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**WRITINGS OF RESISTANCE: WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
WRITINGS OF THE ITALIAN RESISTANCE, 1943-2000**

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Writings of Resistance:

Women's Autobiographical Writings of the Italian Resistance, 1943-2000

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This dissertation explores the autobiographical writings of three women who participated in the Italian Resistance (1943-1945) during World War II, and whose narratives were written between 1943 and 2000. The narratives considered in detail are: *Ragazza partigiana* (written in 1946 and published in 1974) and *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* (1996) by Elsa Oliva, *Diario partigiano* (written between 1943-1945, revisited/revised from 1950 until its publication in 1956) by Ada Gobetti, and *Con cuore di donna* (2000) by Carla Capponi. I analyze the methods of and motivations behind their varied methods of self-fashioning. In particular, I articulate how these women fashion, create, and negotiate their own identity for themselves and with respect and in response to a greater national audience that has often misrepresented or not represented their wartime experiences. Such a practice then allows them to contribute to the construction of a national identity and national memory in which their individual experiences are accounted for.

In executing my analysis, I draw from numerous historical sources (Bravo, Bruzzone, Saba, Alloisio, Beltrami, Pavone, Portelli) to contextualize the narratives, as it is

imperative to understand the socio-historic, and cultural environment from which these narratives are generated. In addition to socio-historic considerations, I also approach these texts, to varying degrees, through the use of autobiographical (Bernstock, Friedman, Jelinek, Mason), psychological (Gilligan), and sociological (Rowbotham, Chodorow) theoretical material relating to women to illuminate the ways in which these narratives conform with, differ from, or exemplify noted trends of women's self-representation and to help interpret the narrative choices made by the authors. I also avail myself briefly of Italian feminist difference theory (Muraro and Cavarero). My focus throughout, however, is always on the narratives themselves.

I ultimately argue that these writings are both inspired by Resistance participation and that for each writer, they are a form of continued resistance to gender based societal assumptions and/or personal historical legacy. That is, while it was their involvement in the Resistance movement that is the basis for the production of these narratives, each author uses her narration of these events to further resist easy or popular categorization of her experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

“ *Nella Resistenza la donna fu presente ovunque:
sul campo di battaglia come sul luogo di lavoro,
nel chiuso della prigionia come nella
piazza o nell'intimità della casa.
Non vi fu attività, lotta, organizzazione, collaborazione
a cui ella non partecipasse:
come una spola in continuo movimento
costruiva e teneva insieme, muovendo instancabile,
il tessuto sotterraneo della guerra partigiana.*”

-Ada Gobetti

The idea for this dissertation was borne out of a research paper on Renata Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (Einaudi, 1949) that I completed for a graduate seminar. During my research for that project, which included ample inquiry into the history of women and the Italian partisan resistance, I was quite intrigued by the way historiographical practices had, up until very recently, marginalized such an important component of this event of significant national importance. Popular discourse about the event over the past sixty years, I learned, had been primarily both created by and centered upon men. As a result, most histories either did not mention women's involvement at all—a group whose participants numbered over 100,000—or, if they did, it most commonly was a brief mention of their contribution, a term several contemporary historians take issue with due to the way in which it trivializes female participation.¹ In *L'Agnese va a morire*, Viganò,

¹ This number is a rough estimate that includes also those women who had participated in the civil resistance. The historical introduction provided in Chapter 1 of this dissertation explains in detail these numbers, the various kinds of resistance, and it elaborates on the problems with popular historical documentation of this period. Further, Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami address the issue of “contribution” directly in their book, *Voluntarie della libertà: 8 settembre 1943-25 aprile 1945* (Milan: Lampi di Stampa, 2003), in which they maintain that women often risked more than men in their decision to participate. This issue of terminology is problematized and addressed in all of the few histories that treat women and the Italian resistance directly. See also Marina Addis Saba, *Partigiane: tutte le donne della Resistenza* (Milan: Mursia, 1998). It is also further discussed in Chapter 1.

in fact, represents this production of male-dominated discourse about the Resistance in placing the responsibility for perpetuating the memory of the main protagonist, Agnese, a representative figure of women involved in the movement, in the mouth of the Comandante, the leading male figure. The Comandante declares, towards the end of Viganò's novel, "Sai mi pento di non averle detto[...]che cosa ha fatto per la compagnia, per il partito, per noi[...]la zone intera dovrà saperlo. Lo dirò io che è L'Agnese—." With these words he assumes the symbolic charge of declaring to posterity the existence of and extreme value of women's involvement. However, the task of recording and documenting women's collaboration, as recent historians have shown, has not been sufficiently completed or represented by popular history or literature in a way commensurate with their involvement, and the reality of the situation as it involved women is still slowly being reconstructed in contemporary Italian society. In light of this component of my research, my own interest in the history of women in the Italian resistance grew, and, in particular, I became interested in representations of those women who were a part of this movement.

During that initial research project, I was further struck by the apparent lack of other novels by women writers that centralized a female resistance participant. This led me, in the beginning stages of my research for this dissertation, to investigate the spaces in which the full stories and experiences of women who had participated in this event were being told over the years, if not in popular, fictive narrative and in history books. I discovered that many partisan women had been engaging in autobiographical production during the war, in the immediate post-war period, and even through present day, and,

further, that there is a dearth of analysis that addresses these particular writings, which are often left out of even contemporary anthologies.² Rather than being celebrated as documents of historical, national, literary and personal interest, most memoirs and autobiographies of female partisans are neither widely available nor read, nor available to an English speaking audience.³

I then began to wonder why it was that these autobiographical texts remained, for the most part, unknown, and what it was about Viganò's text that seemed to garner popular critical acclaim in the postwar years and continued, though measured, attention through the following decades.⁴ After reading several of the autobiographical writings of

² Though at times Viganò's *Agnese va a morire* (Einaudi, 1949) is mentioned in anthologies, other writings by or about women in the Italian resistance are often overlooked. As one recent example, we can point to Alberto Asor Rosa's *Storia europea della letteratura Italiana, vol. 3-La letteratura della nazione* published in 2009. Of his section entitled: "I giovani e la guerra: soldati, prigionieri, deportati, resistenti, partigiani," Rosa argues that "questa è uno dei paragrafi più importanti del nostro capitolo," yet he doesn't highlight any texts produced by women, who were certainly 'soldati, prigionieri, deportati, resistenti, [and] partigiani.' Rosa speaks of how writers who wrote about the Resistance then became successful as writers even though they never entertained the possibility of that kind of profession before the war and before having written their memories and this is what distinguishes the writing about this from any other. He then goes on to list six **masculine** examples. (Revelli, P. Levi, Rigoni Stern, Fenoglio, Meneghello, Calvino) and dedicates small subsections to a discussion of each of their works. Works by women are still, in Italian literary history, at the margins, if even included at all. See: Alberto Asor Rosa, *Storia europea della letteratura Italiana, vol. 3-La letteratura della nazione* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009) 416.

³ Interestingly, Viganò's text, translated into thirteen different languages, is also still unavailable to an English speaking audience. Additionally, it should be noted that Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zackek have recently published a book that includes some translated excerpts of writings dealing with women in the Italian Resistance, and though this can be a useful tool, especially for the teaching of this topic to non-Italian speakers, the book offers virtually no critical analysis. See: Rosetta D'Angelo and Barbara Zaczek, *Resisting Bodies: Narratives of Italian Partisan Women* (Chapel Hill: Annali D'Italianistica, 2008). Finally, the difficulty I was met with when in Rome in 2007 in trying to acquire several of the published autobiographical narratives reaffirmed this general state of their current unavailability, and, therefore a sense of popular disinterest. I was further assured of this when I tried to locate a narrative in May 2009 in Rome by Ida D'Esta (*Croce sulla schiena* (Rome: Edizioni cinque lune, 1966)) and I was told confidently by the clerk in the bookstore that "Ida D'este non esiste in Italia."

⁴ Though Viganò's work has been noted in general studies of Resistance literature, her text has not, in and of itself, generated an extensive bibliography of literary criticism. As examples of her inclusion, we can look to Frank Rosengarten, who, in his article, "The Italian Resistance Novel, 1945-1962," attempts to define a paradigm of the Italian Resistance novel, and Viganò's text is included and is the only female representative. Further, Giovanni Falaschi's entire book dedicated to Resistance literature, *La resistenza armata nella narrativa Italiana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), does not make mention, apart from Viganò, of any

Resistance participants, as well as studying the historical context in depth, I came to read Viganò's text as a vehicle which serves primarily to reinforce the incomplete and often stereotyped histories created by men in her creation of a protagonist who so much differs from many of the actual protagonists who have provided first-hand accounts of their experiences and involvement through autobiographical writing and oral testimonies.⁵ Though Viganò's characterization is not entirely unfounded, in answering my own question, I concluded that it is the very image of Agnese that Viganò created—that of a simple, politically detached, subservient, maternal collaborator—that enabled her to win so much acclaim and acceptance, and even be awarded the Viareggio Prize for literature in 1949. After all, Agnese is an easily palatable and historically concordant image of a female Resistance participant. She is one that can be, and is used in the Italian public school system to acknowledge women's involvement in the struggle for national liberation. But, as the only popular representation of such a strong and numbered force, she is inadequate.

While some work has been done by historians to bring to light oral narratives of female resistance participants (Bruzzzone, Farina, Saba), no major work has critically addressed the written production through a literary lens.⁶ Autobiographical writing that considers a

other female writers. Conversely, however, Viganò's name is not consistently found in dictionaries and encyclopedic texts of Italian literature.

⁵ We can also look to the portrayal of female characters in Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, particularly Pin's sister, Rina, who is characterized as a prostitute, as a literary example of another stereotype that women disrupt order and cause chaos among men in the brigades.

⁶ There have been a few scattered articles on a select number of narratives that consider autobiography and history, but the one's that I have seen are all primarily concerned with history. In particular, of this variety, I can note a few articles that have been written on Giovanna Zangrande's *I giorni veri, 1943-1945* (Milano: Mondadori, 1963). See Penny Morris, "A Woman's Perspective: Autobiography and History in Giovanna Zangrande's Resistance Narratives." *European Memories of the Second World War*. Eds. Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett and Claire Gorrara (New York: Berghahn, 1999) 35., Penelope

specific historical time period or event lies very close to the intersection of literature and history in as much as autobiography is both considered a literary genre and is often drawn on as source material by historians seeking to represent historical moments or events. Motivated, in part, by this proximity to both history and literature, this dissertation primarily draws on these two disciplines to consider the autobiographical narratives crafted by three women who participated in the Italian partisan resistance movement between September 1943 and April 1945, and whose works were written between 1943 and 2000. The texts that I consider in detail are: *Ragazza partigiana* (written in 1946 and published in 1974) and *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* (1996) by Elsa Oliva, *Diario partigiano* (written between 1943-1945, revisited/revised from 1950 until its publication in 1956) by Ada Gobetti, and *Con cuore di donna* (2000) by Carla Capponi. This project analyzes the methods of and motivations behind the varied self-representations set forth in these narratives. In particular, it seeks to articulate how these women fashion, create, and negotiate their own identity for themselves and with respect and in response to a greater national audience that has often misrepresented or not represented their wartime experiences. Such a practice then allows them to contribute to the construction of a national identity and national memory in which their individual experiences are accounted for.

In her article, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," Susan Stanford

Morris, "Giovanna Zangrandi: Negotiating Fascism." *Italian Studies* 53 (1998): 94, and Barbara Zaczek, "Narrating a Partisan Body: Autobiographies of Carla Capponi and Giovanna Zangrandi," *Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies* 24 (2003): 71. For an historical study which utilizes, in part, Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano*, see: JoMarie Alano, "Armed With A Yellow Mimosa: Women's Defense and Assistance Groups in Italy, 1943-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 615-631 (2003). Finally, I have not seen an entire book dealing with female narratives of the Italian Resistance.

Friedman observes of women's autobiographical writing that "alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing...Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech."⁷ I would argue, in this case, that the selection of autobiographical narratives that I have chosen to include in this dissertation shatters the reflection that Agnese-type participants have on popular cultural memory—the cultural hall of mirrors— and, they certainly work against the silence or inadequacy imposed by placing the responsibility and the privilege to tell the story in the pen and mouths of men. I hypothesize that each one of these narratives is motivated by and, therefore representative of continued resistance. That is, while it was their involvement in the Resistance movement that is the basis for the production of these narratives, each author uses her narration of these events to further resist easy or popular categorization of her experiences. As I will show, each narrative resists gender based societal assumptions and/or personal historical legacy and the combative fervor with which each of these women approached the Italian Resistance bleeds through their writing. Motivated by their participation in the Resistance, it is my contention that writing, for these women, is a continued form of resistance even decades after the war's end.

The sense of resistance found in these writings is layered, and diverse, but common to all is that it is rooted in the consciousness of being both a Resistance participant, and of being a woman—a minority within this larger cultural category. This sense of duality (and sometimes it is even more fragmented) is something that men do not tend to

⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiography*, ed. Shari Bernstock (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 40.

experience, and, therefore, their post-war autobiographical production tends to occur later in life, is often produced by men of rank, and usually embodies a strong sense of individuality that is celebrated. In as much as they are the protagonists and authors of prevailing histories, and their activities have been historically and politically validated, men's writings often aren't trying to resist misrepresentation so much as document their experiences for general historical knowledge and commit them to posterity for future generations. If a sense of resistance is manifest in men's writings, it is often found in the more recent narratives that are written with the explicit intention to address historical revisionism.⁸

In executing my analysis, I draw from numerous historical sources (Bravo, Bruzzone, Saba, Alloisio, Beltrami, Pavone, Portelli, etc...) to contextualize the narratives, as it is imperative to understand the socio-historic, and cultural environment from which these narratives are generated. When well situated in their historical context, the various resistances to cultural circumstances become evident, particularly in terms of their marginalization, and to historical misrepresentation. In addition to socio-historic considerations, I also approach these texts, to varying degrees, through the use of autobiographical (Bernstock, Friedman, Jelinek, Mason), psychological (Gilligan), and sociological (Rowbotham, Chodorow) theoretical material relating to women to illuminate the ways in which these narratives conform with, differ from, or exemplify noted trends of women's self-representation and to help interpret the narrative choices made by the authors. I also avail myself briefly of Italian feminist difference theory

⁸ For an example of this, we can think of the autobiography of Rosario Bentivegna, husband of Carla Capponi, entitled *Achtung Banditen: prima e dopo via Rasella* (Milano: Mursia, 2004). In writing his narrative, Bentivegna is clearly motivated by historical revisionism.

(Muraro and Cavarero). My focus throughout, however, is always on the narratives themselves. Chapter 1, which is divided into two sections, is a historical and theoretical introduction to my critical approach to these texts. It is dedicated to a discussion of important historical background relating to women in the Resistance, as well as a detailed treatment of theoretical material relating to women's autobiographical production and the sociological and psychoanalytic theories from which I will draw.

Chapter 2, dedicated to two autobiographical narratives by Elsa Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana* (written in 1946 and first published in 1969) and *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* (1996) highlights the process of gender negotiation engaged through the writing. I demonstrate and analyze Oliva's tendency to identify those traits which are traditionally considered masculine within herself, yet also her attention to certain feminine qualities that are useful in the kind of combat in which she was involved. In this constant process of negotiation as is present in both of her narratives, Oliva is actively resisting characterizations created by then popular historical discourse, and often draws attention to her use of firearms and relative comfort with violence. Upon entering the armed resistance, Oliva herself blatantly states, "Io non ero andata da loro per lavare i piatti, per rattopargli i pantaloni, io era andata per combattere."⁹ Oliva writes her narratives in order to continue to resist erasure from recorded history, or to resist being grouped into that stereotypical category of female participation that Agnese so clearly exemplifies. I show that in her narrative space, she settles on a practice of self-representation that encompasses both armed resistance and feminine attributes. In doing this, I historically

⁹ Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina. *La resistenza taciuta: Dodici vite di partigiane Piemontese* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003) 140.

contextualize the attributes drawing from the material presented in Chapter 1, and in particular from the work of Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami (*Volontarie della libertà: 8 settembre 1943- 25 aprile 1945*, 2003) and their observations on female partisans and violence. In particular, in discussing how women typically tend to shy away from the subject of violence, I am able to highlight how Oliva's self-image does not conform to standard assumptions regarding women and violence. I also consult an oral interview with Oliva conducted by Anna Maria Bruzzzone and Rachele Farina contained in *La resistenza taciuta: dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi* (2003) to augment our understanding of Oliva's self-fashioning also through the venue of her oral testimony. Additionally, I reference social theorist Sheila Rowbotham's idea of *dual consciousness* as explained by Susan Stanford Friedman to shed more light on the narrative qualities and tendencies found in these texts, particularly those which tend to evidence an understanding of oneself as different from cultural prescription. Through close reading, I further investigate narrative differences in the time of writing between the two texts, calling attention to the immediacy with which Oliva penned her first narrative and the reflective tone of the second, and how these choices also reflect the motivations behind the writing.

Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* (Einaudi, 1974), the subject of Chapter 3, champions feminine and maternal behaviors as evidenced through her distinct narrative style. It differs greatly, however, from Viganò's work, in that Gobetti's decision to focus her narrative space on those behaviors (as opposed to her many politically motivated and widely recognized accomplishments), can be read, I argue, as a way of seeking socio-

political valorization of such practices in a way that steps away from the propagation of the sort of gender related stereotypes that I believe *L'Agnese va a morire* participates in. In this way, in my reading, Gobetti resists and even prohibits traditional interpretations of maternal behaviors in affording to them unprecedented political legitimacy, rather than representing them as forms of subordination or limitation. In this reading, Gobetti is choosing to act as woman in the public space of her text, and in doing so she is privileging and validating these behaviors. In order to reach this reading, I primarily adopt the psychological and sociological gender theory of Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, 1982) and Nancy Chodorow (*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, 1978), respectively, as an interpretative framework through which to read this text. In particular, that women identify themselves relationally in a way very much connected to others, and further that they define their self-worth by a metric of responsibility and care towards others, which often results in self-sacrifice, are concepts relevant to my interpretation of Gobetti's text. The psychological and sociological characteristics of women identified by these social scientists permits an identification of Gobetti's narrative structures and choices as distinctly feminine. In this chapter, I also revisit the concept of *dual consciousness*, and note how it is manifest in Gobetti's text, and touch upon how it further relates to the concepts of *who* and *what* as set forth by Italian feminist theorist Adriana Cavarero ("*Who* Engenders Politics," 2002) and as discussed in Chapter 1. In my analysis, I also demonstrate how Gobetti embraces the notion of *beyond equality* championed by Italian feminist theorist Luisa Muraro ("*The Passion of Feminine*

Difference Beyond Equality,” 2002), and again, further elaborated on in the second part of Chapter 1, and this further supports my initial argument.

Finally, Carla Capponi’s *Con cuore di donna* (Il Saggiatore, 2000) is the topic of Chapter 4. This text manifests its continued sense of resistance in two ways, and accordingly, it is divided into two sections. First, as a main protagonist in a very controversial event in Roman Resistance history, Capponi’s narrative comes from an explicit commitment to resist historical revisionism through personal testimony, particularly surrounding the GAP in Rome, and the action of the bombing of Via Rasella and the resultant (as some might argue) Fosse Ardeatine Massacre. The first section of this chapter spends a fair bit of textual space exploring and historically contextualizing these events and it analyzes through close reading and historical documentation the way Capponi’s own narrative resonates with popular memory of these specific events, and in particular, with her personal role in them. For this, I rely heavily on the work of historians Alessandro Portelli (*L’ordine è già stato eseguito*, 2005) and Robert Katz (*Death in Rome*, 1967 and *The Battle for Rome*, 2003), who have both dedicated entire studies to reconstructing and understanding these major events, as well as the general climate of the city during World War II. I also draw from numerous other historical and cultural sources that reference these events and related issues. In light of this background material, in this first section, I discuss the particular narrative techniques adopted by Capponi to construct a testimonial narrative in which, in my reading, she seeks to contribute to and/or combat a revision of national history in her own defense and in defense of her fellow companions, and I show how she often oscillates between the personal and the collective to do so. As she does

this, she consistently fashions a self for posterity that is humane and compassionate. Such a characterization, I demonstrate, is part of her defense tactic, and it is her way of contributing to the historical discourse of these events that she believes has often misrepresented her.

The second part of this chapter examines how Capponi's emphasis on her personal acts of bravery and the use of weapons, in a similar way to that of Oliva, though not quite as vehemently or explicitly, work toward an expanded definition of self. I posit how this narrative practice further seeks to make a space for the figure of the woman warrior within the national memory of the Resistance, thereby continuing to contribute to, or resist, the existing historical record.

In my choice of narratives to include in this project, I was motivated also by increasing the diversity of selection in terms of publication dates, and regional differences as well. That is, while Oliva wrote *Ragazza partigiana* in the immediate post-war period, 1946, Gobetti penned her final version in the early seventies, and Capponi's narrative was published in 2000. In spanning this temporal distance, this dissertation also highlights within each chapter elements that are indicative of and resultant of the time in which each chose to write. For example, the immediacy of communication that so strongly characterizes Oliva's work counterposes the retrospective, anti-revisionistic tendency of Capponi's writing. It is also interesting to note that while each of these women fought in the Resistance in different capacities, they also fought in different regions of the country, and this adds to the diversity that one must necessarily account for as well when

considering female Resistance experiences. Elsa Oliva fought in the armed Resistance in the mountain brigades of Northern Italy (in the province of Novara) where the Resistance lasted until April 25, 1945, a full ten months (including one hard mountain winter) after it had ended in Rome on June 4, 1944, where Capponi fought as a *gappista*, a city operative. Gobetti, whose activities primarily took place in Turin, spent time in both the mountains and the city, and also a short period of time in France, just over the Italian border. I purposefully chose to include narratives that spanned a range in terms of writing and publication times, but also those that would present geographically different backgrounds. The varieties of experiences had by these women point to the fact that the Resistance was experienced differently, and often remembered differently, even in contemporary Italy, according to the geographic location of its individual participants.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

“Ma, come al solito, nessuno mi disse nulla; [...]dessi ancora una volta il mio aspetto insignificante- ne’ bionda ne’ bruna, ne’ alta ne’ bassa, ne’ grassa ne’ magra, ne’ bella ne’ brutta—che mi fa passare inosservata e che nessuno ricorda.”

-Ada Gobetti, *Diario partigiano*

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“è giusto che, in un grande moto popolare come quello della Resistenza, l'apporto delle donne sia stato confinato ai margini, come finora in realtà si è fatto, ricordato in fin di orazione come generico riconoscimento di un <<prezioso>> contributo alla lotta? Non sarebbe invece il caso di parlare di apporto femminile come condizione indispensabile per l'esistenza stessa di questa lotta?”

-Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina
La Resistenza taciuta

Historians date the official start of the armed Italian Resistance as contemporary with the announcement of the armistice between Italy and the Allies on September 8-9, 1943, which was a result of the deposition of Mussolini (July 25, 1943) and the assumption of power by Pietro Badoglio. An armistice with the allies, in effect, meant that Germany and the Italian Fascists were considered the enemies. Italy essentially switched allegiances midway through World War II. Immediately following that announcement, the Committee of National Liberation (CLN), comprised of various anti-Fascist political groups, was formally assembled in Rome and began to organize Resistance forces. The German occupation of Rome occurred on September 10, 1943 and Italy (Badoglio)

officially declared war on Germany on October 13, 1943.¹⁰ The Italian Resistance movement, organized together by the CLN and the CLNAI (The Committee of National Liberation of Northern Italy), had as its mission to eradicate Fascism and Nazism and restore a democratic government to the country, a goal that resulted in what many now acknowledge as a civil war.¹¹ This was a moment of great historical significance for the country. More than 200,000 armed fighters, among them 35,000 women, fought as partisans for the Resistance, and another estimated 20,000 women were considered patriots and participated in the civil facet of the Resistance (these official statistics are widely believed to be lacking).¹² The popular consensus that the official statistics are much smaller than the reality of the situation would indicate, tells us that women's contributions were held in low esteem in the post-war period when the figures were compiled.

¹⁰ Though most general histories of the Italian Resistance will provide general historical information about events leading up to and comprising the Resistance, Jane Slaughter's excellent book, *Women and the Italian Resistance* (Denver: Arden Press, 1997) provides a very useful timeline, making it easy to visually trace the succession of events.

¹¹ When the Germans invaded Italy, they freed Mussolini and on September 23, 1945 restored control of Northern Italy to him. The headquarters were in a town called Salò on Lake Garda. On November 24, 1945, his government was officially known as the Italian Social Republic (RSI) and because of its location became commonly known as the Republic of Salò. This collaborationist government was essentially a puppet government backed by Germany. The partisans, therefore, fought against both the Germans and Italian Fascist supporters of the RSI, and this is why, during World War II, Italy also experienced a civil war. Claudio Pavone takes this theme as the title to his extremely detailed and excellent history of the period, *Una guerra civile* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), and discusses this in detail. Giorgio Bocca also dedicates a subsection to this theme in *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995). It should be noted, however, that for many decades after the war, Italian history remembered this event as a war in which *all* Italians were united together against Fascism and this is widely known as the myth of the Resistance.

¹² These statistics were gleaned from Slaughter's *Women and the Italian Resistance*, 33. They are widely cited and officially documented elsewhere, and are popularly believed to be lacking in all accounts of the period that I have read (see bibliography—Mirella Alloiso and Giuliana Beltrami specifically indicate the difficulty in establishing the exact number of female Resistance participants in *Volontarie della libertà* (2003), 25 and on p.283 they discuss various reasons for the inaccuracy of these numbers. Further, the official numbers regarding women do not take into account all of the members of the Gruppi Difesi della Donna (GDD) whose activities are certainly categorized as civil resistance and whose members numbered 70,000 at the end of the war.

Women were present and active in all areas of the Resistance, and often they fulfilled multiple roles. Many were *staffette*, or couriers, risking their lives to procure and transport valuable weapons and information. There were women who fought in the mountain brigades, and those who carried out actions of sabotage in the cities. There were even those who had positions of military command. A large number of women organized demonstrations and uprisings, worked as nurses, sheltered and aided the persecuted, and fed, clothed, and cared for partisans in any way that they could. Many of the activities in which women engaged, however, did not earn them recognition as partisans at the end of the war. According to a decree dated 21 August 1945,

(...) è dichiarato partigiano chi ha portato le armi per almeno tre mesi in una formazione armata <<regolarmente inquadrata nelle forze riconosciute e dipendenti dal Comando volontari della libertà>>, e ha preso parte ad almeno tre azioni di guerra o di sabotaggio. A chi è stato in carcere, al confino, in campo di concentramento, la qualifica viene riconosciuta solo se la prigionia ha oltrepassato i tre mesi; almeno sei sono necessari nel caso di servizio nelle strutture logistiche. A chi, dall'esterno delle formazioni, abbia prestato aiuti particolarmente rilevanti, viene attribuito in qualche regione il titolo di benemerito.¹³

These parameters, which were used to determine the aforementioned “official statistics,” make no inclusion of those who participated in the “civil resistance,” nor do they account for those who spent less than three months with a brigade, as was often the case with women whose activities were frequently changing. This is one of many ways in which women and their participation have been excluded from official historical documentation.

“Civil resistance,” a term coined by French historian Jacques Sémelin, describes a mode of unarmed yet active participation that expresses patriotism and solidarity with the

¹³ Bravo and Bruzzone, 19-20.

liberation cause.¹⁴ The vast majority of women who participated in the Resistance resisted in this way as a result of the means and the gendered tasks available to them. Historians Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone explain:

È resistenza civile quando si sciopera o si manifesta per migliori condizioni materiali, per ostacolare lo sfruttamento delle risorse locali da parte degli occupanti, per testimoniare la propria identità nazionale; quando si agisce per isolare moralmente nazisti o collaborazionisti; quando si tenta di mantenere una certa indipendenza di gruppi sociali e istituzioni, di impedire la distruzione di beni essenziali, di contenere la violenza magari offrendosi come intermediari; quando ci si fa carico di qualcuna delle numerose vite messe a rischio dalla guerra.¹⁵

All of these activities, you will note, require an element of self-sacrifice in the interest of others, or of the cause as a whole, and were vital to the operation of the Resistance. In *Con cuore di donna* (2000), Carla Capponi discusses an incidence of women overtaking a bakery in order to obtain flour to feed their children before the Germans emptied it. In this attempt, several women were caught and murdered right there on the spot in front of their children.¹⁶ On September 8, 1943, when the armistice went into effect and the Italian army had been disbanded since the end of July, it was primarily the women who helped shelter, feed, nurse and clothe the soldiers and ex-political prisoners in the forty days before Resistance formations were organized. They also volunteered their homes as meeting places where important political connections could be forged, and connected these soldiers with local resistance groups when possible. Without this “*maternage di massa*”, countless lives would have been lost and the strength of the Resistance

¹⁴ As cited in Bravo and Bruzzone, Sémelin’s definition can be found in: J. Sémelin, *Senz’armi di fronte a Hitler. La Resistenza Civile in Europa. 1939-1943*, Sonda, Torino 1993.

¹⁵ Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone, *In Guerra senza armi: storie di donne 1940-1945* second ed. (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2000) 16.

¹⁶ Capponi, 245. We can also recall a similar scene from the film *Roma, città aperta* (dir. Rosellini, 1945).

organization would have not been as it was.¹⁷ These activities continued through the end of the war, even as there were clear orders from German command for the execution of anyone engaging in such activities. All three women whose narratives are included in this study participated in such preparations, as well as a multitude of other activities. This is also civil resistance, and these types of crucial activities have been silenced and unrecognized, for the most part, by popular and mainstream Resistance histories. All of the narratives in this study acknowledge and afford due merit to such involvement, whether it be in speaking about observed or personal experiences. Each narrative, however, while documenting these moments as collective history, most certainly privileges a narration of the individual ways in which each were a part of the national battle.

In *Diario partigiano*, Ada Gobetti explains the development of the Gruppi di Difesa della Donna e per l'Assistenza ai Combattenti per la Libertà (GDD), an organization which she was instrumental in creating during the beginning of the Resistance (November 1943) in an effort to coordinate the efforts of all of the women who were, essentially, civil resisters. The title of the organization itself, 'per l'assistenza ai combattenti,' echoes the characteristics of civil resistance in its attention to others.¹⁸ Likewise, Gobetti's narrative, itself, focuses on her own Resistance experiences in close relation and connection to others. There were members of the GDD who were, however, *combattenti* themselves, but they were by far not the majority. The GDD was officially recognized almost a year

¹⁷ Bravo and Bruzzone (*In guerra senza armi*, 24, 78-88) use this term to describe the mass mobilization of women in war efforts.

¹⁸ In *Diario partigiano*, Gobetti discusses her initial dislike of the title of the organization. See p. 63.

after its formation, in October of 1944, by the CLNAI, and even began to receive funds to continue their work towards the war efforts. At the end of the war, their members numbered 70,000. Their work, however, which included a variety of tasks and missions, would not, for the most part, be within the aforementioned parameters established for identification as a partisan at war's end. Sémelin's term, 'civil resistance,' therefore compensates on a theoretical level for some of the silencing and non-recognition of women's contributions, but, in historiographical practice, the discourse in which women's participation is marginalized remains very much unchanged.

Historians Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami argue that in engaging in such resistance activities as women did, they, in fact, risked more because for them, unlike for men, it was not their only option, it was a choice. That is, while men, at the risk of execution or imprisonment, had to either join the Fascist ranks, or clandestinely fight against them as part of the Resistance, women could have either done nothing or collaborated with the enemy and remained safe. Several women note the absence of men from the cities during the war, precisely for this reason—"Le strade eran quasi deserte e non s'incontravan che donne..." Alloisio and Beltrami write:

<<Volontarie>> lo furono più degli uomini, perché, mentre a questi, per ragioni di obbligo militare, una scelta di campo si imponeva, le donne restando a casa non avrebbero rischiato nulla; se poi avessero collaborato ne avrebbero tratto vantaggi: quelle che lo fecero furono gratificate con zucchero, caffè, sigarette, carbone; cose che, nella penuria del tempo, avevano un valore oggi difficilmente immaginabile.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Gadola Beltrami, *Volontarie della libertà: 8 settembre 1943-25 aprile 1945*, second ed. (Milan: Lampi di Stampa, 2003). In using the word "volontarie," the authors are referring to the Corps of Volunteers for Freedom (CVL), a title used by the CLNAI to identify and unite ALL groups of people fighting against Nazism and Fascism irrespective of which governing body they reported to. All members were essentially volunteers. The CVL, instituted in June 1944, was the first general partisan organ to be recognized by both the Italian government and the Allies in December 1944. Further, Luciana Viviani ("Le guerriere tornano a casa," Atti del Seminario. Esperienza Storica femminile

The motivations for assuming such risk and participating, therefore, were as varied as the backgrounds of women who were involved, which crossed all social boundaries and encompassed women of all economic, educational, and professional boundaries. Some attribute their activity to an irrational, instinctual reaction, others to the desire to help loved ones who were partisans, and still others to an informed political consciousness.²⁰ Capponi, Gobetti, and Oliva all profess that this latter reason was an integral motivation for them. Oliva, uneducated, also admits to wanting to accompany her brother Aldo in his resistance activities, and Gobetti, who finished university just before the war, fought together with her husband and son. As historians, Alloiso's and Beltrami's statement effectively points to the undervalued nature of female Resistance participation, especially in emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement.

Anna Bravo observes that while activities rooted in maternalism and concern with the collective partisan population (clothing, feeding, nursing, rushing storehouses for provisions, etc...) were viewed as instinctual and celebrated and even expected of women during wartime (perhaps, we can imagine that this is because of their representative continuity with society as it was under Fascist influence), at the end of the war when everything went back to 'normal,' "La maternità diventi per le donne un patrimonio poco spendibile sul piano politico per ottenere più libertà e potere per se stesse."²¹ In addition to that, however, these imperative tasks, maternal as some might identify some of them,

nell'età e contemporanea. Parte prima. ed. Anna Maria Crispino (Unione Donne Italiane: Circolo <<La Goccia>>, 1988.) equates the sacrifice of female participation with sainthood, arguing that female participants put themselves at a high risk.

