she states "i compiti ricoperti dalle donne nella Resistenza furono molteplici: fondarono squadre di primo soccorso per aiutare i feriti e gli ammalati, contribuirono alla raccolta di indumenti, cibo e medicinali, si occuparono dell'identificazione dei cadaveri e dell'assistenza ai familiari dei caduti" (2014, p.68). Menapace highlights an important distinction here, that not all women participating in the Resistance can be referred to as *staffette*, and that this job in fact was one of the many roles women took in the Resistance. Through Menapace stressing the youth and vigour of these young women, there are multiple effects on the reader. For example, Menapace presenting them as young directly contrasts the danger

within their roles, making the reader consider the extent they were willing to go to, like their male counterparts, to support the Resistance. Menapace prompts the reader to consider their own knowledge of women in the Resistance, and the dangers they were undertaking at such a young age. In addition, by highlighting the multiplicity of roles women took in the Resistance, Menapace makes it apparent to the reader how indispensable women were in the Resistance. In light of the current social context, in which there is limited acknowledgement for women's roles, Menapace draws a stark comparison for the reader, that women's roles have yet to be appreciated completely despite the vast roles they undertook in the Resistance. In addition, Menapace clearly emphasises that women were not limited to their domestic role and frequently went beyond this.

However, Menapace presents a nuanced redefining of gender roles as she refused to bear arms herself. Throughout the Resistance, Menapace did not carry or use weapons. She states

Io non porto armi, devo dire soprattutto perché ho paura di farmi male da sola, le formazioni non obietano.... Penso però che far saltare un ponte o interrompere una ferrovia significhi evitare l'arrivo di truppe e ridurre il rischio di vittime civili (Menapace, 2014, p.74).

Therefore, from the start of the Resistance Menapace made a conscious and individual decision not to carry weapons. Menapace distinctly highlights that she understands the importance of this. Menapace is advocating for some potentially violent methods as legitimate because they were a means to save lives in the long term. Here, Menapace can be seen as countering gender norms around women and violence. Menapace does this through actively supporting particular forms of violence. Moreover, those who she worked with did not object to her being unwilling to bear arms. The lack of objection suggests that her companions and leaders were respectful of her decision and appreciated her help and contributions. Therefore, this adds an interesting depth to the extent to which Menapace participated in the Resistance. Menapace's decision not to bear arms due to the fear of hurting herself should be analysed. In terms of a gendered representation, this suggests a need to counter the idea that women did not actively participate, while acknowledging the

limits of her own participation. It is interesting then, that Menapace supported potentially violent methods but would not bear arms herself, due to fear of harming herself. In light of this, it creates a broader image and nuanced understanding of women's Resistance participation.

To conclude, Menapace's autobiography *Io partigiana, La mia Resistenza* proffers an invaluable insight into Menapace's individual experience of the Resistance. Through committing a significant part of her autobiography to her childhood and experience of fascism, she creates an interesting and dynamic discussion on how women were influenced to take part in the Resistance through their childhoods. Moreover, it is through the latter part of her autobiography discussing her own activism, such as what it meant to be a *staffetta* and her suggestions as to why women's roles have been neglected, that the strength and advantages of autobiography can be seen. Through Menapace's autobiographical "I", the fact that she was there and has lived through the event, she offers invaluable insights into women's roles and contributions to ultimately challenge and combat the invisibilisation of women. Menapace directly argues that women had multiple roles, some of which were not strictly maternal. This is a keyway in which she adds another dimension to our incomplete understanding of this period. Added to this her message for the book, to be a tool for the younger generation to learn from, Menapace succeeds in again highlighting the importance of researching women's roles in the Resistance. As such, the value of this source, despite its release over 70 years after the end of the Resistance, cannot be overstated and in fact calls for further studies to be published before it is too late. I acknowledge Benedetta Tobagi's *La resistenza delle donne* (2022) as an excellent start to answer this call. In comparison to the earlier texts analysed, a shift in Menapace's presentation is clear as she can be seen nuancing the representation of women in the Resistance in the way she contests the narratives around heroism and the absence of men. Unlike the previous two texts, Menapace is able to directly question the invisibilisation of women over the last 50 years and question women's representation and why the call for more research is still yet to be answered.



## Conclusion

Throughout this research, I have critically explored how each author/director presents women's experiences of the Italian Resistance. Due to the selection of my texts, I have been able to look at working-class women over an extended period of time of 50 years. Including the different types of testimonies has also enriched my research by having a visual medium, a transcript and a written autobiography.

Cavani's 1965 documentary opens up discussion on women's narratives in the Resistance. Caruth's trauma theory (1995) and Jolly's notion of "embodied witnessing" (2011) were essential in order to analyse the depth and variety of women's experiences. There was much to be analysed in the women's physical gestures and what their trauma left them unable to voice. Cavani's documentary is the first text to begin opening up discussion on women's narratives but is quite essentialist in terms of gender. This may have been due to the context of the time, or Cavani's own views on gender which also may have been influenced by the social context of the time. During this period in general Italian historiography, as previously explored, men were regarded as the heroes of the Resistance, leaving women's narratives neglected. In addition, women still did not have the vote in Italy. While Cavani's documentary can be seen as revolutionary for its time, the text can be seen as the beginning the discussion on women's narratives. In comparison to Guidetti Serra and Menapace, the documentary is essentialist in its views on gender and can be seen as a starting point on women's narratives in the Resistance.