²⁰ For a discussion of motivations, see Marina Addis Saba, *Partigiane: tutte le donne della Resistenza* (Milan: Mursia, 1998), and Bruzzone and Farina, *La Resistenza taciuta*, and Alloiso and Beltrami, *Volontarie della libertà*, p. 19-26.

²¹ Bravo, *Donne e uomini nella guerre mondiali*, 99.

accompanied by *bravura* on the battlefield and command organization, and countless other actions proved to be ‘un patrimonio poco spendibile’ even in gaining participation in the victory marches or documentation in historiographies of the Resistance. As the result of a directive of the CVL (the Corps of Volunteers for Freedom), Saba notes:²²

Nelle giornate della liberazione nazionale, mentre sfilavano per le città in festa le formazioni scese dalla montagna, le donne partigiane, che pure tante volte si erano esposte in piazza in scioperi e manifestazioni nelle quali avevano rischiato la vita durante l'occupazione, restarono nelle fabbriche o nelle case a provvedere, (...) alle provviste alimentari, agli alloggiamenti, alle mille necessità del momento, oppure assistettero commosse alle manifestazioni, ma restarono tra la folla, soprattutto quelle delle formazioni garibaldine, sempre per ordine dei comandi che non volevano esporle alla chiacchierare e alle facili insinuazioni.²³

This physically marginal, undistinguished position occupied by the women during the victory marches, ‘tra la folla’, is not only reflected in the historical documentation of the period as well, but it is also, for many, a symbolic reason for the writing of their autobiographical narratives—that is, to insert themselves into the ‘manifestazione’ proper. As post-war society developed, a strong sense of disillusionment and resentment on the part of women set in, and Oliva’s narrative is an excellent example of writing borne out of this disillusionment. Women’s resistance activities, of any variety, were not granted as much societal importance as they were during the war, and women were forced to walk through “le porte di normalizzazione,” and readjust to their limited, traditional, often domestic roles in a patriarchal society that made very little recognition of their heroism.²⁴ The Resistance for women was an impassioned struggle for the liberation of the country from Nazism and Facism, but, for many, it was also a secondary,

²² Please see note #13 for a discussion of the CVL.

²³ Marina Addis Saba, *Partigiane: tutte le donne della resistenza* (Milan: Mursia, 1998) xv.

²⁴ Luciana Viviani uses the phrase “le porte di normalizzazione” in “Le Guerriere Tornano a Casa,” *Atti del Seminario. Esperienza Storica femminile nell'età contemporanea. Parte prima.* ed. Anna Maria Crispino (Unione Donne Italiane: Circolo <<La Goccia>>, 1988.)

subconscious struggle for women's liberation and equality, providing them an opportunity to live on equal terms with and gain respect from the opposite sex. In the immediate post-war years, women did not widely enjoy the same equal status that they had during their Resistance, and though they had changed and matured significantly, society had not.²⁵ This notable incongruity enabled, for the most part, the senses of disillusion and resentment.²⁶

Up until little more than a decade ago, histories that largely included, or centered upon, Resistance experiences neglected to mention the significant female component as anything more than a small contribution, and documented this extraordinary national accomplishment as primarily male dominated.²⁷ In expressing their dissatisfaction with this practice, Bruzzone and Farina explain their problem with the notion of "contribution." They write, "Per definire l'opera delle partigiane si parla di contributo, un concetto debole rispetto alla ricchezza dell'esperienza, e un indicatore forte degli orientamenti storiografici. Contribuire non equivale a fare e fare parte, anzi marca il divario fra appartenenza e convergenza momentanea, fra l'azione creativa e il suo contorno o supporto, che restano vaghi."²⁸ This perspective is shared by many feminist historians, and in an effort to devote appropriate attention to the topic and expand or

²⁵ For an excellent treatment of women under Fascism, which helps to contextualize the condition of women during this war, see Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of women and their experiences after the war, see Alloisio and Beltrami, 279-293.

²⁷ Pavone's *Una guerra civile* (1991), however, does, in its extensive historical documentation, draw upon the experience of women and the role they played. The first, and it seems only male to do this, the only predominant critical complaint is that his massive and excellent volume should have been published earlier.

²⁸ Bruzzone and Farina, vii. In this same tone, they later continue, "...di una donna che cucina per i partigiani, cura i feriti o segnala la presenza di tedeschi, si dice che dà un aiuto; dell'addetto alla sussistenza di una formazione, del cuoco, dell'infermiere, dell'informatore, si dice che sono partigiani" xi.

revise existing historical knowledge, a few books have been published on the topic, only one of which is in the English language.²⁹ These books are essential to the study of this event. Though the last decade has seen more interest in the topic, most scholars will agree that it still begs critical attention. Because few books have been published on the topic, the predominant documentation of women's experiences is that which they themselves have written, and is the subject of this dissertation.

In constructing their histories of female Resistance experiences, the authors of these existing studies draw upon official documents, oral testimonies, and autobiographical writing. Many partisans, male and female, wrote memoirs, autobiographies, and diaries of their experiences. While many male authored narratives have been published, we find substantially fewer published narratives by women. Those that are published, however, are of extreme testimonial value. For these women, writing was a way of establishing an historical presence, of affirming an existence and an experience. Their writing bears witness to their personal experiences and, secondarily, to those of their partisan companions in a way that canonized history has not. In many of these texts, in fact, there is an excessive and at times exhausting register of full names, not initials or battle names, of fellow partisans, both male and female, killed during the war. In this way, these books also function as memorials, and establish this same historical presence for those that cannot do it themselves. These books also, at times, serve a revisionist function, such as

²⁹ The most useful and notable of these resources are: Jane Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance* (Denver: Arden Press, 1997)., Marina Addis Saba, *Partigiane: Tutte le donne della Resistenza* (Milan: Mursia, 1998)., Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone, *In guerra senza armi: storie di donne 1940-1945* second ed. (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2000)., Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Gadola Beltrami, *Volontarie Della Liberta': 8 Settembre 1943-25 Aprile 1945*, second ed. (Milan: Lampi di Stampa, 2003)., Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina, *La Resistenza Taciuta: Dodici Vite Di Partigiane Piemontesi* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003)., Anna Bravo, ed. *Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali* (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1991)., and Renata Viganò, *Donne della Resistenza* (Bologna: Steb, 1955).

Capponi's narrative—and quite notably. Bernadette Luciano explains, "women writing about the period were, by their very act of writing, resisting the representation or misrepresentation of their cultural experience."³⁰ These women who chose to commit their experiences to paper, either during or after the time period recorded, and, in some cases to publication, did so for a variety of motivations, but common among them is that they attached a certain value to their struggles and placed merit in the telling of their stories.

The majority of published narratives (which might very well pale in comparison to those that remain undiscovered in archives throughout Italy), however, were published by small publishing houses with scant national diffusion.³¹ Saba comments of these women and their writing, "[...] rientrate nella routine quotidiana, non poterono tuttavia dimenticare i loro giorni di gloria, l'epica della loro giovinezza con le sue speranze deluse; perciò ne hanno lasciato memoria pubblicando nei luoghi di residenza, spesso in provincia, presso piccoli editori locali, tutta una 'letteratura minore', poco nota e poco diffusa, da cui solo oggi iniziano a essere oggetto di studio, e che attendono ancora la loro valorizzazione storiografica."³² The two narratives of Elsa Oliva, fall under this category of texts published by smaller publishers, while Capponi's narrative was published by a mid-size company. Gobetti's narrative reached greater diffusion through a major publishing company, Einaudi. Both Ada Gobetti and Carla Capponi were central protagonists in the

³⁰ Bernadette Luciano, "Women Writing History: Female Novels of the Resistance," in *Gendering Italian Fiction: Feminist Revisions of Italian History*, eds. Maria Ornella Marotti and Gabriella Brooke (London: Associated University Presses, 1999) 156.

³¹ See Slaughter's bibliographic section for a detailed discussion of available archival and published material (153-166). Though her interest is primarily in historical studies, her bibliography section is quite useful.

³² Saba, XV.

organization of their respective resistance movements, and in the creation of the national women's organization (GDD). It can be interpreted that because they were highly politicized and influential women, the inherent value of their narratives of their war experiences was estimated to be greater by larger publishing houses.

II. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This dissertation adopts a combination of theory (literary, sociological, psychological, feminist) and practice (close reading and interpretation of content and narrative forms, and historical contextualization and significance), though more the latter, to illuminate the chosen Resistance narratives, and to maintain and celebrate their individuality.³³ The theoretical background that follows is intended to serve as a point of reference, illustrating which theoretical discourses intersect with analyses of these texts and in relation to women's autobiographical production, and its evolution. This background will, in my estimation, significantly enrich the analyses that follow, as well as open one of the lenses through which my readings are informed. In my approach to the narratives in this dissertation, I do not choose to uniformly engage it, but rather I draw from it when it is appropriate for and complements my readings, and I highlight these moments below. These are my intentions with the section that follows.

³³ As Shari Bernstock notes, and I concur, "Women's writings are as individual as the women themselves, and they often resist easy classification, thus posing problems for theory from the first." (Bernstock, 4).

The concept of difference in Italian feminist thought, as articulated by its' most engaged thinkers, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero, is characterized by the idea that sexual equality is not a feminist goal (or, rather, should not be). Muraro writes, "if we have at heart a woman's freedom neither mediated nor modeled by men, it is indispensable to go beyond the political paradigm of equality and rights." Muraro's concept of *beyond equality*, calls for a sense of feminine difference "that is not phallic (which does not aim, that is, towards supremacy over the other by exhibiting the thing that "everyone" is supposed to desire). Its response to the lack, in fact, is to put itself into a relationship of exchange, not of antagonism."³⁴ Muraro further believes that the languages of love and dependence are excluded from the public, political arena, and, as a result, women are forced to adopt a male language in order to feel as though they "fit in." This contributes to the problem of striving for equality, and not accepting gender difference in the political and social arenas as well as on a linguistic level. Women are different from men, and rather than view this difference as an inferiority, proponents of Italian sexual difference theory argue that this difference should be celebrated and embraced and that women

³⁴ Luisa Muraro, "The Passion of Feminine Difference Beyond Equality," trans. Carmen di Cinque, Graziella and Rebecca West Parati, ed., *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). Further, Muraro's book (perhaps her most widely read), *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2006), discusses the importance of becoming a mother for women, as it is through motherhood that a mother can affirm her role as a giver of life and language and strengthen their sociological connection. In instances where this natural relationship is not possible, Muraro proposes a process called *affidamento* in an effort to establish a way for women to relate to other women. Carol Lazzaro-Weis explains this process: "*Affidamento* redefines the mother-daughter relationship as a symbolic one: the "symbolic mother," usually but not necessarily an older woman, functions to sustain and recognize the gendered nature of thought, knowledge, and experience of a less experienced woman who has entrusted herself to her. The mentor-guide relationship between two different women facilitates the "vertical" (Muraro avoids the word "hierarchical") transmission of knowledge and authority from woman to woman as they learn to recognize the individual difference." (Carol Lazzaro-Weis, "The Concept of Difference in Italian Feminist Thought: Mothers, Daughters, Heretics" in *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice*, 34) The process, of *affidamento*, therefore, helps to promote women's security with difference and to engage in relationships of exchange.

should not be consistently endeavoring to be like men. Cavarero, however, further complicates this theory by asserting that in their difference from men, not all women are the same, and that identity is as much a function of one's own self perception as it is how one is perceived and labeled by others. She adopts the terms *who* and *what* to indicate the difference between individual identity—*who* somebody is—and collective identity—*what* somebody is (or, what group one belongs to)—experienced by women. She further posits, “The confusion between the uniqueness of personal identity and common identities—further aggravated by the dissolution of the first into the second—in fact forces me to point out the obvious. The *who* is never without the *what* [...] Obviously every life narrative is the unrepeatable story of someone who is many things.”³⁵

Extending this theory to the literary arena, one will note that the negotiation and existence of individual and collective identities is a common attribute in female-authored, autobiographical narratives of the Italian Resistance. Specifically, I will explore this in the works of Ada Gobetti and Carla Capponi in subsequent chapters. Italian difference theory, as outlined above, is particularly relevant to Gobetti's narrative whose work, I argue, seeks to politically and socially validate feminine language and practices whilst never separating the *who* from the *what*. Though I note this interplay between individual and collective representation in women's writing of the Italian resistance, it is not limited, by any means to this very specific sub-genre of writing. It is a commonality in women's autobiographical writing as a whole. In fact, Susan Stanford Friedman corroborates this:

In taking the power of words, of representation, into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and

³⁵ Adriana Cavarero, “*Who Engenders Politics*,” trans. Carmen di Cinque, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference*, eds. Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002) 100.

the unique. In autobiography, specifically, the self created in a women's text is often not a "teleological entity," an "isolate being" utterly separate from all others, as Gusdorf and Olney define the autobiographical self.³⁶

Rather, as I have found, the self that is created in autobiography is multi-faceted, much negotiated, and not easily singularly categorized, and all three texts in this dissertation demonstrate this.

In explaining and situating sexual difference theory, in her article, "The Concept of Difference in Italian Feminist Thought: Mothers, Daughters, Heretics," Carol Lazzaro-Weis explains, "Inspired in part by the more recent works of Luce Irigaray, especially *Sexes et parentés*, sexual difference theory replaces the former unifying category among women, that of belonging to an oppressed class, with a common gender identification." She goes on to remind us that it is men who propagated the idea that all women are alike. Sexual difference theory, therefore, as argued by feminist philosophers and feminist scholars alike, is a reaction against a male produced gender ideology that categorizes women as at once all the same and inferior. Lazzaro-Weis further notes that sexual difference theory "cleverly uncovers sexual bias in mainstream discourses and shows how partial totalizing philosophies are..."³⁷ We can interpret 'totalizing philosophies' here to include not only those created from paternal ideological structures, but also those which consider all women to be equal to each other. "Mainstream discourses" and "totalizing philosophies," are, as used here, intentionally perhaps, non discipline specific terms which can refer to and extend across a wide variety of disciplines. Lazzaro-Weiss

³⁶ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiography*, ed. Shari Bernstein (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 40.

³⁷ Lazzaro-Weis, "The Concept of Difference in Italian Feminist Thought," 45.

herself, in her Introduction to *From Margins to Mainstream* relates this same idea to the literary sphere when she speaks of how often scholars of women's writing fail to notice many details and trends in their readings precisely because they view them as all the same and lose sight of the individuality of each author.³⁸ A reaction against "mainstream discourses" and "totalizing philosophies," even if not stated in those exact terms, also surfaces in relation to both contemporary autobiographical theory, and to psychological and sociological theories of human, particularly female, development.

Beginning in the 1980's, and taking strong hold in the latter part of the decade, critics of autobiography (predominantly female scholars, and not specifically of Italian literature) have called for a reconsideration of the theory generated in relation to that genre.³⁹ This is because both the practitioners of the theory and the sources considered had been male. That is, it had been predominantly men generating theory from critical inquiry into writing produced by male authors. This practice clearly makes no account for the validity and structure of writing by women, if we accept that there are inherent gender differences in writing. The genre itself, they argue, had been overwhelmingly dominated by men to the detriment of women's autobiographical production. In her essay, "Autogynography," Brée Germaine argues that this trend "sustains a more or less unconscious assumption,

³⁸ Carol Lazzaro-Weis, *From Margins to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women's Writing, 1968-1990* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

³⁹ Mary Mason, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), contributes an article, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," in which she tries to identify a theoretical paradigm into which she can insert women's life writing. Interestingly enough, it is the only essay in this seminal volume that confronts the theme of women's writing, and it seems to be the earliest attempt to establish women's autobiographical writing as a genre separate from general autobiography. This essay is closely followed by Estelle Jelenik's book, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986). Further, a proliferation of critical texts on the subject appeared particularly between 1986 and 1989. See note #39 and the bibliography for specific titles.

pervasive in our culture, that what is “important” is coextensive with what is masculine, ‘human,’” and she poignantly states that “the generic models proffered do not apply to women’s autobiographical writings.”⁴⁰ Women’s experience and modes of expression are different than those of men, and so theory measured and generated by male production is simply inadequate. In the case of this project, one might also argue the same of histories and literature produced by men—that it is simply inadequate in illuminating the female experience and reality of the Second World War. Studies that use these literary theories as ways to read autobiography either leave out women altogether from the works considered or, in cases where they are considered, they continue to be marginalized because the tools to execute productive readings that consider the specificity of women’s writing did not exist. Germaine is not the only critic who sustains this position.⁴¹ While most critics of the genre recognize the inadequacy of male inspired theoretical frameworks (such as those proposed by Olney, LeJeune, Gusdorf⁴²) some actually try their hand at establishing viable paradigms through which a reading of women’s life

⁴⁰ Brée Germaine, “Autogynography,” *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 172.

⁴¹ This premise is pervasive in almost all of the literature on women’s autobiographical writing. For examples, see Shari Bernstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck, eds. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), Martine Watson Brownley and Allison B. Kimmich, eds., *Women and Autobiography*, *Worlds of Women* ; No. 5. (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999), Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.8.No.2 (Winter 1981): 347-61., Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), Estelle Jelinek *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), Nancy K. Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Nancy K. Miller, "Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6.1 (1994): 1-27., Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91.No.5 (Dec., 1986)., Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and Domna Stanton, *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). This is by no means an exhaustive list.

⁴² Shari Bernstock states in her notes that Gusdorf’s essay, “Conditions and limits of Autobiography,” suggests that autobiography is a genre that belongs only to men and not women.

writing can be fruitfully executed. A study of literary criticism concerning women's autobiography yields commonalities and patterns in the observations of writing by women, as well as similarities in the methods to interpret these characteristics. That is, there is overlap in the possible theoretical frameworks set forth that are drawn from female-authored texts.

Mary Mason's article, "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers," appears as the token chapter specifically addressing writing by women in the seminal volume *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980) edited by James Olney. In this article, through a study of four female-authored autobiographical texts, Mason looks to identify and set forth "a set of paradigms for life-writing by women right down to our time."⁴³ She discovers that when women speak about themselves, they do so in relation to a chosen "other" or others, and that this identification with someone else allows them to write openly about themselves. This "other" can be a variety of combinations of people and collectives, and in this article, Mason identifies the four different possibilities that she has observed as four different paradigms.⁴⁴ Within these possibilities, however, she notes a commonality. She writes, "One element, however, that seems more or less constant in women's life writing—and this is not the case in men's life writing—is the sort of evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity that we have traced in

⁴³ Mason, 210.

⁴⁴ The four paradigms as identified by Mason are: relation to another autonomous being, relation to one single, transcendent other, relation to two others, relation to a multiple collectivity, a many-in-one. Mason notes that these identified possibilities are not exhaustive, not are the possibilities infinite (Mason, 231). She also notes a variation on these patterns. She writes, "A variant on this pattern alterity-equality is to be found in stories where the other is neither a partner nor an equal, neither a spouse nor a creation of the writer but is instead an overwhelming model or ideal that has to be confronted in order that the author's identity be realized..." (Mason, 232). This variant is the case with the narrative *Ragazza partigiana* (1974), by Elsa Oliva.

the four paradigms.”⁴⁵ With regard to the narratives I study in this project, it is, in fact, the case, that each of the authors self-fashions, and self-defines by way of alterity, either by differentiating herself from publicly held images of what she is believed to be (Capponi and Oliva), or by defining her self-worth in relation to others and to the collective (Gobetti). The concept of “identity by way of alterity” as a particularly feminine practice inspired later critics to further explore this, and it is, indeed the root of subsequent theories and observations of female autobiography.

One of the first to provide an entire book on the subject, Estelle Jelinek looks at women’s autobiographies from antiquity until the present in an attempt to delineate trends, changes, and characteristics of women’s life writing. She notes changes in subject and narrative technique over the centuries and identifies the twentieth century as a turning point.⁴⁶ Similar to Mason, however, she notes that despite temporal differences, women’s writing always seem to express a feeling of otherness. Jelinek explains, “Even in recent decades, when more women are writing with the assurance and command usually associated with men’s autobiographies, we still find in most women’s autobiographies a sense of feeling *other*, of being *different* from the rest of society, even from other women[...]They feel they are different from, other than, or outside the male world, a poor fit, indeed, in that world.”⁴⁷ Further, in terms of literary technique, Jelinek identifies a non-linear, episodic recounting of events as common in female autobiographical writing. That is, while men’s writing is typically a chronological, ordered telling of events,

⁴⁵ Mason, 231.

⁴⁶ This is a similar finding to that of Smith (Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), and Mason suggests this as well. I refer you to the particular texts for an elaboration on these changes.

⁴⁷ Jelinek, 186.

women's writing is, for the most part interrupted by anecdotes or other insertions into the narrative, because, as Jelinek posits, "chronological order does not seem to be sustainable in narratives with selves that are weak in focus, feel ambivalent, or are intent on portraying various and conflicting roles." Jelinek further explains that, "disjunctive narratives and discontinuous forms are more adequate for mirroring the fragmentation and multidimensionality of women's lives."⁴⁸ This is one rationale for the presence of these characteristics, again manifest in the texts at hand. Gobetti's and Capponi's texts, in particular, in alternating between personal, reflective forms and documentary style writing, and also in often disrupting a chronological telling of events, exemplify Jelinek's observation. Likewise, Capponi's text often follows the path of memory and demonstrates a defiance of chronological order as well. Through this narrative technique, these authors tell collective and personal stories, evidencing the multidimensionality of their lives and the various identities they embody.

These two significant observations made by the earlier pioneers of the field of women's autobiographical writing, that of women's tendency to define themselves in relation to others, and also of the frequent execution of a non-linear narrative, are characteristics noted in later studies and further elaborated.⁴⁹ A proliferation of texts on the subject appeared between 1987 and 1989 including notable and important work by Smith, Stanton, Bernstock, Brodski, Miller, Germaine and Heilbrun.⁵⁰ These scholars all helped

⁴⁸ Jelinek, 188.

⁴⁹ Domna Stanton also observes non-linearity in *The Female Autograph*.

⁵⁰ Recent studies treating women and autobiography are predominantly rooted in the work and theoretical paradigms established by this proliferation of criticism appearing in the late 1980's. From this basis, more contemporary studies either consider texts in their historical specificity (geographic location, race, socio-economic status, historical time period, etc...) and in light of these base theories, or they merge these theories with other theoretical models such as postcolonial, post-structural, etc. Therefore, in my

to explode and expand the genre of autobiographical studies. As all of these scholars concur that the existing models of autobiography were then not sufficient in dealing with female autobiography, primarily because of the marginalized position occupied by women. The studies offered by these critics complement each other, as their core observations are similar (in accordance with the aforementioned characteristics), yet their rationale for explaining these differences, and their adopted approach for dealing with them in relation to the narratives considered in their studies do vary.⁵¹ Several, however, do suggest that theories of sociology and psychology of gender, particularly those set forth by Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, respectively, do offer useful insight into understanding the recurring attributes of women's autobiographical writing. I agree very much with this approach, as I have clearly observed and discuss at length the characteristics noted by Chodorow and Gilligan in my analysis of Gobetti's *Diario*

work, I avail myself of the work of the base group of theorists of women's autobiography, as it seems to me the most relevant to my own research, and these critics are continually referenced in current literature.

⁵¹ For example, while Jelinek vows to strictly analyze the content and narrative forms which comprise a text ("My concern is with the nature of autobiographies themselves: their content, the narrative forms in which they are shaped, and the self-image that informs them." Jelinek, xi.), Friedman takes to exploring how dominant theories, and that of Gusdorf in particular, do not explain the process of female life writing and explores the application of Sheila Rowbotham's idea of a female "collective consciousness" (as expressed in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973)) in relation to the manifestations of the individual and collective that Friedman herself notes in women's autobiography. (Friedman observes, "The emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism." 39). She then proposes a psycho-political approach as the way to go. Bernstock also interrogates the consciousness of the autobiographer through a psychoanalytic approach and critiques Gusdorf. Domna Stanton places at the center of her edited volume the question "Is the subject different?" and includes a variety of analyses by different critics of *autogynographic* (this is the term used by Stanton to refer to women's autobiographical writing. Stanton, p.5) texts to establish in which ways women's writings differ from men's. Therefore, Stanton, in choosing the essays to contain in her volume, champions the need to identify difference, but does not privilege any particular approach. Her Introduction, however, provides an excellent history of autobiography criticism, as does Smith's Introduction to *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987). Smith's introduction is very thorough, and as with both her predecessors and successors, argues strongly for the need to study women's autobiography independent of existing theoretical approaches. Further, Smith acknowledges that women are writing in an androcentric genre and they are aware of it, and the reader of this type of writing is required to be a psychoanalyst of sort, at times even identifying their own selves in the text. In a much less theoretical way, Heilbrun discusses characteristics of women's life writing, and in her discussions, and traces an evolution over time.

partigiano.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Chodorow examines psychoanalytic accounts of male and female personality development to illustrate how women's mothering reproduces itself with each generation.⁵² Rather than being a product of biology or willed role training, Chodorow argues that this reproduction "occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes."⁵³ As a result, "externally, as internally, women grow up and remain more connected to others," as their roles are traditionally more familial and are characterized by interpersonal and affective relationships. Chodorow argues that:

We can reformulate these insights to emphasize that women's lives, and beliefs about women, define them as embedded in social interaction and personal relationships in a way that men are not.[...] The activities of wife/mother have a nonbounded quality. They consist, as countless housewives can attest and as women poets, novelists, and feminist theorists have described, of diffuse obligations. Women's activities in the home involve continuous connection to and concern about children and attunement to adult masculine needs, both of which require connection to, rather than separateness from, others.⁵⁴

Chodorow's argument also accounts for gender roles outside of the familial sphere, and still maintains that women's roles are more relational in nature. This observation, many critics argue, and I agree with them as I have found the same to be true in my own readings, particularly of Gobetti's narrative, can help to explain Mason's initial observation of female life writing—that women tend to identify themselves 'by way of

⁵² Chodorow explains "mothering" in the following way: "Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed. This prepares men for their less affective later family role, and for primary participation in the impersonal extra-familial world of work and public life." Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 7.

⁵³ Chodorow, 7.

⁵⁴ Chodorow, 178-179.

alterity,' that is, relationally. In this view, this 'social structurally induced psychological process' of mothering, as Chodorow identifies it, is corroborated by trends found in autobiographical writing. Because Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* is written from an intensely maternal perspective, Chodorow's theory is particularly useful in understanding and illuminating this text.

Similar to the position of scholar's of women's autobiography, Carol Gilligan's work is rooted in the belief that her field, Psychology in this case, has systematically misunderstood women, or not accounted for them in the generation of theoretical paradigms. Her work is devoted to understanding and explaining women's development. Gilligan observes that Freud's theories of psychological development are unable to logically account for women's experience (particularly their experience of relationships), and this leads him to set them apart as aberrations to his theories rather than seek to understand why the logic of his theories does not effectively apply.⁵⁵ Gilligan, therefore, identifies, "the problem of interpretation that shadows the understanding of women's development" as arising "from the differences observed in their experience of relationships."⁵⁶ Through a series of studies aimed at identifying gender differences in the perception of morality, Gilligan illustrates how then current developmental theory did not account for the experiences and developmental processes of women. Gilligan essentially calls into account the history of human development as primarily dominated by theories that apply to male development and marginalize female developmental trends. She calls

⁵⁵ Gilligan writes, "Freud is unable to trace in women the development of relationships, morality, or a clear sense of self. This difficulty in fitting the logic of his theory to women's experience leads him in the end to set women apart, marking their relationships, like their sexual life, as "a 'dark continent' for psychology" (1926, p. 212)." 24.

⁵⁶ Gilligan, 24.

for a reconsideration of female developmental processes and for theories to accommodate them and not marginalize them. This lack of appropriate generic attention sounds strikingly like the case made by scholars of female autobiography, and in fact, some of her findings correspond to characteristics of women's writing illuminated by these same critics and manifest in the narratives in this dissertation.

In one study, Gilligan asked male and female adults to describe themselves. The results echo narrative techniques found in women's life writing, which is, in essence, a definition, or description of self. Gilligan writes:

In response to the request to describe themselves, all of the women describe a relationship, depicting their identity *in* the connection of future mother, present wife, adopted child, or past lover. Similarly, the standard of moral judgment that informs their assessment of self is a standard of relationship, and ethic of nurturance, responsibility and care. Measuring their strength in the activity of attachment ("giving to," "helping out," "being kind," "not hurting"), these highly successful and achieving women do not mention their academic and professional distinction in the context of describing themselves.[...]In these men's descriptions of self, involvement with others is tied to a qualification of identity rather than to its realization. Instead of attachment, individual achievement rivets the male imagination, and great ideas or distinctive activity defines the standard of self-assessment and success.⁵⁷

This difference between male and female modes of self-identification is one of the major points of contention that scholars have with existing autobiographical theory, particularly that of Gusdorf and those that follow him and use his "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" as the basis of their own work. Similar to Gilligan's observations of men's self descriptions, Gusdorf writes, "A great many autobiographies—no doubt the majority—are based on these elementary motives: as soon as they have the leisure of retirement or exile, the minister of state, the politician, the military leader write in order

⁵⁷ Gilligan, 159 and 163.

to celebrate their deeds (always more or less misunderstood), providing a sort of posthumous propaganda for posterity that otherwise is in danger of forgetting them or of failing to esteem them properly.”⁵⁸ The emphasis, therefore, of ‘no doubt the majority’, which, in essence, means those of male-authorship, are chronicles of ‘individual achievement’ and ‘distinctive activity.’

Gusdorf argues that autobiography is predicated on a consciousness of self and that this consciousness is the “awareness of the singularity of each individual life.” Gusdorf further explains that autobiography is not possible when “the individual does not oppose himself to all others” and “does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others...”⁵⁹ Susan Stanford Friedman interprets this to mean that autobiography, according to Gusdorf, is an individualistic paradigm.⁶⁰ “This emphasis on separateness,” Friedman argues, “ignores the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity. From both an ideological and psychological perspective, in other words, individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities.”⁶¹ While Friedman specifically and systematically calls into question Gusdorf’s essay, she is representative of the majority of feminist literary critics in her insistence on a recognition of gender difference in the production of autobiographical

⁵⁸ Gusdorf, 36. Gusdorf follows this by writing, “The autobiography that is thus devoted exclusively to the deference and glorification of a man, a career, a political cause, or a skillful strategy presents no problems: it is limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence.” 36. To his credit, Gusdorf’s essay does not focus entirely on the public sphere of autobiography, but also acknowledges the personal nature of the genre and the construction of the self through writing.

⁵⁹ Gusdorf, 29. As a precondition for autobiography, one can see how the consciousness of self, interpreted as individualism, can be problematic for women’s life writing. Friedman elaborates on this.

⁶⁰ Friedman, 36. Most of her essay focuses on how this stipulation is simply incompatible with women’s autobiography.

⁶¹ Friedman, 35.

writing. Likewise, in her conclusion, Gilligan calls for an acknowledgement of the psychological and developmental differences that exist between men and women, and hopes that through the awareness of “a different voice,” that is, the female voice, we can “arrive at a more complex rendition of the human experience which sees the truth of separation and attachment in the lives of women and men and recognizes how these truths are carried by different modes of language and thought.”⁶² Incidentally, the psychological and psychoanalytic differences identified by Gilligan and Chodorow correspond quite well with the literary differences identified by a multitude of scholars, past and present. Therefore, their theories of development are useful in reading and interpreting women’s autobiographical writing, and I draw upon them specifically with my analysis of Gobetti’s *Diario partigiano*, whose text exemplifies manifests these trends.⁶³

⁶² Gilligan, 173.

⁶³ While the works of Gilligan and Chodorow are widely championed as useful and insightful in the study of literature (together with the heretofore mentioned critics, I can add Judith Keegan Gardiner and Nancy K. Miller to the list of supporters), I should note that Joan W. Scott questions its use for historians. In her article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis,” Scott examines a psychoanalytic approach to the study of history, and believes that neither the theories of Chodorow, Gilligan, or Lacan (the three major players in the field), are “entirely workable for historians.” Of object-relations theory (that embodied by Chodorow and Gilligan), Scott writes, “My reservation about object-relations theory concerns its literalism, its reliance on relatively small structures of interaction to produce gender identity and to generate change” 1062. Scott expands on this in depth, as well as her contentions with Lacan’s theories (by contrast, post-structuralist and concerned with language as opposed to actual experience), in her article. For historians, or those interested in gender and modes of historical analysis, it is recommended reading. Scott explores three theoretical approaches to the study of history, of which psychoanalytic theory is one.

CHAPTER 2

SELF-FASHIONING AND ARMED RESISTANCE IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF ELSA OLIVA

ELSA OLIVA
(1921-1994)

*O fucile, vecchio mio compagno,
Mio compagno nel combattimento,
Tu che vali forse più d'un regno
Sei la chiave della libertà.*

*Sul cammino dell'Onor
Combattiam con ardor.*

*O fucile, vecchio mio compagno,
Sei la chiave della libertà!*

—Anonymous, *O fucile, vecchio mio compagno*⁶⁴

Elsa Oliva's exercises in self-fashioning, as set forth in her two autobiographical narratives, *Ragazza partigiana* (written in 1946 and first published in 1969) and *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* (1996), illuminate a woman coming to terms with her past at two very different points in her life. Resisting popular representations of female Resistance experiences, in both of her narratives, Oliva consistently negotiates her gender identity and image by presenting herself both in accordance with and in contrast to

⁶⁴ *La letteratura partigiana in Italia 1943–1945*, ed. by Giovanni Falaschi, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984), 275.

traditional notions of masculine and feminine behavior. Oliva, born April 11, 1921 to a large, antifascist family in the province of Novara, attended school until she was eight, at which time she had to work because her father lost his job as a result of his refusal to join the Fascist party. She left home at the age of fourteen with one of her brothers and worked in a painter's studio in Ortisei, and then in the registry office in Bolzano before joining the Resistance immediately following the Armistice in 1943.⁶⁵ Oliva is a woman whose past is characterized by active, significant involvement in an event that changed the direction of national history, yet whose very involvement, in as much as she is a woman, seems to be downplayed in the immediate postwar years, as discussed in Chapter 1. As a result of exclusion from popular history, both immediately after the events, and fifty years later, we see that Oliva, through her images of self, is compelled to approach both of her narratives in, what is, in a sense, a manner of defense—a manner of continued resistance.

Oliva's narratives are particularly interesting because she was an active, armed, female Resistance fighter and commander in the province of Novara between September 1943 and April 1945, and therefore is a minority on two counts: first in terms of gender and secondly in terms of roles realized within her gender. That is, the majority of female Resistance participants did not become part of the mountain brigades and bear arms, as that would impede their daily habits and familial responsibilities, and, further, it was considered socially taboo to share the days and nights with so many men.⁶⁶ Additionally,

⁶⁵ Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia, "Elsa Oliva," available on line http://www.anpi.it/uomini/oliva_elsa.htm [accessed January 2, 2009]. For more comprehensive biographical information, this ANPI website provides a good background. It is in Italian.

⁶⁶ Saba, 95.

only a total of 512 women held the rank of Commander. Elsa Oliva was one of them, finishing her military career at the rank of lieutenant, an even more exclusive position. As a result of these two factors, in both of her texts Oliva is continually negotiating her gender identity and appropriating both masculine and feminine spaces (physical and psychological) throughout her narrative. She does not hide the fact that she is a woman, nor does she make any apology for it. Instead, she seeks, and even demands, equal treatment, recognition, and responsibility within the Resistance movement. She acknowledges the problems that she encounters because she is a woman and she brings attention to them because it is a part of her experience. She does not, however, explicitly embrace her experience as a feminine one, with the major exception of the titles of both of her books.⁶⁷ In fact, she often highlights those attributes that set her apart from other women, and consequently make her seem more masculine.

A strong example of this is Oliva's desire to bear arms, to own them, and to use them—

⁶⁷ This discussion of the titles becomes particularly interesting if we consider the possibility that Oliva herself did not choose the title with which her second book was published. In his preface to the novel, Mauro Beggio speaks of a visit with Oliva in 1993 during which time she presented him with the manuscript of *Bortolina. Storia di una donna*, though, as he relates, it was entitled, *Bortolina e l'amore di un prete*. (Elsa Oliva, *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* [Turin: Gruppo Abele, 1996] 21.) Oliva died in April 1994, at which point Beggio still had not read the manuscript given to him the previous year. Perhaps because he felt responsible to her memory in some way, and having felt guilty that he did not read the novel when she was still alive, he read it, was compelled by it, and tried to get it published. He approached the Centro di documentazione storica delle donne di Novara, and convinced them that this book was worthy of publication. Of their reaction he writes, "Loro non hanno esitazioni e unanimemente ritengono la pubblicazione quanto meno un atto dovuto alla memoria di Elsa; forse il modo migliore per aprire e valorizzare un importante settore della loro attività, quello della «scrittura femminile», della memorialistica delle donne novaresi di questo secolo." (*Bortolina*, 22) Given these circumstances, it is quite possible that upon publication, the editors, or the members of this organization, changed the title from *Bortolina e l'amore di un prete* to *Bortolina. Storia di una donna*. Of course it cannot be known for sure who ultimately chose the title of publication, but there is certainly ample motivation on the part of both a women's historical society that focuses primarily on the promotion of *scrittura femminile* and a publishing house that has a particular interest in socio-historical issues to choose a title that highlights women and history. Following the belief that it was changed posthumously, we can speculate that a title such as *Bortolina. Storia di una donna* would, in any case, be regarded as more respectable than *Bortolina e l'amore di un prete*. Additionally, one can hypothesize that it would likely sell more copies because it veers away from the overt, stereotypical sense of sentimentality contained in the latter, appealing to a wider audience.

her explicitly expressed elevated level of comfort with violence and the discussion thereof (compared to the relative discomfort experienced by most women—partisans and not). Through their interviews and research on female Resistance participants, Alloisio and Beltrami have found that it is predominantly the case that, “superare l’orrore della violenza per le donne non è stato facile, ne abbiamo avuto prova durante le interviste, perché quelle che hanno dovuto esercitarla rifiutano il ricordo, tendono a scivolare sul discorso, qualche volta hanno davvero dimenticato.”⁶⁸ Rather than ‘scivolare sul discorso,’ however, Oliva seems to privilege this subject. Though a striking element in both of her narratives, this tendency to accentuate her *bravura* is most prevalent in *Bortolina. Storia di una donna*. This is accomplished through her use of more detailed description, meditation, and introspection, which is in direct contrast with the terseness and immediacy of expression that so vibrantly characterizes *Ragazza partigiana* and marks it as a rarity amidst autobiographical and memoir-type writings of the period precisely because it is written almost entirely in the present tense.⁶⁹

In this chapter, I will look at two instances of murder, Oliva’s first murder and her last murder, as they are portrayed in both of her narratives, along with other moments of *bravura*. In doing this, I will explore the differences in narration, identifying ways in which the narrative choices made reflect the time of writing and can further be used as tools in understanding the way the writer herself negotiates her identity both for herself and her readership in the ways discussed above. Along these same lines and offering

⁶⁸ Alloisio and Beltrami, 43.

⁶⁹ The use of the present tense as the primary tense of narration sets this narrative apart. Even Fulvia Ripa de Meana’s *Roma clandestina* (Milan: Kaos, 2000), written in 1944, does not rely almost *entirely* on the present tense as a narrative device, but mixes it in good measure with various past forms.

another example of Oliva's self-representation, I will briefly explore the infrastructure Oliva sets up throughout her narratives aimed at justifying and defending her engagement in violent acts and her reactions to them. This tactic ultimately functions to discredit the humanity of her enemies, thereby preventing both the reader and Oliva herself from imagining our author as cruel and vicious.

In her narratives, Oliva refuses to imagine herself as weak, or able to be manipulated. Particularly, in *Ragazza partigiana*, she clearly has an image of herself that is, in a sense, masculine in many ways, or at least goes to great length to avoid any classification as overtly feminine. She wants to be considered equal to the male partisans, and wants to command the same respect. However, her writing style, and the choices she makes in terms of events and details to include demonstrate that while she wants to promote this asexual, if not masculine, image in her own mind and in the mind of her reader, she is still negotiating this representation through the inclusion of feminine characteristics. She makes efforts to appropriate both arenas of participation and representation, and we are left with this evident vacillation, indicative of what social theorist Sheila Rowbotham identifies as a "dual consciousness," a concept that will be elaborated on later in this chapter.⁷⁰ In *Ragazza partigiana*, Oliva tells us that upon entrance into the mountain brigades, she states to her commander, "non devo essere considerata da nessuno una donna, ma uno di loro,"⁷¹ and insists on speaking with the troops directly to communicate this to them. When her commander wants to relieve her of the duty of night guard, she

⁷⁰ Rowbotham's concept is discussed by Susan Stanford Friedman in relation to autobiographical writing. See Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiography*, ed. Shari Bernstein (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 34–62.

⁷¹ Elsa Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1974) 24.

convinces him of the necessity “ch’io faccia ciò che tutti fanno perché vi sia la certezza fra loro ch’io sia come loro.”⁷² Just afterwards she refers to herself as *partigianO*, and not *partigianA* [emphasis added]: “Sono tremendamente orgogliosa di essere diventata finalmente un vero partigiano.”⁷³ In her narrative, Oliva is consistently careful to balance her feminine qualities with those that would make her seem more like “one of them.” For example, while she speaks about the importance of her nursing skills, which during that time was a strictly feminine skill set and occupation, she talks in the same section about her pistol, a traditionally accepted symbol of male virility, as well as her prowess in battle: “I miei compagni mi esprimono la loro ammirazione. Mi dicono che ho combattuto come un piccolo leone.”⁷⁴ Of this same scene she later explains in an interview: “Avevo un’arma, non ero più solo l’infermiera. Al primo combattimento ho dimostrato che sapevo combattere come loro e che l’arma non la tenevo solo per bellezza.”⁷⁵ She does not negate her function as a nurse, but points out that she is also capable and quite willing to participate in actual warfare. Oliva describes another scene in her narrative in which her brigade is about to go into a battle and one of her male companions is carrying the backpack with the medicine. Highlighting her fearlessness, she writes that she says to him, “[s]e ti prende la paura, dimmelo, lo zaino lo piglio io e tu puoi rimanere indietro,”⁷⁶ as if the possibility that she would be scared is nonexistent. It could be argued that she feels driven, subconsciously, towards overcompensation because

⁷² Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 25.

⁷³ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 25. Oliva uses the masculine form of the Italian word “partisan,” *partigiano*, rather than the feminine form, *partigiana*, to refer to herself.

⁷⁴ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 26.

⁷⁵ Bruzzone and Farina, *La resistenza taciuta*, 140.

⁷⁶ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 42.

she is female.⁷⁷

Though Oliva seems to enjoy being treated like a woman while in the mountains, she balances this with her emphasis on her enthusiasm for battles and her position among the male soldiers. She narrates, for example, an instance where she and the other partisan soldiers are marching off to a battle, and she specifically describes the emotional reaction of the women, a group from which she deliberately excludes herself in this context. The gender distinctions enacted in this description, that is, her singling out of the group of women in contrast to the soldiers makes her own self-identification as a soldier all the more striking. She writes: “Al nostro passaggio il popolo grida, acclama entusiasta, le donne piangono e ci abbracciano. Guardo i volti dei miei compagni e li vedo tutti belli, vedo belli anche Pulso e Giovanin, quel mattino, perché l’entusiasmo ci trasfigura.”⁷⁸ This description could easily have been written by a man, who identifies separately the women, a group to which he does not belong. Instead, it was written by a woman, who, in the aftermath of World War II, continues to validate her experience as a woman by mediating strong identification as such.

In contrast to the aforementioned “masculine” comments and as evidence of this continual process of negotiation are the various points in *Ragazza partigiana* when Oliva explains ways in which she exploits her feminine wiles for the benefit of the Resistance

⁷⁷ In fact, Alloisio and Beltrami comment that likely “le ragioni di questo coraggio, di questa ostinata sopportazione di qualunque rischio o fatica derivano anche dalla necessità di dimostrare che valevano quanto gli uomini, dal desiderio di essere considerate in modo diverso da quello tradizionale” (the reasons for this courage, for this obstinate assumption of whatever risk or effort derive also from the necessity to demonstrate that they were worth as much men, from the desire to be considered in a different way than that of the traditional), 42.

⁷⁸ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 43.

as a whole. In this way, she almost celebrates episodes when her femininity is of great use, highlighting its strategic function. She concedes in an interview: “Certo m’ha aiutato la solita fortuna, e anche, devo riconoscerlo, l’essere carina, soprattutto agli occhi dei nemici.”⁷⁹ This is evident, for example, in the beginning of the book when she begins courting a German officer to learn more about a radio transmitter, and to later plan an attack on the headquarters. Oliva blatantly admits: “Sento che potrò ottenere informazioni da lui, ma bisogna che trovi il modo di stargli più vicino.”⁸⁰ Getting “close” to him in the way she intends is a specifically feminine exploit. After flirting with the officer (the fiancé of a friend of hers) and leading him on, she obtains the information and clearance that she needs. She then bombs the building, destroying its contents along with her contrived love interest. Subsequent to this incident, Oliva is arrested by the Germans, undergoes intense interrogation, and ends up on a train headed for Germany. At this point she attempts to escape, again using her femininity to convince the guard, when the train is stopped, to permit her to walk a little bit away from the others on the premise of relieving herself, at which time she takes the opportunity to survey her surroundings and begin to formulate a plan. Therefore, when the use of her womanliness affords her the opportunity to exercise her courage and skill to the benefit of the partisans and to her own well-being, she allows herself to share it openly in her narration. Ultimately, these moments serve to support the brave and strong image of self that she seeks to set forth in her “masculine” self-descriptions that we have just identified.

Functioning to different ends, yet still further indicative of this process of reconciling

⁷⁹ Bruzzone and Farina, *La resistenza taciuta*, 143.

⁸⁰ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 13.

gender identity in her narratives, we can identify an attribute in both of Oliva's narratives in which she consistently describes the reactions of her heart to various situations, and, as such, asserts her femininity as separate from her *bravura*, ever so subtly, via emotive reaction. Virtually all of the situations where she centralizes the state of her heart are a reaction to the wounding or loss of people very close to her. She admits her emotion through mentioning her heart, and this is a trend in female resistance narratives that does not seem to be present to the same degree in male-authored narratives. For example, when she learns that three of her companions were shot, she says, "mi mordo il labbro a sangue e sento il cuore dilaniarsi."⁸¹ Additionally, she uses phrases like, "mi sveglio al mattino seguente col cuore gonfio d'angoscia,"⁸² "mi sento il cuore stretto come in una morsa,"⁸³ "Ho il cuore che mi batte furiosamente per l'emozione..."⁸⁴ In reference to her brother Aldo's death, who is also a fellow partisan, she says: "Rimango come paralizzata. Il cuore mi si è fermato...non posso piangere, non posso parlare."⁸⁵ And in the last scene, when she goes to visit a very badly wounded comrade, she says: "Mi fermo un momento perché il cuore non mi batte più e vedo tutto nero intorno."⁸⁶ While, to an extent, Oliva tries to be true to her feelings, emotions, humanity, and femininity, she is also very careful to avoid having her narrative fall under the rubric of stereotypical feminine production. She clearly does not want to assume that imposed identity. However, in trying not to highlight these characteristics too much, she intensifies the moments when she does, as in these instances where she writes of her heart.

⁸¹ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 71.

⁸² Oliva *Ragazza partigiana*, 88.

⁸³ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 45.

⁸⁴ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 103.

⁸⁵ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 117.

⁸⁶ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 161.

Oliva exercises this caution because the imposed cultural representations of Italian women (pre- and post-war) do not correspond to her real experiences (as they might, in part, for other female partisans), and, accordingly, her narrative form and content overtly reject this imposed popular collective female identity in favor of a more individual representation of self. This individual identity is what Sheila Rowbotham terms a “new consciousness.” Susan Stanford Friedman speaks of this sense of imposed collective identity in its positive attributes, and further touches upon Rowbotham’s definition to do so. She explains:

Women’s sense of collective identity, however, is not only negative. It can also be a source of strength and transformation. As Rowbotham argues, cultural representations of women lead not only to women’s alienation, but also to the potential for a “new consciousness” of self. Not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness—the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription.⁸⁷

As we have just seen, in *Ragazza partigiana*, Oliva, understands well her ‘self as culturally defined,’ and, as a result, she fiercely develops her ‘self as different from cultural prescription,’ in her text—a technique which also recalls Mary Mason’s observation that women’s autobiography is often demonstrative of the construction of identity by way of alterity. This process is evidence of, perhaps, a search for a kind of socio-political validation, or simply self-affirmation. It is, after all, essentially the cultural, collective representations of women after the war, as previously discussed in the historical introduction, that have contributed, in large part, to her state of alienation, and, consequently, desperation—a state which served as the impetus needed for her to write *Ragazza partigiana*. Oliva, herself, references this post-war sense of desperation and

⁸⁷ Friedman, 39.

disillusion in an interview. She admits:

è stato nei mesi di disperazione del '46 che ho pensato di scrivere, come potevo, la mia storia. Il manoscritto l'ho però tenuto lì per parecchi anni e non l'ho fatto vedere a nessuno. Ho scritto con una grande difficoltà. Non sapevo come incominciare. Il libro è stato pubblicato solo nel 1964 [...] però si sente che è stato scritto nel '46.⁸⁸

This notion that one can tell that *Ragazza partigiana* was written in 1946 is in large part due to the very immediate tone of the book.

In his 1964 preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Italo Calvino describes the literary climate of post-war Italy and discusses the idea of an immediacy of communication that was established between an author and his reader. He attributes this to a new found freedom of speech that “manifests itself first and foremost in a craving to tell stories.” He writes:

The fact of having emerged from an experience—a war, a civil war—which had spared no one, established an immediacy of communication between the writer and his public: we were face to face, on equal terms, bursting with stories to tell; everyone had experienced their own drama, had lived a chaotic, exciting, adventurous existence; we took the words from each other's mouths.⁸⁹

Elsa Oliva, at this point, is not an established writer, or a writer by trade. She is an artist and an ex-partisan with an official rank, who is trying to adjust to her post-war reality. She does not have a public in the sense that Calvino means, but she did experience her ‘own drama’ and ‘had lived a chaotic, exciting, adventurous existence.’ She now, at war’s end, must begin a process of “normalization.”

⁸⁸ Bruzzone and Farina, *La resistenza taciuta*, 153.

⁸⁹ Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spider's Nest*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York: The Ecco Press, 1998) 8.

Luciana Viviani, also a Resistance fighter, explains this process in her article, “Le guerriere tornano a casa.” She writes, “se da una parte finiva la guerra, dall’altra si aprivano per noi tutti, ma soprattutto per le donne, le porte della normalizzazione. Le guerriere di prima «tornavano a casa», perdevano ogni traccia di eroismo, dimenticavano di aver saputo usare le armi.”⁹⁰ Oliva doesn’t want to ‘lose every trace of heroism’ and ‘forget that she knew how to use firearms,’ as society would like her to do; as society attempts to force her to do. Instead, she preserves her acts of heroism and other self-defining experiences for herself. She uses writing as a way to deal with her then ‘desperate,’ as she describes it, state of being—desperate because of the difficulty she encounters in the process of ‘normalization.’ Therefore, while Calvino identifies this sense of immediacy of communication and attributes it to those primarily part of the established literary world, I contend that this phenomenon occurs beyond the limited scope of ‘the writer and his public’ but rather can be expanded to include non-traditional writers and publics. It all stems from the same impulse to tell and verify, to express and make concrete that which is elusive, even ephemeral, and maybe even seemingly imaginary.

Now that we have clearly established the variety of facets of self-representations that Oliva sets forth in her books, and the circumstances that contributed to them, I will specifically look at the way in which Oliva represents her engagement in violence, her first and last murder, in her two narratives. From these episodes we will be able to see more of this negotiation, as well as a clear difference between the writing styles of the

⁹⁰ Luciana Viviani, “Le guerriere tornano a casa,” *Atti del Seminario. Esperienza Storica femminile nell’età e contemporanea. Parte prima.* ed. Anna Maria Crispino (Unione Donne Italiane: Circolo <<La Goccia>>, 1988) 170.

two narratives, which in turn allows us to see how and if her images of self change within a fifty year time period (approximately). To begin, it is necessary to look at the specific text of the episodes. Describing the incident of her first murder in *Ragazza partigiana*, Oliva writes:

Una sera, mentre rincaso da una riunione, un sottufficiale delle SS si avvicina prendendomi un braccio. Sembra ubriaco. Mi fa capire che lo devo seguire. Sono a pochi passi dal cancello di casa mia in via Torino (lasciando l'impiego avevo abbandonato la pensione di Vicolo S. Giovanni) non so quali siano le sue intenzioni ed essendo ora di coprifuoco, tento di svincolarmi dalla stretta per fuggire, ma quello sbraita: «Polizia, polizia».

Mi sento perduta. In tasca ho una Beretta 6,35. Riesco ad afferrarla e gli sparo un colpo al fianco. Allenta la stretta al braccio, fa qualche passo barcollando, poi stramazza pesantemente. Appena in casa, mi spoglio affrettatamente e mi infilo sotto le coperte, ma non riesco a dormire. Sono perseguitata dal terrore di sentire bussare alla porta, di vedere arrivare i tedeschi, di dover sparare ancora e uccidere ancora nel tentativo di sopravvivere.

Mi assopisco alle prime luci dell'alba, ed è subito un bussare concitato, che mi fa balzare dal letto. Con furia infilo la vestaglia, affero la Beretta e mi accosto all'uscio chiedendo chi sia. È un vecchio coinquilino. Ripongo la pistola e apro. Mi racconta che la notte, poco lontano da casa nostra, è stato ammazzato un maresciallo delle SS tedesche.⁹¹

In *Bortolina*, she writes of this same incident:

Una sera, l'ora del coprifuoco era passata, stavo rientrando dopo una riunione quando, ormai vicina a casa, improvvisamente mi si parò innanzi un mezzo colosso nazista. Subito girai lo sguardo intorno. Era solo e barcollava ubriaco. Cercai di schivarlo ma egli mi afferrò per un braccio e biascicando parole che io non capivo cercava di abbracciarmi. Ingaggiai una lotta furiosa per divincolarmi ma le manacce possenti non mi mollavano. Feci l'atto di cedere accompagnandomi a lui remissiva mentre andava ripetendo: –*Gut, fräulein, gut*. Potei così afferrare la piccola Beretta 6,35 che tenevo in tasca sparandogli un colpo al fianco all'altezza del cuore...

Le sue manacce si staccarono dal mio corpo. Fece pochi passi

⁹¹ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 9.

barcollando e imprecando, superando il cancello che portava nel giardino di casa, poi stramazza pesantemente a terra.

Mi precipitai in casa e mi coricai. Pensavo mentre non riuscivo a prendere sonno ch'era assai facile uccidere un uomo. La via era deserta. Il colpo attutito dai suoi panni non era stato udito. Era il primo tedesco che cadeva per mano mia e ora potevo dire di essere veramente in guerra. Non mi dispiaceva di avergli sparato, anzi, pensavo che era stato giusto farlo. Tuttavia provavo qualcosa dentro di me che non sapevo definire e le mie argomentazioni non mi assolvevano completamente.⁹²

The obvious difference between these two descriptions of Oliva's first murder are the tenses in which they are written. As previously discussed, the first passage, from *Ragazza partigiana*, is written in the present tense, and therefore confers upon the reader a sense of heightened intensity. They both begin in a similar way, though the second description, that contained in *Bortolina*, is a bit more detailed. They differ in the words spoken by the German: in the first description, he speaks in Italian and says, 'Polizia,' and in the second he speaks in German and Oliva claims to not understand what he is saying. This inability to understand what is being said makes the situation seem even more precarious, and makes Oliva seem more vulnerable. In both situations, he grabs her by the arm, and in order to free herself, she shoots the assailant. In the second description we have a more precise location of the shot than in the first. After the shooting, the narration seems almost identical, save the tense.

The real interesting divergence in narration is after the actual event when she enters her house. In both instances, she cannot fall asleep. In *Ragazza partigiana*, she attributes this to fear, fear of being caught, and fear of having to kill again: 'non riesco a dormire. Sono perseguitata dal terrore di sentire bussare alla porta, di vedere arrivare i tedeschi, di dover

⁹² Elsa Oliva, *Bortolina. storia di una donna* (Torino: Gruppo Abele, 1996), 176.

sparare ancora e uccidere ancora nel tentativo di sopravvivere.’ She makes this one statement referencing this feeling, attributing the necessity of her action to survival. Oliva does not express fear of shooting in reference to planned attacks, but is only fearful of being threatened, and reacting to that (‘di dover uccidere nel tentativo di sopravvivere’). This is an important distinction because she infers no discomfort with offensive actions. She then quickly ends her discourse without further elaboration with an objective statement about how a friend told her that a German official was murdered nearby.

In *Bortolina*, however, Oliva meditates a bit more in depth on her action, an action that she views here as a turning point in her personal history: ‘Era il primo tedesco che cadeva per mano mia e ora potevo dire di essere veramente in guerra.’ With the word ‘ora,’ Oliva herself calls attention to this change. It is the distance of about twenty years that allows her to identify this as a turning point. Additionally, *Bortolina* is a book about Oliva’s character development, in which we find many references to various formative events in her life. This description is in accordance with the tone of the rest of the book. Unlike in *Ragazza partigiana*, in *Bortolina*, Oliva goes on to contemplate how, exactly, the shooting made her feel. While she concludes that she thinks what she did was right, ‘era stato giusto farlo,’ she is still plagued with a slight sense of guilt, ‘le mie argomentazioni non mi assolvevano completamente.’ This admission of a sort of guilt is very different than the sense of fear and anticipation that closes this scene in *Ragazza partigiana*. Fear is often a reaction to not knowing what will happen, while guilt is often associated with completed actions. As Oliva writes *Ragazza partigiana*, she is seeking to relive and relate the experiences exactly as she had them without any element of reflection. With

reflection, however, come more detail, and perhaps more remorse, as we see in *Bortolina*. These two reactions respectively correspond with the different points in Oliva's life when the texts were written.

Additionally, though not explicitly stated, this situation can also be read as a successfully averted sexual assault. Oliva herself acknowledges, 'non so quali siano le sue intenzioni.' Read in this view, her act of murder is an assumption of responsibility for her own female body and the defense thereof, a responsibility traditionally ascribed to men. This situation draws attention to the fact that Oliva is capable of defense of the female body, and of using firearms—both of which are actions that are traditionally regarded as masculine and are associated with violence. In further discussing female partisans and violence, Allio and Beltrami note that whatever the circumstances of the perpetration, “nemmeno allora le donne si sentivano a loro agio; il ricorso alla violenza le faceva star male.”⁹³ Pavone also notes the relative discomfort of women with violence in comparison to men.⁹⁴

In both of Oliva's descriptions, however, it is interesting that, contrary to Beltrami's and Allio's observation, there does not seem to be any anxiousness leading up to such a significant action. In fact, the author herself openly admits, “Avrei potuto servire benissimo la Resistenza come informatrice, come staffetta, restando all'anagrafe. Invece ho capito che io volevo combattere con le armi in mano.”⁹⁵ The author, admittedly, sought out a position in the movement in which she would be required to perpetrate

⁹³ Allio and Beltrami, 43.

⁹⁴ See Pavone, 439.

⁹⁵ Bruzzone and Farina, *La resistenza taciuta*, 134.

violence against the enemy. Insisting on this position, Oliva recounts in a June 2003 interview that upon joining her first mountain brigade she told her superior: “Non sono venuta qui per cercare un innamorato. Io sono qua per combattere e ci rimango solo se mi date un’arma e mi mettete nel quadro di quelli che devono fare la guardia e le azioni. In più farò l’infermiera. Se siete d’accordo resto, se no me ne vado.” She later clarifies, “curavo i miei compagni, ma non li servivo...non ero andata da loro per lavare i piatti.”⁹⁶ This lack of preoccupation, and, in fact, enthusiasm for combat differs greatly from similar situations explained in other narratives written by female partisans, and the case of Oliva is even described by Pavone as “una vicenda per alcuni aspetti estrema, ma per altri esemplare.”⁹⁷

One particular contrasting example can be seen in the autobiography of Carla Capponi, a Roman Resistance fighter. In her autobiography, *Con cuore di donna* (Il Saggiatore, 2000) written at a distance of approximately fifty years from the actual events, Capponi explains the circumstances of her own first murder and describes her experience of extreme apprehension before shooting somebody. In briefly looking at this other example of female self-representation, we can see through sharper contrast the ways in which these women manipulate images of self and the uniqueness of the image Oliva seeks to create. As we can see, Capponi is much more anxious about the act of taking someone’s life before the fact. She writes:

Avevo la rivoltella nella tasca destra del giaccone, stretta nella mano, il cane abbassato con il colpo in canna. Era la mia prima azione armata contro un uomo, poiché tale era colui che camminava davanti a noi: portava la divisa di ufficiale nazista ed era armato, ma era pur sempre

⁹⁶ Bruzzone and Farina, *La resistenza taciuta*, 140.

⁹⁷ Pavone, 441.

un uomo a cui avrei dovuto togliere la vita per strappargli la borsa dei documenti.

Alla prima strada esitai. La superammo, allora Paolo mi disse: «Alla seconda tocca a te sparare, lo farai appena scesa dal marciapiede», l'ufficiale non era ancora risalito sull'altro e Paolo disse: «Ora». Estratta la rivoltella, sparai ad altezza d'uomo contro il bersaglio, che crollò a terra gridando.⁹⁸

Capponi then acknowledges, “ero sconvolta, [...] avevo fatto un grande sforzo ed ero in preda all’angoscia.”⁹⁹ Capponi’s distress lasts into the following day as well. She writes: “Il giorno dopo ero ancora in preda a un grande turbamento.”¹⁰⁰ This situation differs from that of Oliva in one very obvious way. Oliva’s shooting can be attributed to the perceived need for self-defense, whereas Capponi’s is a planned partisan action. Fundamentally, however, as Capponi states, murder is murder irrespective of circumstance and nationality: ‘ma era pur sempre un uomo a cui avrei dovuto togliere la vita... .’ No matter who he is—Nazi or partisan, he is still a person whose life she has to take away to retrieve a bag of documents. This is not only a profoundly humane statement, but this position is consistent with Alloisio and Beltrami’s research, as noted earlier. Alloisio and Beltrami further explain that violence was so difficult to partake in for these women because it was precisely due to the violence of the Fascist regime that many of these women were fighting. Capponi is aware that this is a war fought by humans, and she does not seem to demonize the Germans in quite the same way that Oliva does. This is a point that I will revisit shortly. By focusing her narrative on her remorse, on how deeply this action affected her, Capponi arouses sympathy in her reader and calls attention to her own compassion, a practice that will be discussed in great detail in Chapter 4.

⁹⁸ Carla Capponi, *Con cuore di donna* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2000), 144.

⁹⁹ Capponi, 144.

¹⁰⁰ Capponi, 145.

Conversely, as we have seen, Oliva views her first murder as her proper initiation into the war, and feels that there is no other alternative. She focuses on possible future actions, and her soldierly qualities required for survival. As she explains to her interviewers in *La resistenza taciuta*: “Tanti nostri soldati sono stati ammazzati nelle loro brande, nelle camerate. Da quel momento ho capito che li potevo solo uccidere, i tedeschi. La scelta è venuta subito.”¹⁰¹ Neither in this interview, nor in her own books, as seen in the aforementioned passages, does Oliva intimate to us a state of anguish or remorse. Her descriptions are very matter of fact and calm, expressing a degree of guilt regarding that first shooting, but not something that disrupts her state of being for more than a few moments, or at least these sentiments are not elaborated on in her writing as they are with Capponi. After all, Capponi admittedly writes *con cuore di donna*. That is, and stereotypically so, in a very sentimental fashion.

In looking now at Oliva’s last murder, we will see that though this calmness is still present, there is a slightly higher degree of compassion at war’s end. Further, she continues to negotiate her gender identity. The differences in the writing styles between the two narratives remain the same. In speaking about the last battle on April 25, 1945 in *Bortolina*, Oliva describes coming face to face with a young German military man. She notes here that she lost her hat, and her hair was flowing: “Nella furia della battaglia, avevo perso il beretto e i lunghi capelli erano caduti sciolti sulle spalle.”¹⁰² In so doing, she acknowledges that her femininity was evident, and further makes it present, in a very

¹⁰¹ Bruzzone and Farina, 134.

¹⁰² Oliva, *Bortolina*, 200.

romanticized way, in this narration. It brings to mind Ariosto's and, consequently, Calvino's Bradamante, in its classic image of a woman warrior.¹⁰³ Additionally, as we will see, Oliva notes that her victim stared at her as her finger pulled the trigger. This observation places a particular face, albeit unnamed, to her enemy, and makes the encounter more personal. She further particularizes her victim's eyes, not only making personal his image though acknowledging eye contact, but poeticizing it as well. Oliva describes the incident:

Il giovane tedesco, con aria stupefatta, rimase a fissarmi con l'arma puntata mentre le mie dita premevano il grilletto facendo partire la raffica. I grandi occhi, azzurri come il cielo, rimasero ancora a fissarmi per un momento. Sulle labbra la piega di un lieve, amaro sorriso. Poi stramazzo.¹⁰⁴

Oliva then follows this personal description with her reaction. This is the same form used to describe to the reader the events of the first man she ever killed, as discussed earlier. Now she has come full circle and has described the circumstances of the last German (presumably) that she murdered. Oliva continues:

Sotto l'infuriare delle raffiche mi inginocchiai a sollevargli il capo. Ora vedevo bene il suo viso imberbe sotto l'elmetto. Era poco più di un ragazzo ed ebbi l'impressione di averlo conosciuto in tempi diversi. Forse nella mia «scuola» di pittura.
Gli accarezzai la guancia.
—*Gut*—mormorò, reclinando il capo.¹⁰⁵

Oliva does show some compassion for the boy, but she does not dwell on it. Perhaps this bit of compassion has come after fighting a war full of so much loss in which while she still will do what she believes she has to do, she acknowledges some degree of sentiment about it. Perhaps it is his youth that evokes the caress. In speaking about his hairless face

¹⁰³ From *Orlando furioso* and *Il Cavaliere inesistente*, respectively.

¹⁰⁴ Oliva, *Bortolina*, 200.

¹⁰⁵ Oliva, *Bortolina*, 200.

and the possibility of him being one of her students in time past, Oliva steps away from the previously personal description and moves towards one of more universal appeal. This boy could be any teenager, even one of her students that she cared so much for. But, in times of war, none of that matters. She reinforces her own position on the matter in describing how she caresses him towards his death. She does not try to save him or express any verbal remorse to the reader or to the victim. The victims' mumbling of the word 'gut,' meaning "good," shows his acceptance of his fate.

Oliva follows this incident with her final paragraphs of the novel, in which she talks about how she was profoundly changed, or more precisely, mutilated by her experiences. She writes: "Il mio io usciva dalla grande avventura profondamente mutilato. Non sarei più ritornata a vivere come un comune mortale. La tanto agognata libertà mi aveva portato via l'essenziale della vita. L'adorato fratello Aldo e tanti altri compagni."¹⁰⁶ It is evident that as she has just taken the life of her enemy, and has seen the lives of so many companions, including her brother, lost, Oliva is more sentimental and reflective in her writing. She realizes the toll these experiences have taken on her as a person, on her 'io,' and she acknowledges this in her writing in this later book.