A shift can be seen in Guidetti Serra's *Compagne* (1977). Guidetti Serra's text broadens our understanding of women's narratives in the Resistance, and this text is the start of discussion on broadening our understanding of women's experiences of the Resistance outside their normative gender roles. Both Guidetti Serra and Cavani engage with a mediated remembering community (Jones, 2012) in order to create narratives that confirm and support each other. Cavani does this within already existing frameworks, but Guidetti Serra is able to develop and progress this further. Analysing Guidetti Serra's text with Beverley's *testimonio* (2004) successfully broadens our understanding of women's political impact on the Resistance. Guidetti Serra has successfully mediated her text in order to highlight a gendered political narrative to the reader, demonstrating the impact of their collective unity as well as how women have developed their maternal and domestic role. Moreover, it is through these collected voices that Guidetti Serra not only broadens our understanding of women's narrative but highlights the nuance and variety to their experiences that have been neglected in general Italian historiography. It remains clear that Guidetti Serra is restricted on how far she can diversify these narratives due to the context of the time restricting women to their normative gender role.

Another shift in representation can be seen in Menapace's text, *Io partigiana, La mia Resistenza* (2014). Differing in form, Menapace's autobiographical text focuses not on multiple women's voices and experiences, but her own. Menapace describes her life as a political autobiography which focuses predominantly on her experience of the Resistance, with informative *schede* cards included throughout with key information on the Resistance to educate the next generation. Menapace successfully engages with the autobiographical 'I' to create her own narrative on women's experience of the Resistance and reflects on the

subsequent invisibilisation of women. Menapace expands the gendered political narrative to consider women outside of their maternal role and by merit of their own acts, rather than in regard to their normative gender role. It is in this way that Menapace highlights nuance and variety to women's roles, adding another dimension to our understanding of women and the Resistance. Additionally, in Menapace's text there is a clear shift, as Menapace reflects on how women and the Resistance has been remembered. At the end of her testimony, Menapace is significantly more critical than the other two sources. She is able to critique other academic responses to women in the Resistance. While it could have been possible for Cavani and Guidetti Serra to do this, it did not happen as it might have been more difficult for them to do this. This can be seen reflected in the context of the time they were speaking in during the 1960 and 1970s. Moreover, through contesting the narratives of men's heroism, Menapace is able to nuance and diversify women's representation in the Resistance.

Above all, this research highlights the discrepancy in the research and testimonies available. However, across all three sources a gradual broadening of women's narratives in the Resistance can be seen. My research highlights the continued lack of critical literature available for women's narratives on the Resistance. The foreword of Menapace's text in 2016, comments that a text about the Resistance from a woman's point of view is "doubly welcome". In light of my research, I propose that there is a lack of consistency in terms of critically analysing women's testimonies and that more work is needed. Each of the women who have constructed and produced these testimonies, Cavani, Guidetti Serra and Menapace, have each used their platform with what I propose is the ultimate aim to broaden and diversify the understanding of women's experience. Not only do we need to

broaden this, but we need to understand the nuances and complexities in more detail.

Through analysing the sources as testimonies, I have been able to consider how the texts are constructed and what particular narrative the authors were aiming to create.

My research has provided an interesting analysis considering the context of the time the women were speaking into. I have demonstrated how the testimonies are constructed in order to be accepted into the social context through transgressing their normative gender roles, rather than speaking out directly against their supposed 'stereotypical' experience of the Resistance. In addition, I have demonstrated a gendered experience of the Resistance, and how these texts demonstrate both normative gender roles and how a nuanced exploration of these roles is essential to see how women began to progress their normative gender roles. However, through this research I have demonstrated that it is not just a neglect of women's experiences, but rather the role of Italy in the Resistance is still being debated in general Italian historiography. Given that the narrative of Italy and the Resistance is still being debated, this links to the sporadic and unclear narratives and critical analysis of women and the Resistance. We need to know more about women's varied roles to understand the Resistance as a whole more fully.

To conclude, through this thesis I have demonstrated how women's testimonies highlight the variety of perspectives that have come to light. Through analysing women's testimonies, it has highlighted a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the Resistance, as suggested by Cicioni (cited in Alano, 2003). However, given the passage of over 50 years, a sense of urgency can now be seen as some of the participants are no longer with us. Therefore, this thesis has successfully highlighted the richness of critically analysing

women's testimonies over the passage of time. In terms of next steps, more research and studies are needed to highlight the nuance and variety in women's testimonies, especially over the passage of time in order to further explore the diversity of women's experiences in the Resistance.

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