Let's now look at the same final shooting, and then conclusion of the narrative as it appears in *Ragazza partigiana*. Oliva writes:

Mi guardo intorno; il fuoco nemico si è un po' allentato. Sto per prendere la corsa quando vedo alzarsi un tedesco da un cespuglio vicino. E mi prende di mira con suo tac-pum. Sono più svelta di lui a far partire i pochi colpi che mi rimangono e lo colpisco in pieno viso. Con un gemito si accascia dietro il verde da dove era spuntato. In un

¹⁰⁶ Oliva, *Bortolina*, 200.

baleno raggiungo il vigneto, e di salto in salto i primi caseggiati del paese.

Ho solo un gran desiderio di chiudere gli occhi e di non ragionare più.¹⁰⁷

This description is markedly different than the one we saw in *Bortolina*, and this lies, again, in the simple narration completely devoid of description, reaction, and sentiment. Oliva simply states what happens, noting that she is more agile than the German. That is, she shoots him, and, with a groan, he falls over. The circumstances also seem to slightly differ. That is, while in this case Oliva says that she shot him in the face ('in pieno viso'), she remarks in *Bortolina* about how she could see his hairless face well ('ora vedevo bene il suo viso imberbe...'). There is the sense that the story in *Bortolina* is dramatized, and perhaps even embellished. In any case, Oliva spends no time thinking about what she did, or at least writing about it in *Ragazza partigiana*, but rather she leaves the situation immediately. Her final statement is particularly interesting because rather than reflect on how this incident and her involvement in the Resistance as a whole has affected her, as she does briefly in *Bortolina*, her reaction is to withdraw and regress, to not think or reason. This regression takes Oliva to an almost animalistic state. This is an interesting way to close *Ragazza partigiana*, as throughout this text as well as that of *Bortolina*, Oliva uses animal imagery to distinguish between humans and the Nazis and fascists, thereby justifying her perpetration of violence against them. As mentioned earlier, Oliva does not regard the Nazis as human, and therefore violent acts against them do not compel her in any way towards compassion. As she clearly states in *Bortolina*: "Non immaginavo potesse esistere una specie umana come i nazisti. [...] I nazisti non erano

¹⁰⁷ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 160.

uomini, erano una razza di bestia della peggior specie.”¹⁰⁸ This attitude recalls the title of Elio Vittorini’s famed 1945 Resistance novel, *Uomini e No (Men and Not Men)*, in which the very humanity of the Nazis is outwardly questioned. In his article, “The Italian Resistance Novel (1945–1962),” Frank Rosengarten argues that the characters in Vittorini’s novel “act against the horrendous debasement of life perpetrated by the Nazis and their Fascist henchmen,” thus distinguishing “men” from “not men.” Rosengarten goes on to articulate what I assert to be Oliva’s precise attitude towards the question of humanity. He writes, “In their incapacity for love, in their roles as sadistic wielders of power, the German Nazis and Italian Fascists definitively repudiate their humanity.”¹⁰⁹ Likely having written *Bortolina* in the 1980s or 90s, it is not unreasonable to assume that Oliva had read previously published popular Resistance literature, such as *Uomini e no*, and was influenced by certain trends contained in those texts, even if her book was to be autobiographical. I do not contend that she borrowed this from her predecessors and that her feelings are fabricated, but, the inhumanity of the Germans and Fascists is a recurrent theme in writing about this period.

If we think back briefly to the description of Carla Capponi’s first shooting, we can remember the way she thinks about the Nazis and Fascists. She says, ‘[m]a era pur sempre un uomo a cui avrei dovuto togliere la vita.’ Fundamentally, we have two different approaches to describing Germans. Capponi is of the mentality that they are human, just like the partisans. Oliva, on the other hand, believes that Germans are evil

¹⁰⁸ Oliva, *Bortolina*, 187.

¹⁰⁹ Rosengarten, Frank. “The Italian Resistance Novel (1945–1962),” in *From Verismo to Experimentalism: Essays on the Modern Italian Novel*. Ed. Sergio Pacifici (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 219–220.

beasts, and do not deserve sympathy. Both of these positions can be read as justification tactics for the actions against the Germans. In the case of Oliva, the argument is that they deserved it and had it coming to them, and because their inhumanity renders them bestial in her mind, she does not individuate feelings of remorse or significant internal conflict regarding her violent actions against them. Capponi's mentality, however, is that it is wartime, and the Germans are the enemy. The argument in this case would be that while she will dutifully fight against her enemy adopting whatever means are necessary, she will also make the reader aware that she is conflicted about such actions to some degree. Her feelings of conflict, however, do not impede her actions, but they are made evident in the text so as to acknowledge them to her reader and render her own self-characterization as emotionally involved, and humane. Capponi's situation is particularly unique in that she has been widely accused of being responsible for the Fosse Ardeatine murders,¹¹⁰ and feels compelled, especially so late in life, to constantly publicize herself as decent and humane, and psychologically incapable of atrocities, even if she physically engages in actions that result in deaths. This sympathy that she arouses in the reader with writing

¹¹⁰ The Fosse Ardeatine massacre refers to the mass execution on March 24, 1944 of 335 Italians carried out by the Nazis in the caves near via Ardeatine just outside of the city of Rome. This action was in response to a March 23, 1944 partisan attack on the Germans, which took place on Via Rasella in central Rome. Carla Capponi was a protagonist in this attack. The controversy surrounding this massacre lies in the fact that news of the proposed execution was not publicized until after the order had been carried out, at which time an advertisement appeared in a local paper asking the partisan protagonists to turn themselves in or ten Italians would be killed for every German killed on Via Rasella. Capponi, along with her comrades have been criticized for not turning themselves in and, therefore, for being responsible for the 335 deaths that define the Fosse Ardeatine massacre. Thirty-three Germans were killed in the via Rasella attack. The Germans killed five more Italian than they were supposed to. The caves were imploded, and the victims buried together, were hidden from their families and were finally uncovered and given proper burials a year later. The victims were a combination of civilians, prisoners, and Jews. Additionally, this was the first time a killing of this size in Rome had been carried out since the start of the war. The partisan protagonists, including Capponi, have been blamed well past war's end, though, in reality, they never had the opportunity to turn themselves in and avert the tragedy. In his excellent book on the event, Robert Katz claims that the pope had prior knowledge of the execution. See Robert Katz, *Death in Rome* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) and see also Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of the Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Macmillan, 2003).

serves, in part, to lessen the guilt assigned to her in relation to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre. Oliva, on the other hand, chooses to arouse sympathy in her reader by casting the blame on the enemy, thereby instigating a “you can’t blame her” reaction. In *Ragazza partigiana* Oliva writes, “Non avevo mai provato simpatia per i tedeschi; ora mi pare di scorgere nei lineamenti di quegli uomini un isitinto crudele, una luce malvagia negli sguardi privi di dolcezza [...] Sono atterrita che esseri umani possono commettere simili malvagità.”¹¹¹ She makes these statements after witnessing two atrocious German perpetrated murders, yet allusions and statements of this nature continually appear in her writing.

Oliva’s characterization of the enemy in such dehumanizing terms further serves to accentuate the validity and necessity of the nature of her Resistance participation. As we have seen, the socio-political climate of the immediate post-war period fostered a sense of disillusion and desperation among the many women who actively and equally took part in the movement for national liberation, the Resistance. Elsa Oliva, one of these fighters, was moved to produce written documentation of her experiences in which, despite the time period, we find recurrent instances of gender negotiation, primarily centered around her capacity and desire for armed combat. That is, she begins with a declaration of her capability, followed by a demonstration of it, and then, through her narratives, provides a discussion of it recounting the first two phases of declaration and demonstration. In discussing her Resistance activities in her two narratives, however, Oliva oscillates between representations of self that are in agreement with traditional images of feminine qualities of behavior and narrative practice, and modes of self-

¹¹¹ Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 4–5.

fashioning that are in agreement with those that are traditionally masculine. In the chapter that follows, we will see that Ada Gobetti, in her *Diario partigiano*, affirms her maternal character rather than negotiate her gender identity and, in doing so, seeks to assign a new sense of political validation to these common feminine practices.

CHAPTER 3

DIARIO PARTIGIANO: VALORIZING THE MATERNAL

ADA GOBETTI
(1902-1968)

In a flyer distributed to promote a theatrical production of Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano*, an event organized in Torino in April 2008 as a 40- year commemoration of the author's death, the book is described as the story of "una donna coraggiosa ... che si lascia guidare solo dal suo forte senso civico, combatte come un uomo per la libertà e la giustizia."¹¹² As late as 2008, it seems that it is still considered a selling point in Italy, as if an ideal to be achieved, to 'fight like a man.' In my reading of this text, Gobetti, unlike Oliva, would have been sorely disappointed at the employment of such a marketing strategy. *Diario partigiano* does not champion the notion of women striving to be like men and embracing male attributes as a means of achieving civic validation, but instead, I argue that this text seeks to give the long awaited political valorization to feminine

¹¹² "Le attività." Centro Studi Piero Gobetti. 08 July 2008.
<<http://www.centrogobetti.it/attivita.htm>> (click on "invito" next to the *Diario partigiano* event posting in April 2008 to download cited PDF)

qualities, particularly to maternal behaviors by centralizing such qualities. Gobetti is not driven by a ‘forte senso civico,’ but instead by humanitarian, nurturing impulses perhaps better described as *un forte senso materno*.

Ada Gobetti, and most well known as such, was born Ada Prospero into a petit bourgeois family in Torino on July 23, 1902. At a young age, Gobetti immersed herself into the clandestine, anti-Fascist intellectual circles in Torino, where she collaborated on the publications *Energie Nuove* and *Rivoluzione Liberale*. In this capacity she met Piero Gobetti, a fervent and active anti-fascist intellectual, and they were married in 1923. Their son, Paolo, was born in 1925, just a few months before Piero died from a heart condition aggravated by an assault executed on him by the Fascists. In 1937, Gobetti re-married Ettore Marchesini and with him participated in the formation of the Partito d’Azione (which had its roots in the anti-Fascist movement headed by Carlo Rosselli, *Giustizia e Libertà*) and then entered into the Resistance movement with both her husband and her son, Paolo, after the announcement of the Armistice. During this time she was active in Torino and the Val di Susa and, among the multitude of capacities in which she was involved, she was instrumental in forming the GDD- Gruppi di Difesa della Donna. After the liberation, Gobetti was the vice-mayor of Turin, and she remained dedicated to pedagogical issues until her death in 1968. In her lifetime, Gobetti was a teacher, avid translator (Italian-English) and writer, anti-Fascist collaborator, political activist, editor and founder of the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti.

Gobetti's text adds a new dimension to the study of women's autobiographical Italian Resistance narratives in her assertion of an unapologetically feminine, maternal narrative style. Through her narrative one can identify established patterns of feminine and maternal behavior according to leading psychoanalytic, sociological, and psychological theory as elaborated on by Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, respectively.¹¹³ These behaviors include, but are not limited to the evidencing of a relational definition of self and assessment of self-worth based on the effect of actions on others, a sense of continuity between self and child, a sense of maternal solidarity leading to an unbounded practice of caring, and acting on a sense of responsibility to others often resulting in self-sacrifice. I argue that this type of written self-representation affords a certain political legitimacy to these behaviors and activities, which, up until this point, had always been ascribed to women but without recognition of any socio-political currency (for this we can think back to the image propagated by Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire*). Without any legitimation, the consequences might be the development of a culture of women who aspire to 'combatt[ere] come un uomo,' and a culture of men who expect and represent only women engaged in such behaviors. The feminist scholar Giovanna Miceli Jeffries acknowledges that "it is time for us to give political legitimacy to these feminine practices and make them integral in a feminist agenda, for, in the final analysis, the choice to be nurturing, caring individuals is a truly political and consequential issue in women's lives."¹¹⁴ Gobetti, I sustain, begins to do just that.

¹¹³ These texts are: Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), and Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹¹⁴ Giovanna Miceli Jeffries, "Caring and Nurturing in Italian Women's Theory and Fiction: A Reappraisal" (p. 87-108) in *Feminine Feminists: Cultural Practices in Italy*. ed. Giovanna Miceli Jeffries, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 104.

Further, I believe that it is Gobetti's status as an exemplary woman in pre and post war Italian society, and her background as a literary scholar, that afford to her the freedom to use her narrative to make public what is usually private, to foreground her maternal nature and humanity in deference of her individual professional accomplishments, and to further use her narrative as a vehicle of memorializing and of historical documentation. In an article contained in the collection *Women and War*, Sara Ruddick writes, "Women who act *as women* in public spaces transform the passions of attachment and loss into political action, transform the woman of sorrow from icon to agent."¹¹⁵ In her text, Gobetti is precisely a woman acting as a woman, though I would argue that it is not only the 'passions of attachment and loss,' which are certainly present, that get translated into political action, but also the 'ethic of care' as enacted by women.¹¹⁶ In *Diario partigiano*, Gobetti is a woman acting as a woman in a public space on two counts: 1) in the public space occupied by Resistance activities, and 2) the space of her text that will be published and distributed by one of the largest publishing houses in the country, Einaudi. In foregrounding these behaviors in a positive and deliberate light, both during the Resistance and in the text that is her legacy of those experiences, Gobetti is insisting on her agency, and consequently, insisting on the political legitimacy of such a transformation- that from icon to agent, to which Ruddick points. Gobetti, after all, grew

¹¹⁵ Sara Ruddick, "Woman of Peace" in *The Women and War Reader*, eds. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 217.

¹¹⁶ The "ethic of care" is a common term in psychological discourse and can be defined as the following: "An ethic of care and responsibility develops from an individual's feeling of interconnectedness with others. It is contextual and arises from experience. It is characterized by nurturance and an emphasis on responsibilities to others. An ethic of justice, on the other hand, is an expression of autonomy. It is formulated in terms of universal, abstract principles and is characterized by rationality and an emphasis on individual rights. Some describe an ethic of caring as a "female" approach to morality and an ethic of rights and justice as a "male" approach." bibliography compiled by Virginia Dudley, January 1994, <http://womenst.library.wisc.edu/bibliogs/ethicbib.html>

up during Fascism, a culture that fortified the iconic nature of the maternal. For Gobetti, a vehement and devoted anti-Fascist, I believe that the decision to represent herself strongly as such is a marked way in which she first and foremost harnesses this female agency.

Diario Partigiano, the first draft of which is believed to have been completed in 1949/1950, was first published in 1956 by Einaudi, and reissued twice by the same publisher in 1972 and 1996.¹¹⁷ This final version is the result of Gobetti's revisiting and reconstructing her notes, which were written in a type of cryptic English during the war, and her experiences and memories of that particular two year time period: September 1943-April 1945. This process was effectuated with didactic purposes in mind, as a result of an exhortation by Benedetto Croce, Gobetti's close friend.¹¹⁸ Croce, having lived through the war in southern, quickly liberated Italy (Croce was from Naples) urged Gobetti to create

¹¹⁷ The published epistolary correspondence between Ada Gobetti and Benedetto Croce, *Carteggio Ada Gobetti-Benedetto Croce, 1928-1952*, vol. 7 Mezzosecolo (Torino: Franco Angeli, 1990), suggests this year, 1950, as the year of the first *stesura*, yet the text itself closes with the date April 28, 1949. Additionally, it is interesting to note that Einaudi is the same publishing house that published Viganò's book in 1949, which effectively came out while Gobetti was crafting her narrative. During this particular time period, there were very few narratives published by women which focused on the Resistance. Why then were these chosen? I can speculate: Giulio Einaudi, the founder of Einaudi Publishing House, was a friend and political colleague of the late Piero Gobetti, Ada's husband, and together with Ada helped to form the Centro Studi Piero Gobetti. In fact, Luigi Einaudi, Giulio's father, also worked with Piero Gobetti and contributed to the anti-fascist magazine *Rivoluzione Liberale* founded by Gobetti himself. Additionally, Ada Gobetti traveled in intellectual and literary circles and was friends with the editors and staff at Einaudi. This is not to say that her book did not merit publication, but she did have connections of sorts that more easily facilitated publication and, consequently, greater diffusion. Also, upon each instance of publication, Einaudi changed the series of which *Diario partigiano* was a part. That is, in 1956, it was published under the series "Saggi," in 1972, it was a part of "Letture per la Scuola Media" series, and in 1996, it is classified as "Letteratura." Only posthumously (Gobetti died in 1968) did her narrative come to be considered "literature." As for Viganò's *L'agnese va a morire*, as I have alluded to in the Introduction, I believe it was assumed by a notable publishing house not only because it is a well constructed piece of neorealist literature, but also because it advocates and propagates the societally accepted and stereotyped image of women's involvement in the Resistance. It does not make waves, per se, but, rather, would sell copies.

¹¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of their unique friendship, see *Carteggio Ada Gobetti-Benedetto Croce, 1928-1952*, vol. 7 (Torino: Franco Angeli, 1990).

a manuscript of her diary in an effort to have her communicate what the Resistance was like for those who tried to understand the experience through the stories of those who had participated in it. The importance of such documentation is also alluded to by Calvino in his introductory note to Gobetti's narrative (written after Croce's suggestion that Gobetti publish her work, and therefore after the book was complete). He writes, "Tra chi aveva vissuto la guerra partigiana e chi cercava di rendersene conto attraverso i racconti dei partecipanti si andava segnando un divario di valutazione, una difficoltà di comprendere appieno quell'esperienza."¹¹⁹ Croce's encouragement of Gobetti to publish her narrative in fact addresses this phenomenon outlined by Calvino (though not a result of Calvino's statement), and perhaps works as a remedy to this 'difficoltà di comprendere appieno quell'esperienza.' Gobetti, however, was an intellectual, a scholar, and writer. It is not remiss to think that she might have thought to publish her diary otherwise.

This book functions on two different temporal planes, and Gobetti knowingly alternates between the two to tell a collective history and a personal life story, and then to reflect on and interpret it. The text of *Diario partigiano* is not simply a word for word transcription of Gobetti's original, personal notebook, but, in addition, it is also a very clear and conscious reconstructing of and meditation on events, and it openly makes reference to gaps in memory and to its general subjective nature. At the beginning of one section, Gobetti writes, "Trovavo a questo punto, nelle mie note, una lacuna,"¹²⁰ and at the beginning of another, she frames her text, "Ora, ripensando...,"¹²¹ or "Ripensando oggi

¹¹⁹ Italo Calvino, "Nota," in *Diario partigiano* by Ada Gobetti. p. 13.

¹²⁰ Gobetti, 44.

¹²¹ Gobetti, 96.

alla luce di quel che accade poi,”¹²² or “Se debbo essere sincera...”¹²³ or “ A guardar le cose oggettivamente...,”¹²⁴ or, even more explicitly analytical, as if she were teaching her own text, “ come si vede dal diario...”¹²⁵ At one point she even admits, “Ma queste sono divagazioni d’oggi.”¹²⁶ From the first lines of the text, Gobetti makes herself very present as a personal narrator—one who openly exerts complete control over the story she is about to tell, “Credo di dover incominciare il mio racconto da quel momento...”¹²⁷ In this way, Gobetti also immediately forges a close relationship with the reader by admitting her awareness of the public and being honest about her rethinking of and reevaluation of the events in her narrative. She further reinforces this relationship with the use of rhetorical questions that invite the reader to reflect on her narrative (Ex: “Non c’è dunque un limite alla crudeltà e al dolore?”,¹²⁸ or “ Ma ci riusciremo?”¹²⁹), poetic metaphors that help the reader to comprehend her sentiments, and the recurrent employment of a series of three descriptors to communicate the precise meaning or image that she intends (Ex: “ ...vidi il suo volto giovane, stanco, senza vita.”,¹³⁰ or “ ... in quel pianto dissolveva ogni differenza, ogni antagonismo, ogni sospetto.”¹³¹) In speaking with the reader of her text through these various narrative techniques, Gobetti creates a living relationship that, once created, according to her cannot be destroyed. Gobetti herself states, “Non è possibile che la straordinaria ricchezza umana per cui, appena parla con qualcuno, riesce

¹²² Gobetti, 254.

¹²³ Gobetti, 288.

¹²⁴ Gobetti, 48.

¹²⁵ Gobetti, 96.

¹²⁶ Gobetti, 48.

¹²⁷ Gobetti, 17.

¹²⁸ Gobetti, 120.

¹²⁹ Gobetti, 169.

¹³⁰ Gobetti, 174.

¹³¹ Gobetti, 144.

immediatamente a creare un rapporto vivo, possa essere distrutta.”¹³² The reader of *Diario partigiano* is made to feel part of the process and in direct conversation with the author, and this is important because when this sort of relationship is present, the book becomes not only an engaging piece of literature, but it is more effective and enduring as a didactic tool as well. The memorializing function of the text is also reinforced by this bond.

Structurally, *Diario partigiano* is comprised of thirteen sections, alternating between subdivisions that are characterized by a series of dated entries, and those that are of personal reflection and excurses and are more narrative in nature. These more reflective, more personal sections both open and close the book, and, in my reading, are meant to both enrich the narration and help fill in the gaps of the original document. Gobetti's narration begins on September 10th, 1943, and her first dated entry is from 13 September 1943. She closes her narrative with the end of the war, ending her dated entries on 25 April 1945, and her final narrative section on 26 April 1945. The alternation between the somewhat rigid documentation of dated entries, and the more free-form portions of the narrative allows Gobetti to tell a story that is at once a collective history of national importance, and a personal account of feelings towards certain events. These qualities, together with the aforementioned narrative strategies, have made this book ideal for didactic use in the teaching of the Resistance, and, in fact, the 1972 edition of the book was published under the Einaudi series “letture per la scuola media.” The inclusion of both details of personal events and of the greater historical moment further evidence the

¹³² Gobetti, 119.

trend of a ‘dual consciousness’ often observed in women’s autobiographical writing, and as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Oliva.

The idea of a dual consciousness, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is a concept coined by British social feminist theorist Sheila Rowbotham, and referenced by Susan Stanford Friedman in her article “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice.”

Rowbotham identifies a new feminist consciousness that emerges contemporaneous with women’s liberation in the late 1960s, and argues that the consciousness of being female is the initial step in political action. As this new consciousness emerges, Friedman notes that in autobiographical writing, women often exhibit a dual consciousness—that of being aware of oneself as an individual, and also at the same time being part of a group. “Women and minorities,” argues Friedman, “do not have the luxury of forgetting their group tags and experiencing their existence as individualistic.” In the case of Gobetti, her awareness of being a part of a bigger group as translated in her writing can be seen as tri-fold: first, as being an individual, second, as being a part of the greater group of ‘women’, and third, as the collective experience of being a part of the Italian Resistance.¹³³ Adriana Cavarero’s Italian feminist concepts of *who* and *what* also reflect this idea of a dual consciousness, as exemplified by Gobetti’s writing. That is, as we can remember from our discussion in Chapter 1, Cavarero argues that for women, *who* somebody is, their individual identity and *what* somebody is—their collective identity, are inextricable. Weaving these identities together, Gobetti’s text embraces her difference, further embodying the Italian feminist notions of “difference” and *beyond*

¹³³ Friedman, 39. For more on the concept of the emergence of a new consciousness, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

equality as set forth by Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero. As we can recall, these notions disdain the idea of women not accepting gender difference in political, social and linguistic contexts, the practice of which then results in adopting masculine traits to feel like they fit in (thereby creating generations of women who want to ‘combattere come un uomo’). Instead, these ideas champion gender difference and acceptance and celebration of these legitimate differences. In not drawing any distinct and explicit attention to gender inequality issues, as personally experienced or collectively observed either within the Resistance or regarding the post-Resistance recognition of feminine involvement, as we saw occur, for example, in the writing of Elsa Oliva, Gobetti, it seems, would have concurred with Muraro in her apparent exhibition of *beyond equality*.¹³⁴ What enables Gobetti to shirk this concern, I believe, is her highly politicized position in pre and post-war Italian society.¹³⁵ Gobetti uses her exemplary social and political status not to gain recognition of her participation, as she presumably has already achieved that, but to communicate freely her experiences and, above all, feelings, during the war. Hers is more of a sentimental inquiry.

¹³⁴ Even though she was influential in helping to create the GDD, in this text, Gobetti admits to not really seeing much the point of being involved with “cose femminili.” She admits: “Confesso che, dopo l’entusiasmo suffragistico della lontana adolescenza, non m’ero mai più occupata di cose femminili. Ma esiste veramente una questione della donna? Il voto ce lo debbon dare e ce lo daranno: è nella logica delle cose. Quanto al resto, mi pare che i problemi d’oggi, la pace, la libertà, la giustizia—tocchino allo stesso modo uomini e donne.” 57. We can contrast this with Oliva’s previously cited statement, “ volevo essere considerata uno di loro...” (*Rp*, 24). Further, Gobetti seems often to temper the description of her involvement with the women’s movement with some sort of reservation or statement that disengages her from the feminist agenda. For a discussion of “difference” and *beyond equality*, see Chapter 1, p. 13.

¹³⁵ The same flyer quoted in the beginning of this article gives a nice summation of Gobetti’s notable accomplishments. It reads, “ Ada Gobetti ha contribuito allo sviluppo della cultura a Torino, pubblicando libri per la scuola, fiabe per l’infanzia, dirigendo il giornale “Educazione Democratica.” Protagonista e riferimento nella lotta per la liberazione di Torino dall’occupazione fascista, ha fondato il Partito di Azione clandestino. Dopo la liberazione è stata vicesindaco di Torino, membro della Consulta Nazionale, membro dell’esecutivo della Federazione Democratica Internazionale Femminile.” Missing from this list of accomplishments is a reference to her several literary translations from English to Italian.

Though a marginalized experience as a female partisan during the Resistance is not the central focus of her narrative, the narrative is nonetheless gendered in its construction and content. That is, when *Diario partigiano* is considered against recognized traits of women's autobiographical writing, as well as the psychological and sociological theories of women's behavior and development set forth by Gilligan and Chodorow, as illuminated in Chapter 1, it becomes clear that this text not only offers us a further actualization of these theories, but in this exemplification it works, together with other female-authored Resistance narratives, to insert the presence of women as they were into the historiography and literature of the Resistance. Gobetti's celebrated social status allows her to write what might be perceived as a stereotypically feminine/maternal narrative precisely because she is not concerned with proving that her worth and abilities as a woman are equal to those of a man—sexual equality is not a feminist goal, Muraro believes.¹³⁶ Unlike Oliva, Gobetti embraces her difference and is unapologetic about it. She does not seem to fight against the patriarchal definitions of the feminine in her text, but rather the text itself helps to give political validation to those then existing patriarchal ideologies. *Diario partigiano*, therefore, is an example of an uninhibitedly sentimental and humane representation of self and a Resistance experience, which works to broaden our conception and validation of female Italian Resistance experiences.

Not only is an experience of a marginalized, struggling, or “masculine” woman partisan not centralized in *Diario partigiano*, but Ada Gobetti is not independently and solely the central protagonist of her autobiographical narrative either. Gobetti is a key figure in the

¹³⁶ see Chapter 1, p.26-27.

Resistance organization in Turin and Milan, yet she assumes no proactive responsibility for nor provides any discussion of her personal accomplishments in her text. In her personal narrative of her Resistance activities and sentiments, she presents most of her achievements as happening to her, or being assigned to her, and often she states that she is not interested in or not capable of them. For example, it is she who is approached by officials of the CLN to take on the responsibility of developing a mass women's organization (that which will later be known as the GDD), and though this is an honor, and a subsequent achievement, she focuses in her narrative on how she believes that she is ill prepared for the position. She writes, "comunque mi par d'essere la meno adatta a occuparmi di queste cose; e avrei senz'altro rifiutato se Mario, per una qualche oscura ragione politica, non m'avesse detto che dovevo accettare. E ho disciplinatamente ubbidito."¹³⁷ Rather than taking pride in the fact that she was selected by the main organizing body of the Resistance for this task, and further taking credit for her success in establishing this organization, Gobetti places herself in a position of subordination and effectively communicates that she is good at taking orders, that she had 'disciplinamente ubbidito.' She does not further expand on her leadership role, but instead goes on with her narrative in a "business as usual fashion." She is later commissioned with writing the *Manifesto del Movimento Femile, G.L.*, and of this assignment she writes, "Cercherò di far del meglio anche se mi sento negata a cose di questo genere."¹³⁸ She expresses insecurity, rather than pride, with writing, which, interestingly, is her profession before and after the war. Gobetti clearly does not want to use her text as a vehicle of self-praise.

¹³⁷ Gobetti, 57.

¹³⁸ Gobetti, 158.

This narrative behavior is not only present regarding her significant work with the women's organization, but recurs again with her recognition as a "capo" on a mission of international diplomacy—that is, when she travels, as the only woman, to France with a group of other partisans to forge international connections. Once arrived, the French command states that there is only room for three in the car to go meet the appropriate leaders of the French Resistance. Here, once again, Gobetti is chosen as a leader, but rather than embrace that position, she is more concerned about leaving an injured companion by himself. She writes, "Alberto venne a chiamarci: era arrivata una macchina mandata da Briançon per portarci giù: ma poteva caricare soltanto tre persone, e naturalmente volevano i <<capi>>; Alberto pensava che dovessimo andare lui, io e Paolo.[...]Pillo aveva un po' di febbre.[...] ma mi piangeva il cuore di lasciarlo non perfettamente a posto."¹³⁹ While Gobetti is clearly held in high esteem by others, it is her "ethic of care" that is always fore-grounded rather than her positions of political prestige.¹⁴⁰ We can also note in this statement Gobetti's attention to her heart, a characteristic that we also noted in the previous chapter in Oliva's text. Additionally, we find out only in the last few pages of the text that Gobetti, in fact, held the rank of Commander in the Resistance. She mentions this in passing while narrating a different event, as if it were nothing notable. As we can remember, only a total of 512 women held this rank, or that of Commissioner, out of an estimated 70,000 female participants, 35,000 of which were actually recognized as partisans.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Gobetti, 299. It is also interesting to note that during the journey through the mountains to France, Gobetti, in a moment of weakness admits, "In fondo non ero che una donna e potevan benissimo far senza di me; anzi, alla fin fine, non rappresentavo che un ingombro." (291).

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 1, "Historical Background" for a more detailed discussion of these numbers.

Another final, and excellent example of how Gobetti privileges her concern with others over a celebration of her professional accomplishments can be observed when she finds out that she is to be vice-mayor of Turin after the Liberation. Rather than express either appreciation at this selection, active involvement in seeking this position, or agreement that she would be perfect for such a leadership role, Gobetti laughs at the idea, thinking it to be a joke, and then goes on to protest the decision. Only when it is further explained that her actualization of this role would have a positive and much needed effect on the people of post-war Turin, does she even realistically consider it. Gobetti narrates:

Abbiam chiacchierato a lungo di molte cose. M'ha detto tra l'altro che gli amici della direzione del Partito d'Azione han stabilito di farmi nominare vice-sindaco dopo la liberazione. Confesso che sono scoppiata a ridere e ho creduto che Vittorio scherzasse. Invece era serissimo e la mia voglia di ridere ha incominciato a mutarsi in sgomento.—Ma non ho ombra di pratica amministrativa!—ho protestato;—e non sono fatta per questo genere di lavoro!—La pratica te la farai,—m'ha risposto tranquillamente;—e t'assicuro ch'è proprio il lavoro che ci vuole per te. Pensa quanti problemi pratici ci saranno da risolvere: problemi semplici, quasi casalinghi, per riorganizzare la vita di mezzo milione di persone. Non riesco a vedere la persona più adatta. [...] che avesse ragione? [...] ed è vero che a me piace darmi d'attorno [...] per aiutar la gente e far andar bene le cose...¹⁴²

In Gobetti's description, the only way for the directorate of the Action Party to convince Gobetti to accept this nomination is to make her see that the job responsibilities are 'quasi casalinghi' in nature, but also that they will have a profound impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Being of a humanitarian bent, this argumentation was effective, and we even see that Gobetti convinces herself by emphasizing the fact that she always likes to help people. The positive emphasis on the *casalinga* aspect of this

¹⁴² Gobetti, 286. We can also recall that the Partito d'Azione was the main organizing body of the national resistance movement. Additionally, this would make Gobetti the first female to ever occupy this position.

leadership position is notable.¹⁴³ More than homemaker, however, it is the relational and nurturing capacities that it requires which make the position appealing, and this is what Gobetti chooses to emphasize, as she continually defines herself and the worth of her actions in terms of the impact on people around her.

The research of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan help us to understand Gobetti's disposition. Nancy Chodorow's findings sustain the definition of women as "embedded in social interaction and personal relationships in a way that men are not" primarily because according to Chodorow, "the sexual division of labor is such that women's first association is within the family, a relational institution, and men's is not."¹⁴⁴ The familial association, and the societal propagation of such gendered roles has led not only ideology about women to view women in terms of their relational capacities, but, argues Chodorow, it has led to a "psychological definition of self-in-relationship" by women themselves.¹⁴⁵ This relational mode of identification, by both self and other, resulting, as Chodorow argues, from social processes, is also influential in determining how women value their actions, and, in the case of Gobetti, it is a significant factor in how she does or does not discuss the aforementioned examples of her accomplishments.

The work of Carol Gilligan offers some further insight into the issue of estimation of self-worth. Like Chodorow, Gilligan also finds that women identify themselves relationally.

¹⁴³ It also brings to mind Clara Sereni's autobiography, *Casalinghitudine* (Torino: Einaudi, 1987), in which each chapter recalls a recipe and moment in her life are described though a discussion of the preparation of the dish. In an interview with the author, scholar Giovanna Miceli Jeffries reports, "When I asked Clara Sereni what cooking and the preparation of food represented in the past and still represent for her, she commented that her interest in cooking and food is a form of caring." Jeffries, 99.

¹⁴⁴ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁵ Chodorow, 209.

A psychological study in which Gilligan asked several adult women to describe themselves leads her to conclude that “in all of the women’s descriptions, identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care.”¹⁴⁶ That identity for women is judged by a standard of care is very pertinent to the case of Gobetti. Gilligan further elaborates, “the standard [of moral judgment that] informs their assessment of self is a standard of relationship, and ethic of nurturance, responsibility and care. Measuring their strength in the activity of attachment (“giving to,” “helping out,” “being kind,” “not hurting”), these highly successful and achieving women do not mention their academic and professional distinction in the context of describing themselves.”¹⁴⁷ This is precisely what we see, in the written form, in *Diario partigiano*. Rather than elaborating on or drawing attention to her ‘professional distinction,’ Gobetti emphasizes those details which, to her, are of greater worth in terms of self-definition—details about herself and her actions which directly affect other people; ‘activities of attachment.’ Gobetti locates herself, as Gilligan notes of the women in her own study, “in relation to the world, describing herself through actions that bring her into connection with others, elaborating ties through her ability to provide help.”¹⁴⁸ In this way, her own autobiography is not explicitly celebratory of her in the ways in which a reader might expect. That is, as Shari Bernstock observes, of women’s autobiographical writing in general, “The self that would reside at the center of the text is de-centered--and often is absent altogether-- in women's autobiographical texts.”¹⁴⁹ While the self is not

¹⁴⁶ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁷ Gilligan, 159.

¹⁴⁸ Gilligan, 35.

¹⁴⁹ Shari Bernstock, *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 19. Further, we see this characteristic in other

completely absent from *Diario partigiano*, it defers its expected central space to a narrative of a relational self and to a discussion of other companions. Its' *celebratory* focus, if any, is on Gobetti as a mother and provider of essential human needs.¹⁵⁰

In her absence, however, from 'center stage,' she is undeniably present. Above all, she is present in the roles that she adopts in relation to other people, and, as noted, she is self-defined through this sense of humanist connection. As early as the *Dedica* of the book, the author makes it clear that she is most concerned with human relationships. She writes, "Dedico questi ricordi ai miei amici: vicini e lontani; di vent'anni e di un'ora sola. Perché proprio l'amicizia—legame di solidarietà, fondato...sul semplice rapporto umano del sentirsi uno con uno tra molti—m'è parso il significato intimo, il segno della nostra battaglia." This 'semplice rapporto umano,' confirms Gobetti's perception of self as very much connected with others and not separate from them, and her narrative emphasizes her roles in connection with other people. The most pronounced of these roles is that of a mother— not only a mother of her son Paolo, with whom she is fighting in the Resistance, but also she configures herself as an archetypal mother of all the young men she discusses and memorializes, both dead and alive, and in this way she gives continued life to them. Accordingly, Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* is marked by two distinct yet inter-

autobiographical Resistance writings by women, as for example, is the case of Fulvia Ripa De Meana's *Roma clandestina* (Milan: Kaos, 1944), in which the author centralizes the Roman Resistance (as indicated in the title), and the life of Giuseppe Montezemolo, a Resistance leader and the author's cousin. A recent documentary film made from this book, *Roma clandestina*, (Dir. Emiliano Crialese and Domenico Martone, 2009) also centralizes Montezemolo and barely references the activities of Ripa de Meana either.

¹⁵⁰ We can remember Gusdorf's notion of the autobiographical, discussed in Chapter 1, as that which draws attention to the exemplarity of a life. Gobetti's text, then clearly does not meet his definition, and instead is an example that would support Friedman's opposition to Gusdorf's definition.

related narrative qualities: the undeniably maternal perspective from which the events are told, and the humanistic concern that pervades the text.¹⁵¹

This maternal perspective is evident from the very beginning of the text when the first preparations for the Resistance were taking place after the announcement of the Armistice. Gobetti draws attention to the significant commitment of the Resistance and the period of difficulty and hardship that it will likely bring. Her concern, however, is not for herself, but, instead, she expresses distress at her son's, Paolo's, enthusiastic desire for active involvement. She writes:

Capivo, pur confusamente, che s'iniziava per noi un periodo grave e difficile, in cui avemmo dovuto agire e lottare senza pietà e senza tregua, assumendo responsabilità, affrontando pericoli d'ogni sorta.

Tutto questo personalmente non mi spaventava; il mio ideale di bambina, di adolescente—e in fondo in fondo, ahimè, anche di persona adulta—non era stata forse <<la piccola vedetta lombarda>>? Ma tremavo per mio figlio che vedevo lanciato così decisamente verso l'azione.¹⁵²

Gobetti's expression is not of simple discomfort or even emotional angst, but rather she describes a physical reaction to Paolo's resolute decision to actively fight. 'Tremavo per mio figlio...' Gobetti trembles. She shakes. Her worry for him physically disrupts her stasis, while she does not seem to be scared or concerned about herself and her well being in 'affrontando pericoli di ogni sorta.' This type of prioritization and concern, and even

¹⁵¹ By humanistic, I mean relating to the definition of humanism that reads: "Sympathetic concern with human needs, interests, and welfare." "humanism, n." The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 2 Sep. 2009
<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/cgi/entry/50109093>.

¹⁵² Gobetti, 24. Additionally, it should be noted that "la piccola vedetta lombarda" is a literary reference to an episode in the children's novel *Cuore*, written in 1886 by Edmondo de Amicis, and published in 1888. The novel is structured as a diary. In this episode, a young boy gives his life to help the Italian army against the Austrians. Gobetti likely references this to communicate an example of courage and dedication in fighting for one's country or for an ideal. Interestingly, *Cuore* was very popular, especially with the fascists because it exalted this idea of patriotism. Gobetti makes other literary references in her text, primarily by stating the title of a book she is reading or buying and in this way she maintains her intellectual connections.

physical reaction that we observe here within the first eight pages of the text, sets the tone and example of what follows in terms of characterizing this mother-son relationship.

Throughout much of the text, Gobetti is in emotional and sentimental anguish at the absence of Paolo, and much of the narrative is spent on describing these states of being.

In her discussion of mothering, Chodorow notes that part of the maternal process is “experiencing the infant as continuous with the self and not separate.”¹⁵³ I would argue that this sense of intimate connection, as exemplified by Gobetti’s text, extends well beyond the infant stage. The absence of Paolo, or the knowledge that he could be in danger has both physically and mentally debilitating effects on Gobetti, as if a part of herself were compromised. When Paolo is away, Gobetti loses physical strength, and she cannot seem to mentally focus on anything else. Her reactions are strong. In one instance in the very beginning of the book, Gobetti describes a situation when Paolo is late in returning home. She writes,

Era un semplice ritardo; poteva arrivare da un momento all’altro; forse era arrivato mentre si stava salendo e l’avremmo trovato a casa. Ma la casa era buia e vuota; e allora m’accasciai smarrita, senza neanche più la forza d’aiutare Ettore che s’affacciava ad accendere il fuoco. Il mio bambino! Guardavo le sue cose attorno e mi struggevo come se non dovessi vederlo più.¹⁵⁴

She describes herself as falling, as not having the strength to help her husband start a fire, as melting with her anguish, as if a part of her were missing; as if something ‘continuous with herself’ were compromised. Gobetti goes on to analyze and perhaps even justify her reaction. She continues, “Ora, ripensandoci, capisco come possa apparire eccessiva questa mia disperazione, paragonata alle angosce ben più gravi che poi seguirono. Ma era la

¹⁵³ Chodorow, 85.

¹⁵⁴ Gobetti, 44.

prima volta che lo sapevo in un pericolo così grave e non ero con lui.”¹⁵⁵ She is aware that her reactions are strong, and she tries to justify them in some way, while at the same time slipping elements of foreshadowing into her text (‘ben più gravi che *poi seguirono*.’). When she hears that Paolo has returned, she describes a euphoric joy, yet when she finally sees him in person, she continues to describe herself as physically affected. She writes, “Non ebbi la forza di andargli incontro: l’aspettai ferma sulla porta e dopo un minuto me lo sentii tra le braccia; e la gioia fu così grande che versai finalmente le lagrime che in tutti quei giorni ero riuscita a frenare.”¹⁵⁶ She did not have the strength to go meet him, as if to disclose that his absence had drawn away all of her strength and that she would need a recovery period. In another instance in which he is away, an instance which occurs two hundred pages later, we see that she still has the same ‘*eccessiva*’ desperation, and she even identifies it and justifies it herself in the same way as earlier. She reports,

E infelice continuai a essere. E, a misura che passavano i giorni, la speranza si faceva più debole, più forte l’angoscia.

Ripensadoci oggi, alla luce di tutto quel che accadde poi, debbo riconoscere che, s’anche posson sembrare eccessive, le mie paure non erano affatto infondate; e ancora mi chiedo come feci a resistere a quell’ansia spaventosa. Non era la prima volta che stavo in pena per Paolo; ma le altre volte s’era trattato al massimo di tre o quattro giorni e sapevo sempre, con maggiore o minore precisione, dove si trovava e dove avrei potuto cercarlo. Ora invece brancolavo nel buio, in un vuoto in cui mi pareva a tratti d’impazzire [...] nei rari momenti di sosta, quand’ero sola, avevo delle vere crisi di disperazione e urlavo come una bestia ferita.¹⁵⁷

Here, Gobetti explains and almost justifies her reactions, and in her self-description she describes herself as unable to reason at times, as an animal reduced to instinctual

¹⁵⁵ Gobetti, 44.

¹⁵⁶ Gobetti, 51.

¹⁵⁷ Gobetti, 254.

reactions as a result of this mother-son relationship—as a result of experiencing someone as continuous with one’s self. Gobetti’s reactions continually seem severe, indicating an extremely deep level of connection to her son. In yet another instance of Paolo leaving and returning, and the text spends much narrative space on these kinds of moments, Gobetti describes his return. As the war progresses, she is no less affected, and she provides to the reader a metaphor, a literary device, to communicate her feelings on the matter. She writes, “Ne ho provato una gioia assolutamente sproporzionata. Ogni volta che Paolo torna, provo quell che debbono provare i condannati a morte quando vien loro concesso un rinvio: un sollievo, quasi fisico, e il desiderio di sfruttare al massimo ogni ora, ogni minuto.”¹⁵⁸ Gobetti herself alludes to Paolo’s physical affect on her and attests to the closeness of the relationship. She also elaborates on her role and emotions as a mother like no other of her responsibilities. It is additionally interesting that she compares his return to a life-granting force, when, in fact, she is the mother, the traditional giver of life. At various other points in the narrative Gobetti further demonstrates the maternal perspective of the text and the centrality of the maternal role- a role very much linked to the care of others.

Another way in which this maternal perspective is evident is in a kind of fraternity in maternity that Gobetti elucidates. Not only is Gobetti in despair for her own son when he is gone or in potential danger, but she often relates to other mothers whom she imagines are experiencing similar emotions. In one case where she has Paolo close at hand, she recognizes how fortunate she is, yet still admits to thinking about other mothers who are

¹⁵⁸ Gobetti, 61.

not so fortunate. She does not dwell completely on herself. She writes, “ Poi s’addormentò. A lungo ascoltai il suo respiro, il battito calmo del suo cuore. E non sapevo neanche più essere felice. Pensavo agli altri di cui non si sapeva ancor nulla, alle loro madri.”¹⁵⁹ Gobetti’s thoughts of other mothers are more pronounced when there is a sense of tragedy, particularly a death. When a comrade, Franco Dusi, is killed, Gobetti first narrates, “Franco Dusi è morto fucilato, nel Canavese. Penso a sua madre.”¹⁶⁰ This narrative reaction, unembellished and straightforward, foregrounds Gobetti’s concern with and solidarity with the maternal. Her first reaction is to think of Dusi’s mother. Her second, is to think of her maternal feelings for the victim himself. She continues,

E sempre provavo, guardandolo, così bello e forte e intelligente, un intimo materno compiacimento e per lui, come per Paolo, costruivo i sogni più belli. E quando venne l’ora di pericolo, cercai di tenerlo fuori, quasi dominata da un timore presagio. Ma Franco entrò lo stesso nella battaglia; non era uno che potesse starsene fuori. E ora è caduto.¹⁶¹

This above description is exactly what Gobetti feared for her own son in the first days of the Resistance organization when she saw Paolo so excited about being a part of the movement. The simple sentences that dominate this portion of narration are sobering and highlight Gobetti’s sorrow. In many parts of her narrative, Gobetti expresses a maternal attachment to and interest in others besides her son, and these narrative parts seem to be where we see the most succinct and solemn expression of feeling and thoughts of the author. Similar to the physical debilitation that takes place when she is separated from Paolo, Gobetti finally states of Franco Dusi’s murder, “Pare impossibile, dopo simili colpi, poter continuare a camminare.”¹⁶² Not only does her biological son have a physical

¹⁵⁹ Gobetti, 116.

¹⁶⁰ Gobetti, 229.

¹⁶¹ Gobetti, 230.

¹⁶² Gobetti, 229.

effect on her, but her feelings for others are so strong as to take a toll on her as well. Gobetti is the one responsible for communicating the news of Dusi's death to Paolo, and she is only able to do so when Paolo asks his mother what to name a new brigade. Gobetti writes, "Solo quand'egli mi disse che ancora non avevan deciso il nome da dare alla nuova Compagnia, proposi che la si intitolasse all'amico scomparso."¹⁶³ In this way, she is also able to give continued life, as a mother would, to the name and memory of a fallen comrade. She is responsible for a second commemoration by including his name and story in her autobiography, as she does with many other comrades.¹⁶⁴ As such, the maternal perspective of this text extends beyond biological connection, and seems to know no bounds.

In another situation, a young partisan is killed, and Gobetti goes to look at the body. Though it is not the body of Paolo, she claims to experience no relief, as it is still somebody else's son. It is here in this sentimental, richly descriptive passage that she not only admits to her own anguish at the situation, but she also explicitly acknowledges a maternal solidarity. Gobetti writes:

No, non era Paolo, anche se non se ne scorgeva il viso, reclino. Ma non provai nessuna reazione di sollievo. Una pena insostenibile mi scosse tutta alla vista di quella giovane carne denudata e straziata, come se fosse stata la mia stessa carne, quella di mio figlio. Mai come in quel momento sentii quanto sia forte l'istintiva profonda solidarietà materna per cui ognuna *sente* come figlio d'ogni altra donna.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Gobetti, 232.

¹⁶⁴ Gobetti includes a similar narration at the death of Paolo Diena, "17 ottobre. Un altro fanciullo è caduto, un'altra luce si è spenta: Paolo Diena è stato ucciso con altri otto in un'imboscata nei pressi d'Inverso Pinasca. Ricordo la sua cordiale accoglienza quando andammo alla Gianna, la gioia festosa con cui accolse, nella Val Chisone, la notizia che la mamma sarebbe andata presto a trovarlo, la vitalità gioiosa che esprimeva il suo volto infantile sotto la fiammata dei capelli rossi: così forte, così lieto, così vivo! Non posso assolutamente pensare a sua madre." Here she closes this narrative section with a reference to his mother, but, nonetheless, it is something Gobetti continually notes throughout her text.

¹⁶⁵ Gobetti, 99.

Gobetti continues this segment of narration with a lengthy and moving reflection on her experience of coming “visivamente, fisicamente a contatto con la crudele realtà del massacro” for the first time, and then describes her physical reaction of crying, “mi misi a piangere, a singhiozzare forte, senza riuscire a frenarmi...” Finally, she mentions the reaction of other women to her hysterical crying. She writes, “Le donne mi guardano stupite. C’era pena anche nei loro occhi ma, dopo due giorni, l’impeto della pietà s’era un poco attenuato.”¹⁶⁶ In pointing out how her reaction seems so much stronger than the other women present, or, rather how other women were astonished and amazed at her reaction, she not only testifies to its intensity but also sets herself a bit apart from other women in the level to which she is affected by these sorts of breaches of humanity. There is no boundary, in Gobetti’s experience, between self, child, and children of other mothers. Though Gobetti expresses a solidarity with other maternal figures, her reaction and words seem to indicate an emotional reaction to the deceased that is beyond simple solidarity with another mother.

In fact, this unbounded sense of identification extends beyond political and national boundaries as well, and, in Gobetti’s words, her grief and distress would, in theory, extend to the Germans also, were it a German soldier that were hung in the piazza. At this point in her text, Gobetti fundamentally questions the difference between Germans and partisans when they are reduced to a basic human level. After seeing and describing the hung body of the youth, Davide, Gobetti continues to further reference the incident pages later, and through these references she not only prolongs her memorial, but she also

¹⁶⁶ Gobetti, 99.

clearly extends the notion of maternal solidarity to the universal, perhaps even ultimate level. She writes:

Andammo a mangiare in una trattoria. Anche là c'erano dei tedeschi: dei bei ragazzi biondi, allegri. Spogliati dalle divise, dai simboli odiati, in che cosa erano diversi dai nostri? Pensai che se ci fosse stato uno di loro al posto del giovane Davide, avrei provato la stessa ribellione e la stessa pena. Ricordai le parole d'una semplice vecchietta di Meana, che aveva un figlio in Africa durante la guerra. — Prego per lui e prego per tutti. Per tutti. Anche per gli *altri* —. Erano *altri* per lei, non nemici; semplicemente altri figli di altre madri. Era la coscienza universale ed eterna della solidarietà che lega tutte le madri.¹⁶⁷

In making no quantifiable distinction in her grief for a soldier on either side of the war, Gobetti demonstrates not only the unbounded extent of her maternal nature, but also of her humanity—of the humane perspective from which her text is written.¹⁶⁸ As we saw in the previous chapter, this kind of thinking about the Germans is notably in direct contrast to the uniform demonization that we saw in Oliva's texts, and it resonates a bit more closely with Capponi's feeling that, despite their national and political affiliations, the Germans are nonetheless human. More extreme, perhaps, is Gobetti's case, where we see again that the continuity of self extends to encompass other children, even those that are her enemies. This, therefore, further supports the concept of Gobetti as a sort of archetypal mother of all the people she encounters—one whose sense of care,

¹⁶⁷ Gobetti, 112.

¹⁶⁸ Gobetti's narrative contains other such characterizations of and even measured compassion towards the Germans. She writes: "—*Raus! Raus!*—gridarono allora due tedeschi, saltando fuori col fucile in mano; e in pochi minuti, colpendole alla cieca col calcio del fucile, dispersero le donne. Mentre compivano l'atto brutale, il loro volto non esprimeva neanche brutalità; impassibili, senz'anima; e nei gesti spietati non c'era furore, né crudeltà, ma qualcosa di paurosamente meccanico." (143), and after witnessing another hanged young boy, "La notizia mi colpì come una mazzata. Anche senza vederlo, provai lo stesso furore e la stessa angoscia che avevo provato nella Germanasca dinanzi al corpo inanimato del giovane Davide. Furore, angoscia e pietà: per lui, per i suoi, per tutti, per gli stessi suoi assassini, spinti, dal brutale oscuramento di oggi, a un misfatto che non potrà essere loro perdonato." (174). While Gobetti experiences human piety for the Germans and their mothers, she also sees them as mechanical beings. Whether humans who are brainwashed by the war, or machines, Gobetti finds some way to care about them, even if their actions are unforgivable. In viewing their actions as mechanized, she is in some way alleviating from them some of the responsibility, and in that way she is able to express some degree of care towards them.

compassion, and empathy seem to be of monolithic proportions.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, she acts on these feelings, often assuming responsibility for the well being of others around her.

Gobetti, herself, on a few different occasions attests to this obligation of responsibility towards others. In one case, she has some partisans staying the night at her apartment and she admits to not sleeping that evening because she felt there was too much to do for the other young boys, whom she considers like sons. She states, “Ma io non dormii; mi sentivo piena di responsabilità per la casa, per Mario, pei ragazzi...”¹⁷⁰ Her rest and health are compromised by this feeling of responsibility; in a sense, she sacrifices her well being for that of others. In her work, Carol Gilligan discusses the idea of a sense of responsibility that women tend to embrace and notes how often the sense of connectedness that women feel to others, as elaborated on earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 1, translates into a recognition of responsibility towards the people to whom one

¹⁶⁹ Gobetti's expression of solidarity in some way with other mothers is very present in this text, both in sadness (death) and happiness (return of child), or in other instances of concern. Here are three more passages exemplifying these instances that might be of interest to the reader but for matters of redundancy and length, I have not included them in the actual text of the chapter. Note that Gobetti consistently uses full names when speaking about deaths, and continually memorializes in her text as well. 1) “*17 ottobre*. Un altro fanciullo è caduto, un'altra luce si è spenta: Paolo Diena è stato ucciso con altri otto in un'imboscara nei pressi d'Inverso Pinasca. Ricordo la sua cordiale accoglienza quando andammo alla Gianna, la gioia festosa con cui accolse, nella Val Chisone, la notizia che la mamma sarebbe andata presto a trovarlo, la vitalità gioiosa che esprimeva il suo volto infantile sotto la fiammata dei capelli rossi: così forte, così lieto, così vivo! Non posso assolutamente pensare a sua madre.” (Gobetti, 235) 2) In this case a friend of Paolo is returning home to his family, and Gobetti rejoices in the imminent joy of his mother: “Il mattino dopo, l'ho accompagnato a Torino; e quando l'ho visto entrare nel portone di casa sua, ho provato un momento di felicità al pensiero che dopo pochi minuti sua madre—avvertita del suo ritorno sin dal giorno prima—avrebbe avuto la gioia di sentirselo tra le braccia.” (Gobetti, 118) 3) In this example, Gobetti sympathizes with the potential reaction of another mother knowing her son was in danger, but Gobetti offers her own insights as well. What is interesting here is that Gobetti first prefaces her feelings with her recognition that this boy, Franco, is somebody's child: “E anche se, soprattutto per sua madre, avrei preferito non saperlo in pericolo, in fondo, per lui, ne sono lieta. Nessuna considerazione di nessun genere deve poter diminuire o togliere ai giovani quella spontanea fioritura di gioioso entusiasmo che è il <<primo amore>>, sia esso per una donna, per un paese o per un'idea, o forse per tutte queste cose insieme. Ho letto negli occhi di Franco ch'egli sta ora vivendo quest'ora meravigliosa e senza uguale.” (Gobetti, 123).

¹⁷⁰ Gobetti, 162.

is connected. Gilligan goes on to explain the consequences of such responsibility. She notes that “a concern with individual survival comes to be branded as ‘selfish’ and to be counter-posed to the ‘responsibility’ of a life lived in relationships. And in turn, responsibility becomes, in its conventional interpretation, confused with a responsiveness to others that impedes a recognition of self.”¹⁷¹ While women often take responsibility for others and respond to the needs of others, they often find it difficult “to include themselves among the people they consider it moral to care for,” therefore leaving nobody to care for them. Gobetti’s reactions and behaviors as described in *Diario partigiano* exemplify this phenomenon. In one example in particular, Gobetti specifically describes her desire to be mothered herself—to be cared for and have someone understand her needs—and to pass on the responsibility for the well-being of others to someone else, even if only for one evening. This instance takes place when she and a small group of companions are on their way back from a journey to France. She is the only woman in the group, and it is a difficult, long winter journey in the mountains. There is promise of a break at the home of one of the companions, where his mother would be waiting to receive them all. Gobetti writes:

Una cosa era certa intanto: non c’era piú da salire. Dinanzi a noi s’apriva una lunga discesa, al fondo della quale avremmo trovato la tanto desiderata e sognata grangia dei Corallo.—Laggiú c’è la mamma, c’è la mucca, c’è il fuoco, —continuava a ripetere Eraldo, per farmi e per farsi coraggio. E quella semplice frase <<c’è la mamma>> suonava alle mie orecchie come una musica di paradiso. Vedere un volto di donna mi pareva cosa meravigliosa. Mi sentivo sporca, spettinata, lacerata: avevo i pantaloni a brandelli; mi pareva che soltanto una donna potesse capir tutte queste cose e aiutarmi, sia pur con la sua muta simpatia; una donna che ci avrebbe preparato da mangiare, che ci avrebbe sistemato un giaciglio, a cui avrei potuto cedere la responsabilità (che sentivo, pur senza

¹⁷¹ Gilligan, 127.

completamente assolverla) d'organizzar per gli altri le forme primordiali della vita.”¹⁷²

As the passage indicates, Gobetti has assumed the grand responsibility of organizing for the others ‘le forme primordiali della vita,’ as a mother would, but in no way does she include herself in her concern ‘per gli altri’. According to Gilligan, “self-inclusion on the part of women challenges the conventional understanding of feminine goodness by severing the link between care and self-sacrifice.”¹⁷³ In not including herself in her own care-giving activities, Gobetti’s actions up until this point can be read as a form of self-sacrifice. Gobetti, herself, recognizes this sacrifice she has been making, and hence expresses her longing for receiving that same nurturing that she provides to others; ‘quella semplice frase <<c’è la mamma>> suonava alle mie orecchie come una musica di paradiso.’ In her work, Chodorow observes an asymmetry between the sexes in what she identifies as “daily reproduction.” While women, as most theoretical accounts suggest, constantly reproduce people physically and psychologically through their mothering activities, “no one supports and reconstitutes women affectively and emotionally.”¹⁷⁴ This observation explains Gobetti’s desire for the same care that she gives to others; she, herself, needs to be “reconstituted,” and she recognizes that only another mother, or she herself, is capable of fulfilling this need.¹⁷⁵ Gobetti’s narrative perfectly exemplifies Chodorow’s findings in this case. Unfortunately, however, Gobetti’s hopes for maternal comfort and passing off of responsibility are let down. Gobetti continues:

¹⁷² Gobetti, 355.

¹⁷³ Carol Gilligan, *Mapping the Moral Domain* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988) xxx.

¹⁷⁴ Chodorow, 36.

¹⁷⁵ Giovanna Miceli Jeffries notes that when women care for themselves, they are in fact enabling themselves to better care for others. She writes, “The care of the self, whether actualized in small gestures and habits or by consciously self-monitoring, is never totally divorced from other forms of care. It functions as an energizing practice to enable better care for others.” Jeffries, 97.

Addio, vagheggiato sogno d'una presenza femminile, d'abbandono al calore d'un conforto materno! Dissi ai ragazzi d'accendere il fuoco, di fare un po' di brodo, di tirar fuori dai sacchi qualche scatoletta. Mi lavai le mani e la faccia, mi pettinai alla meglio, tolsi i pantaloni ormai a brandelli e mi misi la gonna che fortunatamente m'ero sempre portata nel sacco.¹⁷⁶

Upon learning that the mother of Eraldo is not there, Gobetti assumes full responsibility as usual for the nourishment of the group. In the absence of someone to 'reproduce' her, she begins to 'reproduce' herself as best she can by washing her hands and face, and changing her pants for a skirt. The skirt calls attention to her desire to feel feminine, and to distinguish herself aesthetically as a woman, perhaps as a mother. It of further interest to note that this skirt that is 'sempre portata nel sacco' is quite the contrast from the old pants and sweaters that Oliva describes herself in when in the mountains. The description of their mode of dress can be read as an indication of the way each woman wants to be seen, and, in turn, sees herself, calling attention to the broader methods of self-fashioning in each of the respective texts.

Chodorow points out that "The activities of wife/mother have a nonbounded quality [...]" and that they consist "of diffuse obligations."¹⁷⁷ As I have demonstrated, in *Diario partigiano*, Ada Gobetti substantiates this observation, extending her sense of responsibility toward others beyond biological limits and beyond traditional social limits. Her maternal activities surpass the domestic sphere and are present in her social and political work. In fact, these activities and attitudes— activities and attitudes stemming from a sense of interconnectedness with others and of a relational definition of self—are

¹⁷⁶ Gobetti, 357.

¹⁷⁷ Chodorow, 179.

what infuse her work with a sense of personal validation and are used as a metric of self worth and morality.

A literary analysis that calls attention to the maternal qualities of a female Resistance participant begs the question, “what about Viganò’s *L’Agnese va a morire*?” In choosing to address this very briefly so as not detract from the central focus of this chapter, I will simply state that I believe that Viganò’s text, in fact, works against that of Gobetti. First and foremost, rather than assign political capital to the patriarchal ideology of the maternal, it is my view that *L’Agnese va a morire*, in its tone, content and presentation, further propagates the subordinate, politically uniformed and incapable, domesticated image of the women who took part in the battle for liberation. Gobetti, however, in exerting complete control over her text and narrative decisions therein, chose to represent herself in all of her femininity even though there clearly are other dimensions of her personality and experience that some might claim are more notable. In her conscious decision to privilege these characteristics and narrative style, Gobetti’s narrative is in and of itself a form of continued Resistance. Rather than resisting patriarchal stereotypes of women’s activities as we saw previously in the narratives of Elsa Oliva, Gobetti instead embraces and exemplifies these stereotypes, thereby resisting the disparaging images associated with them—precisely the ones from which Oliva feels compelled to distance herself. Gobetti espouses and acknowledges her gender as a positive attribute without hesitation, she has moved *beyond* [seeking] *equality* and celebrates difference, and in doing so, aided by her political clout, seeks to valorize these activities and emotions—“women’s work.” In this way, her work deepens popular memory of the Resistance as a historical event for both men and women.

Consequently, *Diario partigiano* also broadens our understanding and conception of the varied nature of women's autobiographical writing of the Italian Resistance as a genre. As we have seen, both Oliva and Gobetti make an effort to insert women, or, at the very least, themselves, into the historiographical documentation of the period in ways that result in very individual forms of self-representation and are encouraged by different motivations. Though consistently negotiating the gendered image that she most identifies with, Oliva predominantly foregrounds her acts of *bravura* and capability with firearms. She is motivated by proving herself and motivated by a quest for equality, and to this end she demonstrates her fearlessness and 'masculine' type qualities, as we have just seen in Chapter 2. As we can recall, she does not want to be treated like a woman, and she did not join the Resistance to cook and clean. Gobetti, conversely, showcases her sentiments, disregarding any references towards gender differences, yet exhibiting her valorization of the feminine by adopting a language of love and caring to narrate her own war story, and minimizing the narrative space spent discussing her own accomplishments. While Oliva felt an immediacy in her need to communicate and concretize her time spent as a part of the Resistance, which can likely be attributed to her time of writing (*Ragazza partigiana* was penned in 1946), Gobetti's production and publication was encouraged by an outside source. Both, however, are testimonials, even if that of Oliva is a bit more egocentric.

The following chapter on Carla Capponi's *Con cuore di donna*, offers to this project a more recent narrative whose motivation is explicitly testimonial. This narrative, like the others, seeks to augment existing Resistance histories, but perhaps more than the others,

it is a document of collective history in which the personal stakes are high, as her personal involvement in the Resistance has been, in her mind, misrepresented. As with Oliva and Gobetti, this text is also a gendered one, though not predominantly so, and Capponi does call attention to her bravery and use of weapons, though in a manner much more attenuated than that of Oliva. A combination of personal, historical, and gender driven intentions are strong and present in this text, and as the subject of the final chapter in this study, Capponi's text adds yet another dimension to our understanding of the forms of and motivations behind self-representation of female Italian Resistance participants.

CHAPTER 4

CARLA CAPPONI AND THE ROMAN RESISTANCE IN SELF-DEFENSE AND TOWARDS SELF-DEFINITION: *CON CUORE DI DONNA*

CARLA CAPPONI
(1918-2000)

*“Senza le memorie che tengono insieme la mia vita
non avrei la consapevolezza di aver vissuto
e perderei il senso e la ragione del mio agire quotidiano.
Ho bisogno della memoria del mio passato
per muovermi con sicurezza e coerenza nel presente,
ricca delle motivazioni che hanno determinato le mie scelte.
La memoria mi definisce, mi fa sentire in armonia con il tempo
e con gli altri di cui conosco l’esistere per esser
anch’essi parte della memoria.
“Ricordo, quindi sono” dico per assurdo.
Scrivere le proprie esperienze credo sia un dovere civile
per chiunque abbia da testimoniare il suo tempo.”¹⁷⁸ [emphasis added]*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter on *Con cuore di donna*, my analysis is two-fold. First, I analyze Capponi’s direct treatment of the events and actions that she participated in during the war, and the

¹⁷⁸ Carla Capponi. *Con Cuore Di Donna* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 2000), 14.

ways in which her narrative techniques support her admitted testimonial motivation for producing her text. In looking at the specific ways in which these events are narrated with particular attention to the events chosen and the language used to explain them, I argue that patterns of continued resistance to popular historical memory are evidenced. Second, I will directly discuss Capponi's peripheral treatment of her gender and gender issues embedded in her narrative of her Resistance experiences, calling specific attention to those ways in which Capponi herself elucidates her use of weapons and act of *bravura*. I show that while this text is not first and foremost intended as a female partisan's war story, as perhaps Oliva's might be considered, this text does call attention to these details, hence inserting them into popular history in a way that, as previously discussed, prevalent historiography does not.

More than any of the others, Capponi's narrative is a document of collective history motivated by direct contact with historical revisionism. Unlike Oliva, where her own experience simply seems unaccounted for in history books and popular memory, and Gobetti, where her personal experiences of the war are noted, but not awarded the political currency deserved, Capponi has had a particular encounter with historiography where first hand events, as she has lived through them, have been misrepresented, and filtered, she believes, falsely into collective historical consciousness. The precise event in question is the partisan attack on via Rasella and the subsequent associated massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine, and it is predominantly the order and circumstances of events and the assignment of guilt with which Capponi has contention. I will discuss this in detail shortly. I argue that while Capponi's narrative recounts all of the particular events of her

Resistance experiences, it does so with an eye towards ultimately explaining and representing this one particular event fully and truthfully, though, as is the case with all autobiographical writing, subjectively. Capponi's narrative, therefore, is primarily a document of collective history, written perhaps primarily for those who are not aware of the specific events of the Roman Resistance by virtue of having lived through them (as indicated by Capponi's explanation of basic information such as what the acronym GAP stands for and the fact that the Italians won the war in Africa), and it takes this responsibility very seriously.¹⁷⁹

Capponi's text is also a testimony. It is testimony to the lives of those who fought, and of those who died. And it is a testimony to the events in which she, herself, was engaged. However, more than any of the other narratives thus far explored, Capponi's text oscillates between the personal and collective. In her moments of personal history, she creates an image of herself that is at once a humane individual (which consequently aids in mitigating her misplaced guilt related to the Ardeatine massacre, as we began to see in Chapter 2 whilst discussing Elsa Oliva and violence in comparison with Capponi), and a valiant warrior, or, at the very least someone who believes she can own and operate a weapon. These two self-images stand in contrast to each other at certain points in the text, but, it is precisely in her discussion of weapons and armed combat that she individuates herself from the collective story she is telling. This chapter will first examine the way Capponi's narrative functions as an historical document, with particular attention to the

¹⁷⁹Capponi, 18 (GAP) and 59 (African War). Also, the most recent edition of her book is classified under the series *Storica*, further supporting its' intentions or intended area of marketing. (Updated note: the text continues to be found in the history section of bookstores, but the most recent reprint of the book, which in fact was this year, 2009, identifies it simply as *tascabile*. The first edition in 2000 was *nuovi saggi* and the second in 2003 is classified as *storica*)

way the narration relates to the events of the Via Rasella attack, and then I will examine Capponi's self-representation with regard to weapons, violence, and her experience as a female Resistance fighter.

Carla Capponi's decision to participate in the Italian Resistance is politically motivated, as is her decision to write her narrative—a narrative that is intended to be an historical document of a particular moment in time, but is also a very personal narrative in defense of self, and of comrades.¹⁸⁰ Capponi was born in 1918 into an anti-fascist, Roman, middle-class family where, from a very young age, she became politically informed and convicted in her anti-fascist beliefs. Speaking of herself at the age of eleven, Capponi writes, “Divenni più riflessiva, più attenta al senso delle cose che succedevano intorno a me. Seguivo le notizie sui giornali e cominciai a interessarmi di tutto quanto avveniva nel mondo. Stavo per compiere dodici anni a settembre.” From this time forward, Capponi's awareness of Fascism and its effect on her family's life was heightened. In 1934, she discovered a copy of *Delitto Matteotti* in her parent's house, and, being curious and thinking it to be a mystery novel, she and her sister read it cover to cover.¹⁸¹ The

¹⁸⁰ At various points in her text, Capponi makes note of her political motivation for participating in war. She states, “Oggi penso che a spingermi a partecipare alla lotta di liberazione nel 1943 fu la sofferta e indiretta esperienza di quella guerra civile che visse giorno per giorno cercando di capirne le ragioni, gli obiettivi, e le motivazioni.” (62) Her inability to understand a fascist motivated war contributed to her decision to fight against in the Resistance. Having also grown up in an antifascist household, these politics were a formative factor in her decision as well.

¹⁸¹ *Delitto Matteotti* is a book that has as its' subject the controversial assassination of Giacomo Matteotti, a representative of the Psu (Partito Socialista Unitario), who spoke out against the violent practices of fascism in the *camera dei deputati* (one of two assemblies that compose Italian Parliament), on 30 May 1924. He had also published a book denouncing the crimes of the Fascist regime prior to that—see, Giacomo Matteotti, *The fascisti exposed; a year of fascist domination* (London: Independent labour party publication Dept., 1924). On 10 June 1924, Matteotti was kidnapped and violently murdered. His body was found in the outskirts of Rome on 16 August 1924. Investigations have shown that those responsible for the murder were very close to Mussolini himself. Some partisan formations bore the name of Matteotti in his honor. For further information, see Mauro Canali, *Il Delitto Matteotti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997) and Gersoa Guido, *Il delitto Matteotti* (Milano: Mondadori, 1973).

experience of reading that book taught her, as a young child, that by silencing dialogue about certain events, memory of them is erased, and that in writing about them, one is creating public memory. In her estimation, such writing should not only exist, but should be disseminated. Of this reading experience she writes,

Ci chiedevamo come mai gli uomini politici dell'epoca e anche il re, tutti fossero stati d'accordo nel nascondere quel delitto, cancellarne la memoria permettendo al dittatore di impossessarsi del potere. Riversammo tutta la rabbia contro i nostri genitori, convinte che la maggiore responsabilità fosse proprio da attribuire a loro e a tutti i genitori che come loro avevano tenuto nascosti ai figli fatti di quella gravità, lasciandoli in balia della propaganda fascista, privandoli di notizie così importanti per orientarli e difenderli dal veleno e dalla violenza di quella ideologia. Non eravamo in grado di capire che ci avevano tenute lontane dalla scuola per molti anni proprio per quelle ragioni.¹⁸²

According to Capponi, therefore, keeping the discussion of historical events hidden is an erasure of historical memory, thereby resulting in the assignment of power to the enemy of manipulating historical remembrance. This is important to remember as we examine her own *Con cuore di donna*. After discovering and reading *Il delitto Matteotti*, Capponi and her sister made copies of the book by hand and distributed it to their classmates, as they thought the information it contained should be diffused appropriately. Capponi's choice of vocabulary to narrate this experience, for example, *responsabilità*, *propaganda fascista*, *difendere*, *violenza di ideologia*, is very similar to her mode of describing her own intentions and motivations for writing *Con cuore di donna*—that is, in large part, to combat with words and historical documentation a silencing or misrepresentation of a particular historical moment. Having learned from this experience in her youth, and other more personal experiences in subsequent years, Capponi's writing is driven by the impulse to provide testimony to her experiences during the war. In exposing and

¹⁸² Capponi, 49.

discussing these events, she is doing her part to help prevent Italians and other interested parties from falling into the trap of political propaganda and from falling victim to the violence of ideology. Capponi makes it her responsibility to fight misinformed historical revisionism. Of writing her narrative, she states,

Sono vissuta tanto da vedere persino l'ascesa del revisionismo storico e del negazionismo, divenuti cimento ideologico della destra, che maschera così il ritorno di vecchie ideologie infauste. Ho riflettuto a lungo su questi fenomeni e ho pensato che se tacevo io che ho veduto, udito, vissuto sulla mia pelle gli eventi che hanno attraversato il mio tempo di vita, sarei stata una testimone reticente.¹⁸³

And one might then pose the question “Of what use are silent witnesses”? In her dedication, Capponi explains, “...ogni uomo è un patrimonio di memoria che se, non fissato, permette agli altri ogni manipolazione. Le vicende vissute non mi consentivano che si potesse lasciarle all'arbitrio dei nemici di un tempo.”¹⁸⁴ Though Capponi is speaking here in generalities, it is my contention that this interest in historical revision is rooted in personal experience. Just as it was unacceptable to her at the age of fifteen for *Il Delitto Matteotti* to remain hidden in a drawer, it is unacceptable for the narration of the Roman Resistance, as told by a main protagonist, to not be written and published. Her narrative, though in many ways a general history of the period and memorial to those with whom she fought, is also written with the very distinctive motivations of self-defense and self-definition.

Most significantly, Capponi's narrative is consistently informed by her involvement in the partisan attack on Via Rasella and the subsequent German massacre known as the Fosse Ardeatine Massacre. I sustain that this narrative, written at a distance of fifty years

¹⁸³ Capponi, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Capponi, 6.

from her participation in the Resistance and published in the same year of her death, 2000, was written notably as a reaction against historical revisionism particularly regarding her own misjudged guilt associated with the Fosse Ardeatine Massacre. This guilt is associated with the idea that the partisans could have somehow prevented the massacre, and they simply did not. This however, as Capponi makes very clear, was not the case. Though Capponi does not directly state that intention, and rather defers explicit narrative recognition of the issue of self-defense to attention to collective history (both its' disussion and creation), the text itself does support this intention with its structure, the language adopted, and the episodes discussed.¹⁸⁵ Like these narrative techniques, the publisher's marketing strategy also imparts a motive of self-defense and self-definition, even if not explicitly stated by Capponi herself. There are three editions of *Con cuore di donna*, published in 2000, 2003, and 2009, respectively. All three are marketed as having been written by a main protagonist in these aforementioned events and, to that end, the subtitles of the narrative read, "*Significato e ragioni di un gesto violento*," and, "*Il Ventennio, la Resistenza a Roma, via Rasella: i ricordi di una protagonista*," respectively (the second and third editions have maintained the same subtitle). The blurb found on the back cover of the 2000 edition even poses the question "chi è Carla Capponi? Una terrorista o un'eroina?," acknowledging therefore her controversial/ambiguous position in

¹⁸⁵ In recognition of her intentions to contribute to collective history she writes: "Vorrei poter scrivere veramente per gli altri, degli "altri", di tutte le persone, i fatti, gli avvenimenti che hanno attraversato la mia vita. Non dire di me come soggetto che si mostra e si fa riconoscere e indagare, ma di me come tramite per far conoscere personaggi, paesaggi, situazioni, abitudini di vita e di tutto il mondo che ha popolato la mia esistenza e quella delle persone del mio tempo." (Capponi, 8). In all of the editions of her book, however, attention is brought to her involvement in the attack on via Rasella. While the first edition, that of 2000, is more dramatic (as evidenced by the subtitle and the question it poses (which you will read momentarily) the last two editions, as a selling point, simply state, "In quest'opera autobiografica, la protagonista di uno degli episodi più coraggiosi ma anche più discussi della lotta di liberazione ricostruisce le ragioni che l'hanno portata a partecipare a quell'attentato." (Capponi, back cover of *Con cuore di donna* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2003 and 2009).

public memory.¹⁸⁶ Ironically, Capponi herself does not purport to be either, but, as indicated by the aforementioned rhetorical question, the public seems to demand some form of classification. It is clear, however, from her writing and resultant humane self-portrait, that Capponi does not view herself in the least as a terrorist, and, in fact, defends herself against that image.

¹⁸⁶ See <<http://www.saggiatore.it/home_saggiatore.php?n=4&b_id=151&l=it>> (2000) and <<http://www.saggiatore.it/home_saggiatore.php?n=4&b_id=150&l=it>> (2003), accessed March 24, 2009.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: LE FOSSE ARDEATINE MASSACRE AND ROME OPEN CITY

“Due date, 23 marzo e 24 marzo, 1944. 23 marzo: l’attacco audace e coraggioso dei Gap e via Rasella contro una formazione armata tedesca che attraversava la città in impudente violazione dello statuto di “città aperta.” 24 marzo: il sacrificio eroico dei 335 alle Fosse Ardeatine, barbaramente trucidati dai carnefici nazisti sconvolti ed atterriti dall’azione incanzante dei patrioti romani. Due date che riassumono tutta la grandezza della Resistenza romana...”¹⁸⁷

In the film *La Rappresaglia* (dir. Cosmatos, 1973), a conversation is had between Herbert Kappler, chief of the Gestapo in Rome, and Pietro Caruso, Rome’s Chief of Police, about the existence of Resistance forces in Rome. Kappler says to Caruso, who denies their existence, “Dollman [German official and liason between SS and Fascists] e io riteniamo il contrario. Esiste una giunta militare...di cui fanno parte i rappresentanti di tutti i partiti meno il vostro [Fascist]. Però qui si parla di una parata, non ci sono formazioni militari a Roma. Roma è città aperta.”¹⁸⁸ On August 14, 1943, Rome was declared an open city by the government under Pietro Badoglio, signaling its apparent demilitarization in an effort to protect its historical treasures from physical damage and destruction. The designation of a city as “open” during wartime means that the governing body has abandoned all defensive efforts, and that the city should be taken by the victor without damage and injury to the city itself and its citizens. Shortly after this declaration (which was encouraged by the Pope in an effort to protect the Vatican), Italy signed the Armistice with the Allies, and Badoglio fled the city, leaving it without a government. Though never retracted in official documentation, in practice, Rome’s open city status lasted less

¹⁸⁷ Musu and Polito, 43.

¹⁸⁸ *La Rappresaglia*. Dir. George P. Cosmatos. National General Pictures, 1973.

than a month. First referring to the open city status as a “sham,” historian Robert Katz explains,

In a matter of weeks Rome would become a mockery of an open city, a city whose walls would shake under the roar of German military traffic to the front and the thunder of Allied bombs. It would swell to nearly twice its usual size, hosting, but ever more frugally, a million refugees from the countryside. Rome would be a city of spies, double agents, informers, torturers, fugitives, hunted Jews and hungry people.¹⁸⁹

There were four conflicting parties, each with invested interest in control of the city: the Allies, the Germans, the Pope and the Partisans. The Germans, already in Rome from when Italy was part of the Axis, held it and used it as a base for operations and a supply line to their forces on the front lines. In their occupation of the city, they enacted several restrictive orders and rewarded disobedience with violence, outraged at Italy’s act of betrayal in changing its allegiance. The main priority of the partisans, the force representative of those who were fighting for the liberation of the country, was to make Rome indefensible and unsustainable for the Germans. Rome was highly militarized, but, as Kappler so poignantly states, ‘non ci sono formazioni militari a Roma.’ Relevant to our discussion of the partisan action on via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, is that the theory- that Rome was an open city in the true sense of the term, and the practice—that combative forces made Rome a battleground with four interested parties staking claim, are quite different. This will resurface during the legal proceedings brought against the Partisans.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Katz, *The Battle for Rome* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003) 5. For more information about the details of the struggle for power in the capital during the war between the four major opposing forces, Katz’s text provides an engaging and informative narrative. Additionally, for a reproduction of the various ordinances put out by those involved regarding the open city status of Rome, as well as an excellent chronological and critical picture of the situation in Rome between 1943-1944, see Marisa Musu and Ennio Polito, *Roma ribelle: La Resistenza nella capitale, 1943-1944* (Milano: Teti Editore, 1999).

“Via Rasella, le Fosse ardeatine. Della Resistenza romana, sembra non sia rimasto, a distanza di sessanta anni, quasi nient’altro.”¹⁹⁰

The Fosse Ardeatine massacre is one of the most (mis)remembered and controversial events associated with the Roman resistance and German occupation of Rome.¹⁹¹ It was a swift and silent German reprisal resulting in the brutal execution of three hundred and thirty-five Romans on 24 March 1944 in reaction to a partisan attack on a column of German troops marching down Via Rasella in Rome on 23 March 1944, in which thirty-two German soldiers were killed. The very *first* newspaper announcement regarding the reprisal, appearing on 25 March 1944 in *Il Giornale d’Italia*, mentions that for each German killed, ten Italians will be killed. This announcement infamously concludes, “Quest’ordine è già stato eseguito.”¹⁹² Therefore, only *after* the massacre had been completed were the Roman citizens notified of its occurrence. They were not, however, told who the victims were for another three weeks, at which time the families of the deceased were sent short telegrams—in German, a language most could not understand—

¹⁹⁰ Marisa Musu and Ennio Polito, *Roma ribelle: La Resistenza nella capitale, 1943-1944* (Milano: Teti Editore, 1999) 11.

¹⁹¹ Controversial not only because of the urban myth surrounding a nonexistent announcement asking the partisans to turn themselves in, but, also, as Robert Katz asserts, because of the possible/probable prior knowledge of the event by the Pope and his inaction in preventing it. Katz writes, “A miracle was not necessary to save the 335 men doomed to die in the Ardeatine Caves. There was one man who could have, should have, and must be held accountable for not having acted to at least delay the German slaughter. He is Pope Pius XII.”(p. 249) Katz then goes on to list four preconditions for papal intervention, and shows how all but one, the desire to help those destined to death, were met. See Katz p. 249-253. Further, a simple perusal of the history section of one of the largest bookstores in Rome (Feltrinelli International) yields several books related this particular event, and it is even included in a book dedicated to a discussion of the top nine events in Roman history. See *I giorni di Roma: nove grandi storici raccontano nove giornate cruciali per la storia di Roma e del mondo*, Editori Laterza, 2007.

¹⁹² This announcement was released by the official news agency Stefani as an official communication from the German command and appeared on the first page of *Il Giornale D’Italia* on 25 March 1944. See image #21 in Capponi text.

communicating the death of their loved one. This means that for three weeks, a large number of Romans were left wondering whether or not their relatives and friends were dead or alive. Of this action, Capponi, herself concludes, “Agirono così non solo per la crudeltà, ma per impedire che i parenti di trecentoventi persone si radunassero davanti alle carceri. Capimmo allora perché non avevano mai pubblicato i nomi: per impedirci di contattare le famiglie e organizzare una manifestazione di protesta che avrebbe stretto i familiari nell’abbraccio solidale di migliaia di romani e di tutta la Resistenza.”¹⁹³ The practice of not disclosing the names was widely perceived, just as Capponi notes, as cruel.

An urban legend, or myth quickly developed surrounding the massacre, postulating that the partisans involved were asked to turn themselves in to the German command and in this way the massacre would be avoided. However, this is untrue, and both Herbert Kappler and Erich Priebke, the German chief of police and his subordinate officer who were responsible for executing the mass murder as ordered by Hitler, admitted at their trials (in 1948 and 1996, respectively), as well as Albert Kesselring, the German Field Commander in Italy, to the secrecy of the event and the fact that no announcements of that sort were generated. The executions were intended to be kept secret primarily to avoid possible partisan sabotage.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Capponi, 241.

¹⁹⁴ Historian Robert Katz explains: “In the Kappler trial, the ex-Gestapo chief, as has been shown, stated that secrecy about the Ardeatine crime had been decided upon for security reasons—a fear of an attempt by partisans to stop them from carrying out the reprisal. Asked point blank by the president of the court if any “specific appeal” was made to the partisans to surrender, Kappler replied, “I had no authority to make such appeals.” At another point he declared, “I had no time to do it...”

Further, in each of the other Ardeatine cave trials, none of the defendants, who had more authority than Kappler, claimed to have addressed any appeal to the partisans to surrender. However, in books published in Italy in 1965 and 1966, one can read that such an appeal was made.” (Katz, 241).

Historian Alessandro Portelli examines this myth and remembrance of this event in his book *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (2003). As part of his work, Portelli interviewed several Romans of different generations, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and political affiliations about their remembrance or knowledge about this event. Specifically, he poses the question regarding how much time there was between the attack on via Rasella, and the Ardeatine massacre. The answers provided ranged from three days to six months. Foreign service diplomats were also included in his study, and proved to be misinformed as well. In reality, there were only twenty-four hours between the two events. Portelli ultimately notes that “this expansion of time in popular belief is the most fascinating memory construct concerning these events. It’s most immediate consequence is to reinforce the belief in the partisans’ guilt, by imagining that the Nazis had time to publish an appeal to them.”¹⁹⁵ In the following lengthy citation, Portelli then goes on to show that, in contradiction to this myth, it is well documented that the reprisal at the Ardeatine Caves occurred within that short time frame, and most importantly, that there was no such request for the partisans to turn themselves in in lieu of the planned reprisal. He explains:

Finally, and most importantly, nowhere, except in belated and doubtful self-defense statements (and in anti-partisan mythology), does it appear that the decision to carry out the massacre ever depended on the arrest or self-delivery of the partisans. This eventuality is not mentioned in any version of Hitler’s order. From the beginning, the intention was not to punish the perpetrators but to punish and terrorize the city; even if the partisans had turned themselves in they would not have prevented the

As discussed by Katz, Portelli, and others, the only person to know about the impending massacre was the Pope.

¹⁹⁵ Portelli, 156.

massacre. This is why there was no serious search, nor any poster or public announcement. This has been a matter of record since Kesselring's 1946 trial:

Prosecutor. But you could have said, “If the population of Rome does not deliver within a certain time the perpetrator of the attack I will execute ten Romans for each German killed?”

Albert Kesselring: Now in tranquil times after three years past, I must say that the idea would have been very good.

Prosecutor. But you didn't do it.

Kesselring. No, I didn't do it.

“For the event in via Rasella,” Kappler said, “I made no request to the population, I had no jurisdiction to do so.” The 1948 verdict concludes: “The search for the perpetrators was not the primary concern of the German police, but was carried out blandly, as a marginal activity, after preparation for the reprisal was already underway.”[...]The day after the massacre, journalist Carlo Trabucco wrote in his diary: “The radio has made no mention [of the attack] and the newspapers are mute.” Had the radio said anything, it would be hard to explain how the Vatican was informed by a phone call only in the late morning of the next day (after which no known action was taken).

Kappler's next task was the nocturnal drawing of lists. “The whole of that night we searched the records and could not find a sufficient number of persons to make up the number required for the execution,” Erich Priebke stated. “We realized that the number of those sentenced to death was not 300, but three or four,” Kappler confirmed.¹⁹⁶

The obtainment of the appropriate number of victims, which was then augmented from three hundred and twenty to three hundred and thirty (with an additional five people included mistakenly, totaling 335 victims) at Kappler's sole discretion when one of the Germans injured in the via Rasella explosion died in the hospital—yet another point of contention—also adds to the controversy and devastation surrounding the event and the way it was carried out. The notable lack of “guilty” victims led to a very diverse mix of those ultimately rounded up. The victims ranged in age from adolescents to elderly men, and they came from various political and social backgrounds. The diversity of the origins

¹⁹⁶ Portelli, 151.

of those killed resulted in a city-wide sense of solidarity in internalizing this event. Those chosen for the massacre were brought to the Ardeatine caves, and each shot with one bullet in the back of the head (though, as the Germans had been drinking, sometimes they missed, causing the need for additional shots as coronary evidence shows). As the killing progressed, those still alive were forced to climb upon the dead bodies and were then shot so that all of the bodies would be contained in the caves, whose entrances were then to be imploded, avoiding the need for a burial ground in which to dispose of the bodies. The Germans had created a “natural” tomb.¹⁹⁷



Left: One of the Ardeatine caves in which the mass murder took place; *Right:* The space at the Fosse Ardeatine that currently houses the tombs of all the victims killed in the massacre. The bodies were exhumed and placed in these tombs and left at the site as a memorial. There are a few which read, *Ignoto*, as those bodies were unidentifiable.

Reprisals are a commonly accepted practice during wartime. Their enactment, however, creates an interesting problematic in the assigning of responsibility, and, in this particular

¹⁹⁷ Two very informative books, already cited, have been written on this massacre. See Portelli and Katz. For filmic representations of the event see: “*La Rappresaglia*, dir. George P. Cosmatos, 1973 (based on Katz’s book, *Death in Rome*), and *Dieci Italiani per Un Tedesco (Via Rasella)*, dir. Filippo Walter Ratti, 1963.” Additionally, the *Rai Educational* series “*La Storia Siamo Noi*” has several short video clips available concerning various aspects of the event and its’ memory which also include interviews with some of the main protagonists including Carla Capponi and Rosario Bentivegna. See: [<http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/puntata.aspx?id=66>]. Further, the most recent Italian edition of Portelli’s text now contains an audio cd with interviews relevant to the event. See: Alessandro Portelli. *L’ordine è già stato eseguito* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2005). These interviews and several others are also available for consultation in the Archivio Gianni Bosio located in the Casa della Memoria e della Storia in Rome (last accessed 20 May 2009).

case, Capponi's involvement is at the center of this problematic. Historian Claudio Pavone explains, "È il nesso fra l'azione, la responsabilità collettiva e la responsabilità individuale che emerge nella rappresaglia e la rende, al di là dell'orrore che suscita, un fatto denso di implicazioni[...]"¹⁹⁸ Of these implications, responsibility is, perhaps, the most imminent. This particular massacre is further problematic, however, because of the misconceived notion that it could have been prevented by or should have been expected by the partisans, and it has incurred greater attention and debate because of the number and expansive diversity of the victims. Carla Capponi was a main protagonist in the partisan attack on Via Rasella, along with her then comrade and soon to be husband, Rosario Bentivegna, and, as a result, has been assigned responsibility and guilt both on a collective level, as a partisan, and on an individual level, as one of six principle partisans involved in the via Rasella attack. For her entire post war life, she fought against and dealt with the repercussions of the mythology created around the event and the uninformed, misinformed, or deliberately propagandistic histories.¹⁹⁹ Her husband, Bentivegna, has also been a victim of similar accusations, and to this day he still continues to speak out against false claims. Capponi had received numerous death threats

¹⁹⁸ Pavone, 475.

¹⁹⁹ Capponi is not the only one who has faced this situation. Her husband, and then fellow partisan and one of the six to carry out the attack on via Rasella, Rosario Bentivegna, also has been targeted, and has also written his own autobiography with specific attention to these particular events. See: *Achtung Banditen!: Prima e dopo via Rasella* (Murisia Editore:Milano, 2004.) Bentivegna still continues to speak out in both his defense and in Capponi's, now deceased. In one particular example, Capponi is included in a volume entitled *Italiane*, published in three volumes by la presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, dipartimento per le pari opportunità (ministro Prestigiacomo) in 2003. Capponi is included in the third volume and the part on her life was contributed by Paolo Granzotto. (This text was distributed for free at newstands, and I am unable to locate further bibliographic information.) Capponi is poorly represented, with particular regard to the via Rasella/Fosse Ardeatine events and her character. Bentivegna wrote a letter to Granzotto in her defense, and calling attention to his erroneous historiographical practices. See: <http://www.anpi.it/dichiarazioni/bentivegna_capponi.htm>> See also a statement made by il Coordinamento Femile dell'Associazione Partigiani d'Italia entitled, "*Italiane: Una Antologia di Faziosità, Imprecisioni, Errori*": <<www.anpi.it/patria_2004/06-04/22-23_Bentivegna.pdf>>.

throughout the remainder of her life. In an interview conducted by Robert Katz, Capponi recounts some of these unsettling and accusatory post war experiences:

“ Even today,” says Carla Capponi, “ I receive anonymous letters from Fascists, with insults, with atrocious vulgarities, with grotesque but violent threats of death.”

Sometimes the threats come by telephone. “ One hears at the other end an absurd, cavernous voice, which says: ‘Hello. We are the martyrs of the Ardeatine speaking. Is the murderer Bentivegna there, and his worthy comrade?’ Or else a voice speaks in German, which I do not understand. But then I hear one word, ‘*Rasellenstrasse*.’”

Sometimes a picture of Mrs. Bentivegna, torn from a newspaper, comes in the mail. There are holes punched through the eyes; the ears are cut off, the mouth bloodied with red ink. “ This is what we will do to you,” the correspondent warns.

In Parliament, Mrs. Bentivegna, a former member of the Chamber of Deputies, has been the object of obscene gestures and catcalling. “During Parliamentary debates,” she says, “right-wing Deputies have cried to me, ‘Whore!’”

In a separate interview with Alessandro Portelli, Capponi speaks about how it was necessary to continually speak out against defamation of her character. She says, “...purtroppo ne ho dovuto parlare continuamente chiamata in causa da minacce, da articoli...” Capponi then even offers to “metterò[e] da parte tutti i documenti che ho [ha] di attacchi sui giornali” for Portelli, indicating that there are enough to warrant a collection of sorts.²⁰⁰ Capponi had been in a continued state of defense since 1944. Capponi was even brought to trial with the other partisans where it was asserted that the attack on via Rasella was not a legitimate act of war and, therefore, all persons involved in the attack were guilty and responsible for the subsequent Ardeatine massacre. The case of the prosecution rests on the status of Rome as an open city, as discussed earlier. In theory it was, but in reality, it was not, and to this end the courts judged in favor of the partisans. In 1948, the courts found Capponi and her comrades not guilty, maintaining

²⁰⁰ Carla Capponi . interview with Alessandro Portelli. Archived in the *Fondo Ardeatine*, in the Archivio Circolo Gianni Bosio, Roma, Italia. Accessed 20 May 2009.

that the via Rasella attack was, in fact, a legitimate act of war, and any action moving to the country closer to liberation from the occupying forces was commendable.²⁰¹ This was the consistent verdict through two rounds of appeals (1954 and 1957), the latter of which was addressed to the Supreme Court of Cassation. The case against the partisans, Rosario Bentivegna, Piero Calamadre, Carla Capponi, Carlo Salinari, and leaders of the Resistance Sandro Pertini, Giorgio Amendola, and Riccardo Bauer, resurfaced again in 1997. In March 1999 the Supreme Court arrived at the same ruling as in the previous cases. As one can see, these events have had a long-standing presence in Roman society, and continue to be remembered, rewritten, and discussed.²⁰²

Notably, in 1949, Capponi was conferred the Gold Medal of Military Valor by the Italian government for her participation in that action, as well as other partisan actions. Upon conferral of the *Medaglia d'Oro*, she was commended for her “heroic deeds.” At that time it was further said of her, “With gun in hand, first among the first, she participated in tens of actions, distinguishing herself...by her spirit of sacrifice toward her comrades in the face of danger.”²⁰³ This spirit of sacrifice is evident still even in the way that she frames her narrative, insisting that her motivation in writing is “Per coerenza verso il senso che ho dato alla mia vita, per l’amore che porto a quanti hanno lasciato la loro

²⁰¹ This line of prosecution and subsequent court ruling stems from Kappler’s trial in which the courts inferred that the attack was not a legitimate act of war and therefore a group of five families related to the victims of Ardeatine massacre got together to bring suite against the partisans involved. This related to the battle for meaning of the event. Portelli writes: “The definition of via Rasella as an ‘illegitimate act of war’ and the widespread belief that the court found the retaliation legitimate and condemned Kappler only for the ‘extra five’ are examples of traces of that verdict in institutional and public memory.” (Portelli, 258). For an in depth discussion of this distinction, see Portelli p.260-265. The basis for which the via Rasella attack might be considered an “illegitimate act of war,” that of open city status, would also attribute to the entire Resistance this same categorization.

²⁰² See Portelli p.261 for a detailed discussion of the most recent trials and legal logic employed.

²⁰³ Katz, 238.

giovinezza a marcire nella terra per salvare l'onore della patria, per ricordare tanti compagni di cui nessuno scriverà, uomini e donne che furono protagonisti di episodi straordinari per singolarità e per coraggio...” Capponi then goes on to confirm: “sento quasi come un dovere di fissare i ricordi personali che coincidono con gli avvenimenti di cui sono stata testimone e **in piccola parte protagonista**. [emphasis added].”²³ With these words, Capponi is explicitly deferring her own autobiographical narrative space to a discussion of her comrades and to Roman Resistance history. This practice is not dissimilar from what was evidenced in the previous chapter with the work of Ada Gobetti and her tendency to downplay her own Resistance related accomplishments, and is, as noted previously, a common characteristic of women’s autobiography—we can recall Shari Bernstein’s observation that traditionally in women’s autobiography, “the self that would reside at the center of the text is decentered.”²⁰⁴ In reality, however, Capponi was a central figure in the Roman Resistance as a vice commander of a Roman partisan formation as well as in her attainment of the rank of Captain as an armed combatant. Further, after the war, she served on the Presidential Commission of ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d’Italia), and in the Italian Parliament. This chapter shows that while her proclaimed motivation, as cited above, is true and evident in the text, it is also true that Capponi uses her own narrative as a method of self-defense (hence the sense of ‘*dovere*’) and as a document of national history, and Roman Resistance history in particular. Her narrative cannot help but be informed by these significant events and their lifelong repercussions.

²³ Capponi, 12.

²⁰⁴ Bernstein, 19.

Very rarely, however, does Capponi separate herself from the collective story that she tells. She does not make any reference in her text to the aforementioned achievements in rank, position, or award. The moments when she distinguishes herself individually in her narrative are of three types: 1) when she discusses her youth, 2) when she calls attention to her own personal compassion and humanity, and 3) and this is perhaps the most frequent, the moments when she discusses intrepidity and weapons so as to distinguish herself from the collective. The second type contributes to her self-defense and will be discussed in the first section of my analysis. I will then examine the third type by looking at the ways Capponi works towards a definition of self apart from others through her text.

IN DEFENSE OF SELF

In addressing the events of via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine in public or historical discourse, the other issue, much connected to that of responsibility, is that of language. The language used to describe and document history has the potential to communicate judgment on those involved, turning victims into martyrs, responsible parties into irresponsible parties, massacres into attacks and vice versa. It is with the weapon of language that Capponi, her comrades, and her actions have been attacked, and it is with words, with her narrative, *Con cuore di donna*, that, after many years, Capponi defends herself in the written form. The ‘battle for memory’ of the event, as Portelli so phrases it, began almost immediately afterwards, with language playing a very pivotal role in the way the events were interpreted. One notable example of the way language has shaped popular and historical discourse about the events at hand can be seen in the comment

published by the Church in *L'Osservatore Romano* on 26 March 1944. This comment appeared on the same page just after the German communication of the advent of the reprisal at the Fosse Ardeatine:

Di fronte a simili fatti ogni animo onesto rimane profondamente addolorato in nome dell'umanità, e dei sentimenti cristiani. Trentadue vittime da una parte: trecentoventi persone sacrificate per i colpevoli sfuggiti all'arresto, dall'altra. Ieri rivolgemmo un accorato appello alla serenità e alla calma; oggi ripetiamo lo stesso invito con più ardente affetto, con più comossa insistenza...invochiamo dagli irresponsabili il rispetto per la vita umana che non hanno il diritto di sacrificare mai; il rispetto dell'innocenza che ne resta fatalmente vittima; dai responsabili la coscienza di questa loro responsabilità verso se stessi, verso le vite che vogliono salvaguardare, verso la storia e la civiltà.²⁰⁵

Historian Giorgio Bocca offers an interpretation of the above comment, identifying the way words have been assigned to the parties involved, and, consequently, how the Church had assigned guilt and responsibility. Bocca writes:

L'appello, per quanto non firmato da Pio XII, ne rispecchia il pensiero reazionario. Il foglio ufficiale della Santa Sede esprime la sua condanna della violenza, separando — nella Roma dell'occupazione nazista! — le <<vittime>> (i tedeschi) dai <<colpevoli>> (i partigiani), gli <<irresponsabili>> (i capi della Resistenza) dai <<responsabili>> (I comandi tedeschi e fascisti); e fa sua, volendolo o meno, la tesi fascista e attesista della <<strage degli innocenti>>: dimenticando che la legalità dei <<responsabili>> a cui si appella è la medesima che sta sterminando sei milioni di ebrei innocenti, fatto di cui il Santo Padre, nel marzo 1944, è perfettamente a corrente. Senza dire che via Tasso e i suoi orrori sono a due passi dai sacri palazzi.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Bocca, Giorgio. *Storia dell'Italia partigiana*. (Milano: Mondadori, 1995) 293. The aforementioned German communication is as follows: “ Nel pomeriggio del 23 marzo 1944, elementi criminali hanno eseguito un attentato con lancio di bombe contro una colonna tedesca di Polizia in transito per Via Rasella. In seguito a questa imboscata, 32 uomini della Polizia tedesco sono stati uccisi e parecchi feriti. La vile imboscata fu eseguita da comunisti badogliani. Sono ancora in atto le indagini per chiarire fino a che punto questo criminoso fatto è da attribuirsi as incitamento anglo-americano. Il Comando tedesco è deciso a stroncare l'attività di questi banditi scellerati. Nessuno dovrà sabotare impunemente lo cooperazione italo-tedesca nuovamente affermata. Il Comando tedesco, perciò, ha ordinato che per ogni tedesco ammazzato dieci criminali comunisti-badogliani saranno fucilati. Quest'ordine è già stato eseguito.” (see note #14)

²⁰⁶ Bocca, 294. Via Tasso, 145 in Rome was converted to a German prison (with windows cemented in) during the second world war and is notoriously known as the place where thousands of antifascists were held either in solitary confinement or in very small group cells and intensely tortured by the SS. Many prisoners died there, and this prison was emptied when victims had to be gathered for the

In this passage, Bocca highlights the implications of the ways in which language can manipulate/influence perception of an historical event, and in fact, the way that it has. In her narrative, Capponi pays careful attention to the language she adopts, and is very aware of her use of the terms victims, martyr, innocent, massacre, attack, etc... It is definitions and statements like the one cited above that Capponi seeks to systematically invalidate in her own narrative, in her own defense.

The anatomy of Capponi's defense is, in my reading, composed of several factors. It is primarily constructed via the narrative strategies which include 1) demonstrating her own compassion and that of the partisans as a movement (and the corollary German inhumanity), 2) showing, through a clear and detailed narration of most actions and repercussions prior to via Rasella, how the reprisal could not have been predicted or expected, and 3) in constructing a clear historical picture of wartime Rome in order to show that the partisans were fighting *for* the general population to ameliorate the hardships caused by the Germans and that they (the partisans) were trying to defend everyone from the occupying forces, and therefore, they were not the enemy. Capponi also includes in her text copies of real historical documents, announcements, photographs and newspaper clippings to support her case, and, I believe to augment the historical validity of her narrative. These documents, however, are not equipped with bibliographic information, as her writing is an autobiography.

Ardeatine massacre. After the liberation the prison was turned into a museum, now the home of the Museo Storico della Resistenza, and the several of the cells were left in tact and visitors are still able to see messages scrawled on and etched into the walls of these spaces.

Early on in her narrative, while still discussing her childhood, Capponi begins her characterization of the Germans. She narrates an instance when she goes to the beach to have a swim in August, and she finds out that she is not allowed to do that because the Germans have requisitioned the beach. But, one of them grants her permission. She goes in the water, and after her brief swim she writes, “ Erano là, le gambe divaricate, il casco pesante, il mitra a tracolla pronto per l’uso. D’improvviso mi sentii minacciata, ero sotto tiro. Qualche cosa di sinistro emanava da quei due soldati: il gusto di una caccia inconsueta, il piacere forse già conosciuto di uccidere.” When Capponi exits the water, she then comments about the soldier that gave her permission, “Osservavo quel giovane quasi imberbe, quasi assurdo nella sua perfezione. Mi chiedevo se poteva essere capace di sentimenti umani un uomo così meticolosamente costruito per la guerra.”²⁰⁷ This negative characterization of the Germans comprised of such terms as ‘il piacere di uccidere,’ and notions of lacking ‘sentimenti umani’ as if the German soldier were a machine ‘costruito per la guerra,’ is one that will follow through and be developed further in her narrative, and one that will stand in contrast to Capponi’s own self description and her discussion of partisan behaviors. I believe that this contrast works towards her defense.

Capponi’s self-characterization in relation to murder and violence shows her in constant conflict with the practice. Less than twenty pages after her above description of the German soldier, Capponi is discussing the planning of one of her first partisan actions, an

²⁰⁷ Capponi, 83.

attack on the Italian Italian police chief, Pietro Caruso.²⁰⁸ She admits, “Tuttavia, non potevo fare a meno di pensare che eravamo lì per preparare il piano di morte di un uomo, e sentivo nascere dentro di me un’infelicità, un’incertezza improvvisa, come se la mia personalità si sdoppiasse e io mi sentissi prigioniera di situazioni irrimediabili alle quali non potevo sfuggire, pur avendole scelte e determinate io stessa. Divenni pensierosa....”²⁰⁹ The action in preparation above was never carried out due to circumstantial difficulties. This conflict between doing what is necessary to defend the country, and what seems against natural behavior is in direct contrast to the description of lack of human sentiment and mechanic nature that Capponi invoked to describe her enemy. This was the same sort of conflict that we saw in Chapter 1 with the description of Capponi’s first murder, her *battesimo di fuoco*. In an interview she explains, just as she does similarly in her text, “Io mi sentii morire mio caro, perché sparare a un uomo, poi alla schiena, ti assicuro mi sembrava una cosa di una viltà terribile. Volevo chiamarlo, volevo dire scusi, per favore...”²¹⁰ Yet, even though conflict is continually evident, Capponi views these actions as necessary because the oppression and restriction of freedoms which the Roman population endured as a result of Nazi and Fascist dictates was in need of opposition—military-esque, partisan opposition.

Part of the way that Capponi discusses wartime Rome, and characterizes the occupying forces, is in her testimonial sketches of those who were killed. In one instance (and there

²⁰⁸ Pietro Caruso was the police chief responsible for compiling the names of fifty Italians to be massacred, with another 285 victims chosen by the Germans at the Fosse Ardeatine. Caruso was found guilty after the war by the Italian courts for this and other actions, and was sentenced to death on 21 September 1944. He was executed at Forte Bravetta in Rome on 23 September 1944. Capponi reminds us of this after her narration of this unsuccessful attack.

²⁰⁹ Capponi, 11.

²¹⁰ Carla Capponi . interview with Alessandro Portelli. Archived in the *Fondo Ardeatine*, in the Archivio Circolo Gianni Bosio, Roma, Italia. Accessed 20 May 2009.

are several), Capponi describes the arrest and torture of Don Giuseppe Morosini, a Roman priest, and partisan collaborator.²¹¹ She writes,

L'anno nuovo iniziò con l'arresto di un prete. Il quattro gennaio alle quindici, in via Pompeo Magno, in Prati, fu arrestato Don Giuseppe Morosini, appena uscito dal collegio Leonino con il suo ex alunno e collaboratore Marcello Buschi, tenente dell'esercito, che si era nascosto nel collegio insieme ad altri partigiani. Don Giuseppe aveva appena trentun anni. Fu accusato di spionaggio e di nascondere renitenti di leva e sbandati dell'esercito; avendo trovato armi nel collegio, fu accusato anche di traffico d'armi.

Fu torturato a via Tasso, dove venne rinchiuso e sottoposto a confronto massacranti per le sevizie a cui fu obbligato ad assistere; lo scopo era di fargli rompere il silenzio per far cessare la tortura inflitta al suo collaboratore e svelare, così, quel che sapeva in merito alla dislocazione in Roma delle varie basi di militari del fronte clandestino, di cui era certamente a conoscenza. Fu fucilato a forte Brevetta all'alba del tre aprile, primo lunedì di Pasqua. Sarebbe poi stato decorato medaglia d'oro al valore militare.

Don Morosini e Marcello Buschi erano stati traditi da un delatore al servizio del Gestapo, Dante Bruna [...] la somma ricevuta dal delatore per la “vendita” dei due patrioti ammontava in tutto settantamila lire.²¹²

Capponi's narration here is unembellished and quite simple as it often is when describing tragedies of this sort. She first starts off her description with an impersonal reference, communicating that “un prete” was arrested. She then names the victim, and states only the necessary facts of the situation. This kind of language also functions as a somber textual memorial to the priest, yet also calls attention to the fact that in wartime Rome, the Germans also tortured and murdered members of the clergy. Capponi also further mentions that one of the men, Marcello Buschi, was murdered at the Fosse Ardeatine, but

²¹¹ Don Giuseppe Morosini is often thought to be the priest that inspired the character of Don Pietro in the film *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945), however, it has come out that the character was actually fashioned after Don Pietro Pappagallo, another Roman priest who was an antifascist collaborator. Don Pappagallo, however, ended up as a victim in the Ardeatine massacre, which is not treated by Rossellini's film. Instead, the fate of Rossellini's character more closely resembles that of Don Giuseppe Morosini, as one can see from Capponi's description, and this is why Morosini is most often mistaken for the primary inspiration for Rossellini's Don Pietro. The fate of Don Pappagallo in the Ardeatine is, however, noted by Capponi- see Capponi p. 170.

²¹² Capponi, 155.

we have not yet reached that event in the text. As she makes reference to the Ardeatine at this point in her text, she does not stop to clarify and explain what it was as she has for the war in Africa and other basic historical events of the Second World War in Italy. From this, we can see that she is assuming that the reader is already informed about this event and its basic circumstance. Her reader, she likely imagines, has some conception of this event and its' corresponding circumstances, and as such, does not need the elementary explanations that she provides for other events. This then attests to the significance of the event and, consequently, to her own reputation. Also, in mentioning Buschi's fate, she is proving to the reader that she has had a personal connection to those murdered that day in the Ardeatine. As we can see, Capponi not only memorializes the dead companions, but she also immortalizes the names of traitors as well. In this case, the name of Dante Bruna is now published as a traitor, committed to collective memory. Capponi does this on several occasions so as to assign responsibility where it is due, and, in her own case, clarify the false assignment of responsibility by the same token.

Almost immediately after the description of Don Morosini and Marcello Buschi, Capponi then moves on to describe a partisan action involving a bomb. In this description, Capponi notes the exact placement of the bomb and calls attention to the fact that it was strategically placed so as not to hit any innocent passersby. She writes, "Paolo, Enzo Russo e Franco Dileria decisero di utilizzare due spezzoni da depositare in prossimità di uno degli ingressi all'interno del giardino onde evitare che la bomba, posta sulla finestra, colpisse dei passanti." Capponi then draws attention to her own instinctual action to try to save a German soldier that was about to walk by as the bomb was about to explode:

In quel momento un militare tedesco voltò dalla via Po sul corso d'Italia, quasi scontrandosi con noi: non so quale istinto mi spinse ad afferrarlo per il braccio gridandogli <<Bada, stai attento>>. Paolo mi tirò via e in quel momento la bomba esplose: [...] Ci allontanammo veloci, Paolo e Franco ci seguivano; poi ci dividemmo e ciascuno tornò al suo rifugio. Paolo mi chiese spiegazione del mio gesto--l'aver tentato di salvare quel soldato tedesco-, ma non c'era spiegazione logica, c'era solo la conferma che era difficile accettare l'idea della morte e che in noi restava ancora vivo l'istinto della solidarietà.²¹³

The contrast between German wartime behavior, and that of the partisans that Capponi cultivates in the space of two pages could not be more distinct. While the partisans try not to hurt innocent civilians, and even, at times, try to save their enemy (or, at least Capponi herself does), the Germans kill priests and include hundreds of civilians in an unprecedented massacre. This instinct to warn Germans of impending attacks, or, perhaps this internal conflict, is recurrent in the text. In a similar instance that takes place later on in the narrative, Capponi is responsible for directing a German troop into an ambush. She expresses her internal conflict:

Mi sedetti ad aspettare il passaggio di qualche pattuglia tedesca, che avrei dovuto dirottare verso il nostro insediamento facendo in modo che fosse attaccata dai partigiani...li indirizzai verso la strada che avevo percorso. Sentivo ansia e angoscia crescermi dentro per averli consapevolmente orientati verso un agguato e cercai nella memoria tutte le ragioni ideali e morali che potevano essermi di sostegno in quella pur atroce azione. Ne trovai tante che giunsi correndo a colle Francolino, carica di indignazione per aver avuto quel momento di dubbio.²¹⁴

While she does call attention to this continued sense of internal tension and anxiousness, she also consistently overcomes it, enough to keep participating in a major way in such actions. The expressed anxiety, however, makes her self-image quite human. In another striking example of Capponi's sense of conflict in relation to killing, she describes an instance just before an action where an almost dead baby bird falls into her hands from a

²¹³ Capponi, 157-158.

²¹⁴ Capponi, 275.

tree above. She narrates, “Arrivò Giovanni, osservò la piccola creatura che avevo in mano e mi disse: <<Dai, buttalo, è ora>>. Non potevo fare altro che allungare il braccio più in alto che potevo per sistemare l'uccellino nella forcina dei rami, e lì lo lasciai. Giovanni mi chiese: <<Hai la rivoltella?>>. Titubai prima di rispondere.”²¹⁵ Capponi's narrative continually makes evident these juxtapositions. These kinds of characterizations are an integral part of Capponi's creation of history as well as her strategy of self-defense.

In the part of Capponi's narrative dedicated to discussing Resistance activities in Rome, Capponi describes several of the specific actions that were realized, including several of those in which she was not the central protagonist. In individuating each action, Capponi continually notes three things: 1) whether or not there were bystanders that could be attacked and the precautions taken to prevent unnecessary injury, 2) the objective, the rationale behind the attack (because the partisans did not act out at random), and 3) the German reaction to the attack. In then situating via Rasella in this context, Capponi strengthens her defense.²¹⁶ *Con cuore di donna* is divided into ten chapters with titles reminiscent of what one would find in a history textbook (ex: *L'ombra della guerra*, *Roma città aperta e la nascita dei GAP*, *Ventitré marzo*, *via Rasella*, etc...) exhibiting again Capponi's concern with collective history. The chapter concerning via Rasella is the only one which stipulates a specific date, and this chapter, in fact, is comprised not only of a discussion of 23 March, but includes all of the events which occurred from

²¹⁵ Capponi, 218.

²¹⁶ We can see here another example of Capponi's calling attention to the partisan's consideration of innocent civilians: “...non potevamo attaccare i tedeschi dentro la borgata, poiché sarebbe stata la rovina per tutti gli abitanti. [...] Furono tutti d'accordo: non potevamo attaccarli nella trattoria, sarebbe stato facile ma era troppo in mezzo alle case.” Capponi, 188.

March 1, 1944 to the date in question. In providing a detailed panorama of events, and including them all in a chapter dedicated to one event in particular, Capponi makes the interconnectedness of these actions to the via Rasella attack apparent, thereby suggesting that, in her view, the via Rasella action cannot be viewed as an isolated attack with an isolated, expected repercussion. I believe this to be a primary pillar in her method of relating this history, upon which also the rest of her text and discussion of other events rests.

Accordingly, in the section before she describes the via Rasella incident, Capponi gives narrative space to a sort of reasoning for attacks on Germans. This reasoning is comprised of both the invocation of reference to the German disregard of the “open-city” status of Rome, and the consequent horrible living conditions that the Roman population had to endure. When read in light of the criticism she has incurred as a result of her participation in the attack, and also when read with regard to their placement in her narrative, they can be seen as necessary background and almost as a kind of justification for via Rasella.

The first line of reasoning, that of the reference to the ignored open-city status, is narrated in relation to a bombing that the partisans are about to carry out. Capponi explains, “Malgrado avessero più volte dichiarato Roma “città aperta”, i tedeschi continuavano a usarla come centro di smistamento delle truppe che combattevano sul fronte di Cassino, e lungo i viali tutta la città era occupata dai camion che ne regolavano il trasporto. Eravamo

decisi di impedire che Roma divenisse una retrovia delle forze armate naziste.”²¹⁷ In this section, Capponi seems even a bit instructive in describing how the situation was in Rome, whereas in the previous section of her text, she had mentioned the Ardeatine as if the reader would know it—as though even if the reader were not aware of the day to day socio-political climate of wartime Italy, the reader would still be familiar with the massacre. It is, after all, a selling point for the book in and of itself. In this simple description, she paints the Germans at fault—they are the one’s who did not obey the rules of the “open-city” declaration. As the partisans are about to complete the action, which consists of bombing German supply trucks, Capponi first makes reference to a German war crime that happened back in 1914, and she then goes on to explain the rationale behind the specific action that they are about to complete, so as to make it clear that everything was carefully calculated on the side of the partisans. While waiting to carry out this action, Capponi comments: “Tornai ad appoggiarmi alla stele: lessi il nome e scoprii che si trattava di un patriota impiccato dai tedeschi nella guerra 1914-18, Cesare Battisti. Strana coincidenza in cui volli scorgere un messaggio di solidarietà.” This observation serves to make continuous through history the characterization of the Germans as bad people, as if Italian patriots have always been fighting against the Germans. As mentioned earlier, and in accordance with the details that Capponi typically includes in her narration of partisan actions outlined previously, Capponi discusses the statement to be made by the action they are about to engage in: “Avevamo progettato di colpire i camion tedeschi che passavano per via Cavour: trasportavano pezzi di artiglieria e viaggiavano incolonnati. Volevamo colpirli per denunciare l’arbitrio di usare la città

²¹⁷ Capponi ,158.

come porto franco per lo smistamento di materiali e uomini diretti al fronte di Anzio e Cassino.”²¹⁸ This specific action was not random, but had as its intention to prevent weapons from reaching Germans on the front lines in Anzio and also to let the Germans know that the use of Rome as a base and transportation hub for their warfare was not unacceptable to those Italians who were fighting for the liberation of the country from Nazi and Fascist rule. Finally, and likewise correspondent to the previously identified schema for description, Capponi calls attention once again to the lack of civilians in the area surrounding the attack: “Guardavo la strada sottostante: il palazzo di fronte aveva le persiane chiuse, i negozi aperti erano allineati lungo il marciapiede, dove erano rari i passanti.”²¹⁹ All of these narrative choices help to create a personal and historical narrative which will encourage the reader to look more favorably on our narrator and the group to which she belonged.

The second component in Capponi’s strategy of reason and defense is discussion, prior to arriving at her description of the via Rasella incident, of the general sense of disillusionment felt in Rome, and the degradation of day to day life. We can sense that these kinds of descriptions, though realistic, are still included with the intention of arousing our sympathies as a reader. Often times Capponi comments in her narrative about the lack of water and soap and inability to bathe, paucity of food (and hence sacking of bread stores by women who are trying to feed their hungry children, etc...), and lack of heat. The image of wartime Rome that Capponi creates is not centered on heroic partisan or personal deeds, and, in fact, it lacks a distinct heroic tone. When she

²¹⁸ Capponi, 162.

²¹⁹ Capponi, 163.

discusses the general conditions of the city and the citizens, her narrative takes on a realist, unembellished, and in that way, an even poetic tone. This lengthy passage, which collects in one place in the narrative all of Capponi's pervasive comments and observations of this type, is poetic sounding, and, as such reaffirms the literary merit I assign to this book. Capponi writes:

Ognuno pensava che da Cassino o da Anzio a Roma si potesse far presto, e quando caddero le illusioni iniziò la paura di non farcela. L'intolleranza a restare chiusi, il rischio sempre più reale di rastrellamenti effettuati perquisendo quartiere per quartiere e casa per casa diede luogo a rischiosi trasferimenti per nuovi nascondigli, mentre fame, freddo, malattie e gli abiti che si andavano logorando accrescevano il disagio e la paura. Per i bombardamenti la città perdeva la funzionalità dei servizi, e vivere nascosti diveniva sempre più difficile. Lavarsi era un lusso permesso a pochi privilegiati nelle residenze dei quartieri occupati dai comandi tedeschi; spesso mancava l'acqua per bere, gli insetti infestavano anche le case della borghesia, la scabia si era diffusa per Roma, e per infestarsi era sufficiente andare in autobus, aggrapparsi ai sostegni o appoggiarsi ai mancorrenti, dove altri avevano lasciato i loro acari. L'odore nauseante del farmaco era avvertito fra i viaggiatori, nei bagni pubblici e nelle file per la distribuzione dei generi razionati. Eravamo tutti magrissimi, pallidi gli abiti cominciavano a caderci addosso, le scarpe avevano la suola già più volte rappezzata, ribattuta da chiodi, e c'era chi portava ancora in pieno inverno zoccoli di legno.

C'era però anche chi la mattina beveva il cappuccino con la brioche, chi spalmava il burro sul pane all'ora del tè, chi beveva vini prelibati per accompagnare bistecche e arrosti di selvaggina o di abbacchio. Riconoscevi subito chi intrallazzava con i fascisti e con i tedeschi: erano i soli che giravano ancora con le auto a gas, erano donne ben vestite che si recavano impellicciate agli spettacoli dell'opera per le truppe naziste. La città aveva due categorie di cittadini: una minoranza che se la intendeva con il nemico e gli altri, la maggioranza, che soffrivano, morivano, speravano nella liberazione.²²⁰

In articulating these conditions of Rome under the German occupation, Capponi provides a wider, more general scope to what she and her comrades were fighting against, and she provides this complete description just twelve pages prior to beginning her chapter on via

²²⁰ Capponi, 183-184.

Rasella. In calling attention to the fact that not everyone lived in these miserable conditions, she is also giving a clear picture of the fact that this was a civil war that was taking place in the country. She makes evident the divide between the different political entities of the population and the conditions they endured. Capponi first describes the general situation, then she puts herself into it ('eravamo tutti magrissimi...'), and then she contrasts that with the image of wealth- of which she clearly makes herself not a part. With this contrast, she seems to drive home the fact that partisan life was not one of glory, and in writing, she is not claiming glory for herself. But, in so painting herself in the desperate situation of the populace, again we have sympathy for her condition, and we sympathize with her for fighting against it.

We can further note two referential images that come to mind as a result of this description. First, the images of pale, thin people so emaciated that their clothes are falling off ('Eravamo tutti magrissimi, pallidi gli abiti cominciavano a caderci addosso...') recalls images of concentration camp inmates. It is consonant with the side of the war that is not the German side- in whichever country it might occur. Secondly, the description of the wealth of those who consorted with enemy brings to mind the character of Marina in Rosellini's *Roma, città aperta*. The attention to describing the two categories of citizens is interesting because she places the majority on her side, which likely draws in the reader to her plight. Immediately following this descriptive excurses, Capponi simply returns straight away to her personal story without any real verbal transition, leaving the above description to stand alone, thus increasing its' intensity.

Capponi's narrative treatment of via Rasella includes many of the already signaled trends in her methods of description. She begins by noting that the attack was well planned and well studied, with the objective not only of attacking the German troop that was to pass through, but also to plan an attack, "recando il minor danno possibile alla popolazione civile." To this end, she further specifies of via Rasella that it was, "priva di negozi nel tratto alto, verso via Quattro Fontane" and "nella parte inferiore era occupata solo da qualche piccola bottega artigiana, sempre chiusa nell'ora in cui transitava la colonna nazista."²²¹ Capponi also makes it a point to mention that she told children playing in a nearby garden to leave the area.

While Capponi's narrative is regularly characterized by one narration of partisan action after another interspersed with historical, quasi didactic sections, and reflective excurses, Capponi's moment of described reflection regarding the via Rasella attack is the longest yet in her narrative. It is as if her whole text has reached its' culmination in terms of important events, and she takes her time here to really craft the image that she needs to impart. Capponi reflects on the destiny of men in the field, and, again, calls into question the humanity of it all. She is very pensive about the action pre, during, and post attack and she shares her thoughts from those actual moments with the reader in this autobiography. This is interesting because often times we find that reflection happens at the time of the recounting of the events and not necessarily when the actual events took place. Capponi wants the reader to know that she thought about what was going on around her as things were happening—that she wasn't a desensitized automaton, someone

²²¹ Capponi, 221.

‘meticolosamente costruito per la guerra’ who, only at a distance of fifty years, is able to reflect and understand what was really happening. Rather, unlike the Germans she first introduced to us in the beginning of her narration, she was very ‘capace dei sentimenti umani.’ In sharing this part of her personality, Capponi highlights her own internal conflict between reason and instinct, one that, as we have seen, is recurring. Ultimately, however, she is convinced (and in so doing perhaps even convinces the reader) that she is doing the correct thing, and expresses no regret. She writes:

Avevo bisogno di ritrovare tutte le ragioni che mi portavano a compiere quell'attacco. Ripensai al bombardamento di San Lorenzo, a quella guerra ingiusta e terribile, alle voci dei bambini del brefotrofo imprigionati dal crollo, allo strazio delle distruzioni che si vedevano ovunque e di cui avevamo notizia ogni giorno; ai nostri compagni fucilati, torturati a via Tasso; a tutti i deportati di cui non avevamo più notizia; ai duemila ebrei nei lager; a tutti i paesi oltralpe sconvolti dalla devastazione. A quanti tra i miei amici erano già morti: sul fronte russo, in Grecia, in Jugoslavia, a mio cugino Amleto Tamburri morto al El Alamein, lui figlio di un socialista.

Malgrado questi pensieri, il mio animo era distante, e nel pensare a quei soldati non riuscivo a provare odio. I miei sentimenti erano in quel momento come raggelati, sospesi, come se non potessi più ritrovare tutta intera la ragione della mia scelta: i sentimenti di sdegno che avevano provato di fronte alle loro atrocità erano ormai lontani, come distaccati dalla coscienza che pure mi determinava ad agire, quasi in obbedienza a un dovere.

Ma a poco a poco mi convinsi che non preparavo un agguato a innocenti: quegli uomini erano stati educati, abituati a uccidere: l'operazione di “selezione della razza” (l'attuale pulizia etnica) era per loro un risanamento della società. Mi tornava alla memoria la disperata difesa della donna ebrea a cui avevano saccheggiato il negozio e che avrebbero ucciso; mi sentivo parte di quella tragedia come se avessi vissuto in prima persona lo sterminio teorizzato dal Ministero della Cultura Popolare. Così, recuperai la visione esatta della realtà che stavo vivendo: per tutti coloro che avevano sofferto ed erano morti ingiustamente, che erano ingiustamente perseguitati, per loro dovevo battermi.”²²²

²²² Capponi, 229.

The first section of this passage reads like a memorial plaque, as if to say “ This action is dedicated to...” Capponi then uses this list of categories of victims to convince herself that she was not going to be killing ‘innocenti’, and in this way she was able to justify the act of killing in general. But, the fact that she has to convince herself—“poco a poco” also intimates that this is a difficult process—and it is further evidence of what we have already seen- that she struggles with it and that all is not black and white for her; it is as if she is trying to justify her actions not only to herself, but also to the reader by spending so much time on her feelings and the “logic” behind the attack. While Capponi shares with the reader her mixed feelings about going through with this action, and needs to explore rationally the reasons that she is engaged in this situation, she ultimately pushes herself forward in the name of vindication, and, we might assume, hopes the reader will reach a similar conclusion in moral judgement. Like Gobetti, Capponi expresses compassion for the Germans, and admits to feeling that she cannot hate them, but, her admitted compassion serves a different function and seeks a different kind of valorization. While Gobetti’s feelings towards the Germans (‘semplicemente altri figli di altre madri’) render her maternal impulses and self-characterization strong and universal, Capponi’s compassion here evidences her concern with others and her own humanity, which, I argue, is intended to dissipate unfounded malicious characterizations of the protagonist.

Capponi, unlike Gobetti, overcomes her hesitation, ‘in obbedienza a un dovere.’ The word *dovere*, used rarely in the text, recalls the way Capponi talks about writing history on two aforecited occasions: ‘Scrivere le proprie esperienze credo sia un dovere civile per

chiunque abbia da testimoniare il suo tempo.’ and ‘sento quasi come un dovere di fissare i ricordi personali che coincidono con gli avvenimenti di cui sono stata testimone e in piccola parte protagonista.”²²³ These are things one simply must do- fight against the Germans in the name of liberation and vindication, and then provide testimony to one’s own experiences so that their memory is not manipulated or lost. But, does Capponi’s obedience then release her from responsibility or detach her from the action, as there is, ironically, something almost mechanical inherent in that word choice? In my estimation, it seems that Capponi does not feel separated from her actions themselves or from the repercussions of them. In writing about them, and her feelings towards them, she is drawing herself closer to them; she is not apologizing for them, but does recognize both the fighting and the telling as obligations to society and to herself. At the same time, however, such terminology is tricky in that it clearly recalls a most common defense employed by the Germans (and, consequently, not the Italians)—that of a recourse to duty as justification for violent action. I believe, however, in the case of Capponi, that while her word choice might beg the question, her sense of duty is not attempting to act as justification, but instead, motivation.

After this meditative excursus, Capponi’s next defensive strategy can be found in her theorizing about what the repercussions of the attack would be. In this particular section, Capponi revisits all of the partisan attacks previously described in her narrative and identifies the German response. In doing this she 1) places all of this information in one place so that one who might only read this one particular chapter can still have a context

²²³ Capponi, 12.

in which to place the via Rasella attack and Ardeatine reprisal, 2) provides an almost didactic review of the events of the Roman Resistance, and 3) she highlights the fact that the Ardeatine massacre was completely unprecedented based on the history of German response to partisan action and carried out without any legal proceedings. This final effect is central to the construction of her defense, as a continual accusation against herself and the others who were a part of the Rasella attack states that they should have 1) turned themselves in (though we have already established that there was no such opportunity, and even Capponi addresses this directly and reaffirms it: “A noi non era stata neppure proposta un'alternativa dai nazisti: 'Consegnatevi e le vittime designate saranno salve'. Se avessero posta questa condizione, avrebbero certamente messo in crisi la nostra coscienza”²²⁴) and 2) that they should have expected that such an act of retaliation would occur. Therefore, in bringing direct attention to actions and reactions, Capponi is directly addressing this accusation. Capponi writes:

Mi chiedevo: dopo tutti gli spari con i quali se era concluso l'attacco, quali reazioni sarebbero seguite? Come avrebbero risposto i nazisti? Per l'attacco contro i militari che uscivano dello spettacolo a piazza Barberini, avevano spostato il coprifuoco da mezzanotte alle diciannove; per l'azione compiuta da Giovanni contro il corpo di guardia nazista alle carceri, avevano proibito le biciclette; per l'attacco compiuto contro il corteo fascista a via Tomacelli, i tedeschi avevano proibito ai fascisti di organizzare manifestazioni nella città. Ma questa volta il nostro attacco aveva inferto un colpo assai più grave a un'intera compagnia tedesca.

Cercavo di convincermi che forse, come per la bomba posta al commando tedesco alloggiato nella pensione Santa Caterina, a via Po, avrebbero semplicemente bloccato le strade adiacenti ponendo un carro armato in mezzo alla via. Lo stesso attacco all'albergo Flora non aveva avuto conseguenze se non quella di provvedere ogni albergo di corpi di guardia che patugliassero dall'esterno. Speravo che anche questa volta la risposta limitasse alla sospensione degli insediamenti militari nella città e al divieto di attraversarla, da imporre alle truppe che si spostavano al Nord al Sud. Tutte ipotesi suggerite dal timore che la nostra azione potesse

²²⁴ Capponi, 240.

avere riflessi più drammatici, peraltro inevitabili in qualsiasi lotta condotta per liberare un paese dall'occupazione straniera.”²²⁵

While it is quite clear from this passage that such a significant reprisal as the one that occurred at the Ardeatine would not have fit into the schema of action and reaction elucidated above, Capponi does admit that the partisans did worry that the reaction to the via Rasella attack might be more dramatic. Given this realization, however, Capponi does make a point to say that whatever the case would be, it was ‘inevitabili in qualsiasi lotta condotta per liberare un paese dall'occupazione straniera.’ That is, when one is fighting to liberate a country from the conditions so meticulously discussed in her entire narrative and described in the meditative passage previously cited, there are certain conditions of war, such as reprisals, that are inevitable, and therefore guilt cannot be assigned if such things could not be prevented. This final statement, written as if it were then her present, also foreshadows the gravity of the reaction. Capponi then addresses the massacre, and, in her continued defense, calls into question its’ legality. She writes:

Trecentoventi uomini. Con quali meccanismi legali potevano coprire quel massacro? Tra gli oltre mille arrestati costretti nelle carceri o nelle case di tortura non vi erano tanti condannati a morte in attesa dell’esecuzione. Fino a quella data c’era stata un’unica esecuzione sommaria, sulla via Tiburtina, tra i partigiani e i giovani rastrellati al forte di Pietralata. Ma stragi per rappresaglia non erano seguite a nessuno degli attacchi subiti dai tedeschi, e ci chiedevamo come avessero potuto trasportare sul luogo di esecuzione una massa tale di uomini senza che la Resistenza, che pure era allertata e vigilava, ne avesse avuto notizia. Ci chiedevamo anche come avremmo potuto impedire quella rappresaglia. Preparandoci per attaccare in armi in convogli che portavano i condannati alla fucilazione? Pare che un’operazione del genere fosse riuscita a un gruppo di partigiani che conoscevano con certezza l’ora e il luogo dell’esecuzione.”²²⁶

Capponi again repeats here that such reprisals were out of “German character,” as she has diligently demonstrated thus far. She further states, and this corroborates the historical

²²⁵ Capponi, 236.

²²⁶ Capponi, 239.

accounts of Portelli and Katz, that the reprisal was kept in strict secrecy (though Katz emphatically argues that the Pope was alerted). The only way the partisans could have prevented the atrocity was if they had known about it. Capponi leaves no other option, as she has already insisted that 1) following through with the attack, despite some moral contentions, was the necessary thing to do to work towards achieving their goal (the liberation of Rome), and 2) there was no way of predicting this would occur so as to preemptively prevent it. Given that nobody had alerted them, no guilt can be assigned to them for its occurrence. This, I believe, is the intended conclusion for her reader to arrive at given the narrative content she has thus far provided. Capponi further pushes the point of legality, which has a particularly defensive tone, in her linguistic analysis of the infamous German communication announcing the advent of the massacre. She explains, “L'annuncio 'questo *ordine* è già stata eseguita' con cui terminava il breve comunicato, suonava come una sfida: non avevano scritto 'la sentenza è già stata eseguita', perché nessun tribunale avrebbe sancito una condanna così efferata, contro ogni legge, contro ogni morale, contro ogni diritto umano.” Her insistence on discussing the legality of the matter is, I believe a direct result of her being brought to trial several times, as discussed earlier. Therefore, Capponi’s rendering of all of the details of the post-attack situation can be read as an effort to clarify her own innocence, as well as her fellow partisans, as she does not single herself out from the group in this case. The Nazi’s, she maintains, in contrast to the partisans, acted, ‘contro ogni legge, contro ogni morale, contro ogni diritto umano’. To really drive this point home, Capponi then elaborates,

Dopo la liberazione di Roma, quando si indagò su quella strage si scoprì che solo tre delle vittime erano state condannate a morte con sentenza; neppure il tribunale tedesco installato a via Lucullo aveva avuto il coraggio o la possibilità di emettere una sentenza che desse appoggio

legale a quel massacro. Volevano farci intendere che al di sopra di tutte le leggi del diritto e della morale, c'erano gli "ordini" del comando nazista, il "Deutschland uber alles", della razza ariana, destinata a dominare tutte le altre considerate inferiori e per le quali non c'era bisogno né di tribunale, né di sentenze. Bastava un "ordine", anche quello di un caporale con la svastica sul braccio. Come avvenne alcuni giorni dopo via Rasella, di notte al ponte dell'Industria, dove dieci donne furono fucilate per un "ordine" deciso sul posto da un caporale della Wermacht.

Ormai i padroni erano solo loro.²²⁷

Again the defensive tone is prevalent, emphasizing that the German "ordini" must be above every law because an action like that would never have been allowed under law. To further accentuate the cruelty that she so strongly attributes to the German soldiers, Capponi brings attention to another massacre, granted smaller in scope, but still, in her characterization, as arbitrary and illegal. In specifically concentrating part of her narrative treatment of this event on legal discourse, Capponi is clearly acting in self-defense.

The final way in which I read defensive tendencies in this narrative is the way in which Capponi describes the treatment of prisoners on both sides. She draws the expected contrast, further underlining the German inclination to kill, and the partisan tendency to do what is fair and humane, and to try their best to follow the wartime laws for the treatment of prisoners. This continued painting of this dichotomy is striking. In a poignant passage, Capponi describes how the partisans share their food with German prisoners, to the detriment of their own nourishment. This plays particularly well into her humane characterization of the partisans because it takes place *after* the Ardeatine massacre, when the partisans could have easily let that rage influence their treatment of

²²⁷ Capponi, 240.

prisoners. Instead, however, they are concerned with keeping them alive and satisfying their basic needs. Capponi writes,

[...]Paolo distribuì il “rancio” dividendo tra tutti, prigionieri e partigiani, dieci pagnotte procurate da Dante. Ci toccò un fondo di gavetta con un po’ di brodo, e a me un solo pezzo di pecora: intinsi la mia porzione di pane nel brodo, e infine, quasi sazia, mi bevvi le ultime gocce di quel liquido che odorava così fortemente di pecora. Solo allora mi accorsi che Paolo era rimasto senza razione perché i nuovi prigionieri avevano concorso a ridurre le porzioni di tutti. Riuscì a raccogliere nella sua gravetta qualche goccia di brodaglia rimasta nel fondo dei contenitori, ma non aveva potuto mangiare neppure un pezzo di pane. Ormai gli uomini catturati erano troppi e ogni giorno diventava sempre più difficile soddisfare il fabbisogno di cibo e di acqua[...]

Un giorno i prigionieri avevano protestato e uno di loro aveva cercato di dirci in un pessimo italo-francese che dovevamo rispettare le norme internazionali per i prigionieri di guerra: così loro che non avevano rispetto nemmeno per i bambini e che non facevano prigionieri i “Banditen” ma li uccidevano, ora chiedevano a noi di applicare norme che violavano costantemente che noi, oltretutto, non avevamo alcuna possibilità di rispettare, pur volendolo. Alla fine si resero conto che non stavamo meglio di loro, quanto a vitto, e che tutto sommato dovevano ritenersi fortunati di aver avuto salva la pelle.²²⁸

In this description, Capponi represents the partisans as, to a minor extent, self-sacrificing in the name of doing what is right and just. It recalls the description by Viganò in *L’Agnese va a morire* in which the rules of partisan life are explained.²²⁹ In speaking of the partisans in this way in general, and then most specifically about an incident that included both herself and Paolo (Rosario Bentivegna, in reality), another protagonist in the via Rasella attack, Capponi further adds to her defense in terms of character. That is,

²²⁸ Capponi, 279.

²²⁹ Viganò writes, “Nella vita partigiana, che si governava con leggi proprie, dettate da un personale bisogno di onore, di fede, di pulizia morale, di ordine intimo, guai se non fosse esistita quella volontaria forma di giustizia, anche in quello che sembrava scarsa importanza. Chi tradiva veniva immediatamente eliminato, e si castigava con severità anche un piccolo errore: era necessario, dunque, che la fedeltà, il coraggio, l’amore per la resistenza, fossero riconosciuti, tenuti in conto. Non c’erano ricompense, né premi, né promesse per l’avvenire, né suono di frase retoriche. Bastava una parola, un accenno, per dimostrare che il compagno comandante o il compagno dirigente o i compagni di lotta avevano capito il valore, la sostanza dell’individuo, la sua misura di sacrificio, di volontà e di capacità.” *AVM*, 227.

while some might argue that not all partisans enacted this sense of morality in all of their behaviours, Capponi clearly states that both she and Paolo did. Not only does Capponi demonstrate how the partisans treated their prisoners, but she explicitly contrasts their approach to the practice of the Germans who, ‘non facevano prigionieri i “Banditen” ma li uccidevano...’ And, this final point, particularly in light of the fact that this contrast comes after three hundred and thirty-five Italians were massacred, only three of which had actual death sentences, is, in my reading central. We are now towards the end of Capponi’s narrative, near the end of the war in Rome and she provides very clearly the following contrast with regard to the killing of prisoners. In this instance, in which she herself is involved, Capponi recounts a situation in the mountains where she and Paolo were left alone with several prisoners and they were unsure if help would arrive. She writes, “Non eravamo tanto sicuri che i compagni sarebbero tornati a darci man forte e decidemmo che, se non fossero arrivati entro sera, avremo dovuto provvedere a portare via tutte le armi: uno di noi avrebbe svolto quel compito e poi, durante la notte, ce ne saremmo andati lasciandoli liberi (i prigionieri). Non c’erano alternative. Non ci passò mai per la testa di entrare con il mitra e ucciderli tutti.”²³⁰ In this situation, it is interesting to note that the prisoners were being held in a cave. The fact that they had German prisoners in a cave after the Ardeatine, and Capponi insists that it didn’t even enter their heads to enter into the cave and kill them automatically, and quite clearly not only recalls the Ardeatine massacre, but in so doing she places herself, in her defense, on an altogether different moral plane- She and Paolo here have regard for ‘i diritti umani.’

Capponi then goes on to counterpose this image of the treatment of prisoners to a specific

²³⁰ Capponi, 283. Along these same lines, Capponi notes in another passage how they gave those German soldiers who were killed in battles a proper burial: “Seppellito i tre morti in un campo, portammo con noi i prigionieri nel rifugio...” (Capponi, 276).

instance of the way the Germans treated Italian prisoners at the end of the war. With the same simple and clean language she used to narrate the execution of Don Giuseppe Morosini, she states, “Sedici prigionieri furono lasciati su un camion, forse con l’intento di usarli quali mezzo di scambio con chi li avesse bloccati nella fuga. Quei sedici furono trovati cadaveri località La Storta, sulla Cassia: un colpo alla nuca, riversi a terra, le mani legate dietro la schiena.”²³¹ The contrast is clear.

TOWARDS SELF DEFINITION

*“Finita la Guerra raccontava che, quando ero nata io, si era rallegtrato che fossi una bambina e disse a mia madre, che quasi gli chiedeva scusa per non aver partorito un maschio:<<Meno male che è femmina, almeno non farà la Guerra>>.”*²³²

When Capponi was awarded the Gold Medal of Military Valor by the Italian government, she was recognized for her participation and it was noted that “with gun in hand, first among the first, she participated in tens of actions, distinguishing herself [...]”²³³ The blurb on the back of the first edition (2000) of her narrative states, “Nelle pagine di questo libro, scopriamo che la giovane partigiana che ruba le armi agli ufficiali fascisti ha ricevuto un'educazione borghese in una famiglia colta ed emancipata.”²³⁴ In his text dealing with the history of the Resistance, Giorgio Bocca, in discussing female *gappiste*, talks about Capponi. He writes, “Qualcuna combatte. Si dirà di Carla Capponi, la

²³¹ Capponi, 302.

²³² Capponi, 111. Capponi is speaking here of her father who fought in World War I.

²³³ Katz, *Death in Rome*, 238.

²³⁴ Il Saggiatore. 1/22/2009 [http://www.saggiatore.it/home_saggiatore.php?n=4&b_id=151&l=it].

gappista romana che attacca da sola, coraggiosa come gli uomini, spesso più calma.”²³⁵

Together with her intention of self-defense, as just previously discussed, Capponi also seeks to define and differentiate herself in her narrative through her intrepidity and her sense of initiative. Discussions of Capponi’s desire for, procurement of and use of weapons are present throughout, and while her self image of compassion and humanity is unwavering, as we have explored in detail in the previous section, Capponi seems to make it clear that she was just as capable as a man to fight with weapons, and had the desire to do so. Capponi, as she self-fashions, and as we saw with Elsa Oliva, was a *donna combattente*, and in also weaving this theme consistently through her narrative she both defines herself as such, and also admits into the history of the Resistance the existence of women in arms. Capponi also dedicates a fair amount of narrative space to expositions of various Resistance activities in which women were involved, both armed and not, so as to further create a space for them in her historical narrative.²³⁶ From the previously quoted citations, it is clear that Capponi is not alone in highlighting this part of her own character. This section will briefly demonstrate the ways Capponi discusses her bravery and her initiative regarding weapons and fighting, and will show how she defines herself, to an extent, by these qualities for herself and her readership. Capponi states in the beginning of her narrative, “La memoria mi definisce[...] ‘Ricordo, quindi sono’ dico per assurdo.” *Con cuore di donna* is comprised of her memories, and therefore, in this way, can be read, through Capponi’s declaration, as a definition of self.

²³⁵ Bocca, 222.

²³⁶ Capponi also wrote a speech, “Parlerò a nome di tutte le donne,” in which she directly takes up the theme of women in the Resistance and she discusses and honors their involvement, a further reminder that this was also a theme that was very dear to her. In this text, Capponi provides a lot of facts, figures, and specific names and events so as to give veritable substance to this topic. The printed version of the speech can be found in, *Italian Fascism and Antifascism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Stanislao Pugliese (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 172-178, or, alternatively, see *Le donne della Resistenza* at <www.romacivica.net/novitch/FosseArdeatine/carla.html>

In the first part of her narrative, Capponi describes her childhood and how her parents had “costruito con cura le basi della nostra cultura sul modello di un vivere sociale che era l’opposto dei canoni culturali fascisti,” and that they had “fatti tali scelte per prepararci non alla vita del regime, che contestavano e disprezzavano, ma a quel mondo di giusti, di uguali, di liberi che era stato il sogno ideale della loro giovinezza.”²³⁷

Capponi then admits that such an approach on the part of her parents had created in herself and her sister a sense of “incompatibile diversità, ma anche la coscienza e l’orgoglio di sentirci diverse, pur fra tanti disagi.”²³⁸ Capponi then goes on to describe the psychological results of being raised in an antifascist household in a fascist country. She describes her internal regression from being self-confident to feeling a sense of timidity take over her because the world around her became more complicated and more difficult to understand. This feeling of being *diversa* translated, for the young Capponi, into a reservedness that was attributed to not being in an environment where her sense of morality was in synch with the society in which she lived. Capponi explains,

Prima il mondo mi appariva semplice e lineare da capire, e a ogni evento sapevo dare con sicurezza una spiegazione poiché la mia vita era fatta di cose essenziali, facili perché logiche: ora, ogni anno che passava mi portava nuove difficoltà e problemi, e cresceva in me il sospetto che il mondo non fosse né facile né comprensibile, anzi, fosse ostile e irto di invisibili nemici. Così, a poco a poco erano diminuite la mia baldanza e la mia sicurezza, e una timidezza paralizzante si impossessò di me. I dubbi mi resero più indifesa e fragile, tanto che per anni non riuscii a vincere quella disgraziata reazione all’impatto improvviso con una realtà a cui non ero preparata. [...] e questo rappresentò per me la più tragica delle avventure esistenziali.²³⁹

²³⁷ Capponi, 34.

²³⁸ Capponi, 34.

²³⁹ Capponi, 53.

Capponi's pusillanimity slowly diminishes as she begins to become aware of the various wars that occur in the years just before the Resistance, that is the Spanish Civil War, and the Italian campaign in Africa, and is able to begin to associate the reactions with people close to her to those political events. Ultimately, as she admits, the world stopped making sense to her, and in an effort to rectify that situation, Capponi participated in the war on the side that she most identified with—that made the most sense to her. In doing this, she was able not only to restore her sense of comprehension because she had a clear idea of what she was fighting for and against, but, also, as a result, through this decision and experience, Capponi sheds her timidity, and demonstrates a fearlessness and self-assuredness that is inspired, I believe, by her feeling again a part of a world of people who hold the same ideals as herself both internally and externally; in theory and in practice— a world where she no longer feels *diversa*. Capponi's *timidezza*, I argue, was ultimately overcome by her determination to physically fight in the Resistance. In this capacity, fighting with comrades who were of a similar mentality as she, Capponi was able to overcome her shyness, and instead, nurture her bravery and boldness, and for this reason it is interesting to read the following episodes in light of this development.

Capponi's bravery, and insistence on being a part of the action, are made quite evident from the beginning of her narration of her Resistance participation, which began on 9 September 1943. Capponi's discussion of this first battle sets the stage for the reactions and actions we can then expect from her in her demonstration of her conviction that women can fight in the same capacity as men, and her dedication to seeking out ways to be involved in warfare to that same extent. In this first description, as we will read,

Capponi is met with resistance from both her mother, and other men rushing to be part of the action as well. In the early morning after the bombings, a group of civilians ran down Capponi's street inviting people to come down and help fight. Capponi wants to go participate, and her mother thinks she is crazy because she is a woman. Capponi describes, "A quell'invito pensai che anch'io avrei potuto essere utile in un luogo dove si combatteva: <<Io vado>> dissi a mia madre. <<Ma sei matta! Ma che ci va a fare una donna? Quell'invito è rivolto agli uomini.>> <<Vado a vedere. Donne e uomini saremo tutti utili.>>" Capponi then joins the group of people in the street headed to the battle, and this point she is questioned again about her participation because she is female, and once again, she maintains her conviction to participate in the battle. She continues a bit later, "L'uomo che guidava il gruppo mi chiese dove fosse diretta: <<Vengo con voi>>. <<Hai qualche parente tra i soldati?>> <<No>> risposi secca <<cercherò di rendermi utile.>> <<Brava! Ma lo sai che qui fra poco si combatterà?>> <<Per questo sono qui>> risposi."²⁴⁰ In this exchange, Capponi shows that the man leading the group, on first instinct, assumes that Capponi would have no other reason to be there other than to be looking for a relative. The leader then, as if to really make sure Capponi was aware of what she was doing, reminds Capponi that a battle will ensue shortly. In demonstrating the doubt and resistance that she encountered, solely on account of her gender, and then in showing her determination to make herself useful even in a battlezone, Capponi most certainly characterizes herself as interested in battle right from the beginning.

²⁴⁰ Capponi, 96.

Capponi spends quite a bit of time discussing and describing the progression of events on that day and her attitude towards and participation in them, consistently with an eye towards establishing from the beginning her *bravura*. In this way, we see a strong contrast to the narrative of Ada Gobetti in which this kind of narration is altogether absent from *Diario Partigiano*. Similar, however, to Elsa Oliva, Capponi does make a comment about a battle and a group of women, as if she is distinguishing herself as apart *from* that group rather than a part *of* that group. She writes, “C’erano combattimenti e il clamore delle armi si udiva dappertutto. Un gruppo di donne ci raggiunse portando una damigiana d’acqua per i soldati.”²⁴¹ In this instance, Capponi situates herself among the soldiers, ‘*ci raggiunse*,’ and is not part of the ‘gruppo di donne’ that are responsible for supplying the basic life force that is water. This is not to say that Capponi will not carry out tasks other than those involving combat, but in this way, she makes it clear that she is capable and comfortable with combat. This recalls Oliva’s comment, as discussed in Chapter 2, about troops marching off to battle in which Oliva situated herself as part of the troops and not as part of the groups of women who were hugging the soldiers goodbye. We can remember Oliva’s words: “Al nostro passaggio il popolo grida, acclama entusiasta, le donne piangono e ci abbracciano. Guardo i volti dei miei compagni e li vedo tutti belli, vedo belli anche Pulso e Giovanin, quel mattino, perché l’entusiasmo ci trasfigura.”²⁴²

In still describing this same day of fighting, that was, in reality, a very long day, Capponi describes another incident which highlights her intrepidity in a way that inverts

²⁴¹ Capponi, 99.

²⁴² Oliva, *Ragazza partigiana*, 43.

stereotypical gender expectations. In this situation, Capponi witnesses an Italian vehicle across the street that was struck by enemy fire and sees a young boy trying to escape as smoke is coming out of it. She notes that it was about to go up in flames, and then, in a very detailed (perhaps even prolonged) manner, she describes her heroic, instinctual reaction. She writes,

Senza riflettere, scesi dal terrapieno degli oleandri e attraversai la strada di corsa, solo allora rendendomi conto che la distanza che mi separava dal carro era molto.

I colpi passavano sopra di me; continuai a correre e, giunta sotto il carro, mi accorsi che era di piccole dimensioni, uno di quelli comunemente chiamati 'scattole di sardine' dagli stessi soldati, scelto appositamente di bassa statura. Non fu facile tirare il soldato fuori dal portello, si lamentava aggrappandosi alle mie spalle. Riuscii a trascinarlo giù, il peso del corpo mi sovrastava mi fece perdere l'equilibrio ed entrambi finimmo sul selciato. Mi sollevai, lui sembrava svenuto e lo afferrai sotto le ascelle; non c'era tempo, i carri armati tedeschi sparavano [...]

Temevo che potesse avvenire quello che avevo visto già all'Ostiense: i tedeschi che sparavano ai feriti rimasti sul selciato. Dovevo assolutamente portarlo lontano. [...] lo portavo sulle spalle, era leggero ma ogni tanto ero costretta a fermarmi.

All'altezza dell'arco di trionfo di Costantino, accanto al colosseo, cominciai ad accorgermi che pesava troppo: fino a quel momento la paura mi aveva impedito di avvertire lo sforzo che stavo compiendo[...]

Compresi che mi stavo cacciando in un'avventura più grande delle mie possibilità fisiche.[...]Il giovane era di nuovo svenuto e ora lo trascinavo con grande fatica[...].²⁴³

In this scene, Capponi, without thinking of her own safety, saw that a soldier was in danger, and went to save him under pressure of impending German fire. In her description, Capponi highlights not only her compassion, but also her bravery, physical strength, and ability to overcome fear. Not only does she save him herself by pulling him from the car (rather than call on someone else for help), but in an even more super-hero like way, she lifts him on her shoulders, and carries him quite a distance to safety, stating

²⁴³ Capponi, 101.

that the soldier ‘era leggero.’ She further calls attention to the feat she was performing by stating that she wasn’t aware of it while she was executing it. While she eventually admits that the soldier was heavy, she tells the reader that she continued to carry him, thus diminishing her larger than life self-image to one of simple heroicism and self-sacrifice. Though this scene can be read through the trope of a self-sacrificing woman acting on instinct to save a life, thus, as Gilligan suggests, not including herself amongst the people she cares for, I rather read Capponi’s intention with this description as accentuating her ability not only to participate in combat, but to save fellow soldiers in the same way that soldiers might stereotypically save women and children—lifting them on their backs and carrying them to safety as if there were minimal, if any, effort required. With this image, Capponi enacts an inversion of gender roles so as to make space in history for women who can take initiative in a war zone, be heroic, overcome fear, and do so with success—and she uses herself as an example.

Capponi continues the construction of this self-image as her narrative progresses, and highlights throughout her text specific incidences in which she has had to insist on assuming a main role in combative action. Central, however, to being involved in armed combat is the possession and operation of a firearm. Capponi realizes this, and also includes episodes that take up the topic of women and weapons. When Capponi first joins the Resistance, she asks for a weapon and is constantly denied one, and instead is reminded that her primary function, as a woman, is to pretend to be the girlfriend of the man who was going to complete and attack and act as a form of cover and distraction. Though this was a common task assigned to female Resistance participants, this kind of

involvement in a primary way was unacceptable to Capponi. Capponi knew that with a weapon, she would be more centrally involved in the attacks and if the organization would not provide her with a gun, she would take the initiative to procure one for herself, and, in fact she is successful. Capponi explains the situation:

Anch'io volevo procurarmi un'arma che mi veniva costantemente negata dai compagni dei GAP perché, secondo loro, noi donne dovevamo limitarci a mascherare la loro presenza nei luoghi degli attacchi fingendo di essere le fidanzate: erano convinti che, così, avrebbero corso meno rischi. A me riuscì a rubarne una sull'autobus a un giovane della GNR: era nuovissima, una Beretta 9 con relativo caricatore, che il ragazzo teneva stretta ai fianchi con cinturone[...]Con aria trionfale, poggiando la rivoltella sul tavolo, mostrai il mio primo “bottino di guerra.”²⁴⁴

Capponi does not like to be denied things and told to go home or only engage in typically female roles. In this situation, she is denied a weapon by her male superiors, and so she takes it upon herself to acquire one. The way in which she goes about doing it, stealing one from the belt of a GNR (Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana) official, further accentuates her boldness in acquiring what she wants. However, even after she successfully steals the weapon from the holster of her enemy, she is slightly afraid to bring it with her into action, not because she is afraid to use it, but because she is afraid it will be taken from her by her comrades, as was the revolver that her father had left her. In speaking about an action, Capponi explains this situation. She writes, “Rodolfo e Paolo erano armati; io no, né avrei potuto esserlo perché l'unica rivoltella che possedevo—quella in dotazione a mio padre quale ufficiale del Genio, una Hope corredata da venticinque proiettili—l'aveva presa Luciano Lusana a ottobre, con la scusa che a me non sarebbe servita. Quanto alla bella Beretta, l'avevo lasciata a casa ben nascosta perché continuamente insidiata dai miei compagni.” Because she is a woman, she would have no

²⁴⁴ Capponi, 125-126.

use for a gun, and, therefore, she is not permitted by her superiors to be armed. This is the excuse that she continually comes up against, and one that, in her narrative, she likewise speaks out against. In this particular episode, though she has a gun that she could theoretically carry with her, she fears it will be taken from her, so she keeps it hidden, which, in essence, defeats its purpose.

As the Resistance progresses, however, Capponi becomes more bold and demanding in her insistence on taking part in armed actions. There is no more *timidezza paralizzante* of which to speak. While the men want to regularly assign her responsibilities of a stafetta or one who provides cover for the central protagonists of any give action, Capponi, unlike Gobetti, is firm in her desire to participate in a more combative way. She rejects assignments that blatantly treat her like a woman. In speaking of one action, she writes, “Paolo aveva deciso che lui e Franco avrebbe fatto da copertura insieme a me: ma io non accettai e pretesi di compiere l’operazione con Paolo, lasciando Franco e Enzo a farci copertura.” Again, with this statement Capponi attempts to invert traditional gender roles even as recognized within the structure of the Resistance, perhaps to demonstrate that she is capable and possesses the bravery to be the one that is to be covered, and not the one merely providing backup.²⁴⁵ Capponi brings to light several situations similar to this one where she rejects being blatantly treated differently because she is a woman. In another example, we see that just as an attack on German trucks is about to occur, Capponi learns that she is the reserves, and implies that this is a result of her gender. While in this case

²⁴⁵ Capponi does in fact achieve this, as at one point towards the end of the narrative in a description of another actions, she states, “Raggiunsi Paolo che mi aspettava rispondendo al fuoco per coprire la mia fuga.” (Capponi, 286) Though the tables eventually turn, or so to speak, even if episodically, Capponi still has to insist on that dynamic.

she has a firearm, she is not on the frontlines, and this is unacceptable. Capponi reads this assignment as a challenge and affront to her combative abilities, and takes it upon herself to prove that she can *fare la sua parte*. She explains,

Dal costone Giacomino ci gridò: <<Arrivano>>. Paolo fece segno di tenersi pronti con le armi puntate all'incirca all'altezza del cruscotto, nel mezzo dei fari. Lui e Vittorio avevano il mitra e compresi che mi tenevano di riserva: con quel fucile era come se portassi le armi di ricambio, le tasche piene di caricatori. Mi venne rabbia e decisi: <<Ora vi faccio vedere che anch'io so fare la mia parte>>.[...] Così feci, felice di aver scoperto da sola come cavarmela, e lanciai un'esclamazione che fu interpretata da Paolo come un grido di dolore; mi chiese se fossi ferita. Ero già al secondo caricatore, i camion erano bloccati, ammassati disordinatamente sulla strada ai margini.²⁴⁶

In this situation, Capponi clearly did not simply accept the task of supplying replacement weapons and ammunitions to those who were engaged in combat. Instead, she took this opportunity to prove herself, and, in fact, she expresses pride in being able to figure out ‘da sola come cavar(se)la.’ It is through these moments, particularly because they are the ones that return most vividly in her memory as she writes her autobiography, that she defines herself. It is in this capacity, as a brave, yet compassionate warrior that she remembers herself during those years of war, and, consequently it is the self-image that she chooses to inscribe in her contribution to national collective memory of the Resistance. While she is part of a team, she is still somewhat isolated in as much as she is a woman. In sharing this variety of “discrimination” with the reader, and further demonstrating how she was incited to feats of *bravura* as a result of it, Capponi is making a place for women (albeit self-servingly) and the struggles they faced, in the written history of the Roman Resistance.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Capponi, 181.

²⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that during the war, Capponi held history lessons for women in her apartment. When this group met, they also produced publications relevant to women’s issues. This furth

We can remember that we saw a similar hard-headedness against gender discrimination in the texts of Oliva, where she tells the reader that she made it clear to the commanders of the partisan brigades that she did not join them to “lavare i piatti,” and further explains her dreams of a “bel mitra.”²⁴⁸ Capponi, like Oliva, rebels against being left out of actions. In another instance just before an action, Capponi clearly explains another situation where she was to be left out, and then speaks of her reaction. She narrates, “Paolo scelse cinque partigiani tra i più giovani; anch'io ero pronta, ma lui voleva lasciarmi alla base. **Mi ribellai** [emphasis added] e dissi che avrei partecipato all'azione.”²⁴⁹ While Capponi is, as we have seen, insistent on including in her narrative her armed, physical participation in partisan actions, and the recurrent resistance that she was met with at various points regarding her actual participation in these feats, Capponi also complicates these images with comments that signal a dislike for guns and for using them. In describing her thoughts just before an action towards the end of her narrative, she admits, “In cuor mio speravo di trovarmi di nuovo in una situazione favorevole che non mi costringesse a sparare e uccidere,”²⁵⁰ yet, as we have seen, she is the one who continually insists on being involved in such situations. Though comments like this one demonstrate internal discomfort, or a sense of conflict about participation in armed combat, they are counterbalanced (and, perhaps even outnumbered) by those moments (previously highlighted) where Capponi boldly seeks out a role that will place her squarely in the center of the action.

affirms and demonstrates Capponi's interest in these issues, and we see them manifest in her personal narrative.

²⁴⁸ See Chapter 2, p. 17.

²⁴⁹ Capponi, 286.

²⁵⁰ Capponi, 293.

A second and final example of this conflict can be seen in Capponi's contradictory depiction of self and guns at the end of the war. About half-way through the text, Capponi speaks of a fellow *partigiana*, also named Carla, who was arrested by the Germans, and, as she foreshadows, Capponi will see her again only at the end of the war, on 5 June 1944. Capponi writes, "Con Carla ci saremmo riabbracciate il cinque giugno, alla liberazione di Roma: lei era appena uscita dal carcere e io avevo deposto le armi che tanto avevo odiato e che pensavo di non dover mai più usare."²⁵¹ This comment is the first and only comment in which Capponi expresses a clear distaste for firearms in particular (we have already seen her internal conflict over the act of killing), and comes as a surprise when considered against her previous endeavor to steal one (and then reserved use of the stolen weapon so as not to give her companions the opportunity to requisition it from her). Further, it becomes perhaps more striking when it is considered against her own self-description at the end of the war that is contained in the end of her narrative. At the end of the text, Capponi writes of the day Rome was liberated by the allies, 4 June 1944: "Stavo tornando con il fucile in spalla, la fascia tricolore al braccio, il pennello e la colla in mano, quando incontrai sul portone le tre sorelle Mafai: Miriam, Simona, e la piccola Giuliana."²⁵² Though this last image, seems incongruous with the first which references the same time period, we must remember that fundamentally the final image we are left with as the text closes is that of a woman returning from war with a rifle on her back. Even after intimating such feelings of hate for firearms ('le armi che

²⁵¹ Capponi, 168.

²⁵² Capponi, 303. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Miriam Mafai wrote a book entitled *Pane nero* (Milano: Mondadori, 1987), which is dedicated to the subject of women and daily life during the Second World War, tells the stories of several women, emphasizing the plurality of roles adopted and experiences undergone.

tanto avevo odiato'), the ultimate image with which Capponi chooses to leave the reader is that of herself returning from the war with a 'fucile in spalla,' and this is notably an image which recurs also in her short piece on women in the resistance, *Parlerò a nome di tutte le donne*. While, for the most part, that piece does not really concentrate on Capponi's experiences and actions, and rather speaks of other women and other essential Resistance activities carried out by women, she does, in the last paragraph move from the collective to the personal and leave the reader with an image of herself returning from war, again with 'fucile in spalla' - almost the same image, verbatim, with which she ends her own autobiographical narrative.²⁵³

It is therefore clear that Capponi's objectives with her narrative were manifold. The two most prominent, however, in my reading of this text, are 1) to supplement national memory of the war years by providing testimony of her own experiences and those of her comrades—which Capponi herself regards as an obligation ('un dovere civile')—with a particularly strong intention and attention towards continued self-defense, (constructed through the various narrative techniques discussed in the section of this chapter entitled *In Defense of Self*) in hopes of “setting the record straight,” or so to speak, and 2) to make a space for both women warriors and female Resistance participants within the national discourse associated with Resistance history, and, more specifically, to use herself as an example, thus creating for herself and offering to the reader a definition and characterization of herself in war as not only capable, but also intrepid, determined, and

²⁵³ “Me ne tornavo con il fucile in spalla, il pennello e la colla in mano quando sul portone vedo arrivare le tre sorelle Mafai, Miriam, Simona e la piccola Giuliana. [...] Era il 4 giugno 1944.” (Capponi, *Parlerò a nome di tutte le donne*, 178.)

humane. Consequently, both of these objectives complement each other, and are organically connected, as we have discussed. In these ways, Capponi uses writing, just as we have seen with Oliva and Gobetti, as a method of distinct self-fashioning, continued resistance and personal and collective testimony.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has illuminated the myriad, often complicated, motivations involved in the production of autobiographical writings by women who participated in the Italian Resistance during the Second World War, and it has analyzed the narrative methods involved in their selected forms of self-representation. Rooted in the discovery that representations of women involved in the War seem to flourish in the genre of autobiography, this project examined the writings of three different women whose experiences of the war varied in terms of geography and activities engaged in. The texts considered further differ in terms of publication dates, which span a fifty-year time period, approximately. This diversity in selection has allowed me to individuate qualities of and intentions with the writing that remain constant through this very particular sub-genre of autobiography (that is, women's writing of the Italian resistance), as well as those that seem to change as more time passes between the events depicted and their representation. In discussing the historical and cultural situation of post war Italy, as I did in Chapter 1, I was then able to analyze each narrative in light of my initial hypothesis that, with their writings, these women are inserting themselves into literary and historical traditions that have traditionally excluded or misrepresented them, and that these texts, for each of these women, embody a spirit of continued resistance to the inadequacy of existing historical documentation or of prevalent patriarchal ideologies.

In my examination of the writings of Elsa Oliva, I showed that gender identification, for this writer, is an ongoing process: a concept that is constantly negotiated, but with the

motivation of the creation of a self that is shown to be brave, fearless, and capable of armed combat. This self-image is in direct opposition to the popular maternal or subordinate representations of women that were widespread in post-war Italian society. In examining two different narratives by the same author which overlap in their discussion of certain resistance events, I was also able to begin to individuate differences in the writing that indicate when the narrative was written. As I have shown, the predominant use of the present tense in *Ragazza partigiana*, demonstrates an immediacy of communication commensurate with the impulse to tell and verify that characterized the immediate post-war period. With the intention, in part, of confirming for herself her own involvement in the Resistance as a woman warrior, this first text leaves very little space for reflection and sentiment, which are two characteristics that we see emerge in her later writing, *Bortolina. Storia di una donna*.

In my analysis of Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano*, I established the feminine qualities of her narrative choices drawing from psychological and sociological/psychoanalytic theory of women's development and sexual difference. In doing so, I discussed the way that this text, in foregrounding the maternal nature of Gobetti's participation rather than calling attention to her political, social, and academic achievements and leadership roles, can be read as form of resistance to patriarchal ideology regarding women that awards no socio-political validation to such behaviors. In publicly privileging this aspect of herself through her narrative techniques, Gobetti uses her political standing and recognition decades after the war to encourage a revaluation of the feminine practices of caring and nurturing. This text then presents an inversion of the goals and methods of Oliva.

In my discussion of *Con cuore di donna*, I demonstrated the way that Carla Capponi uses her literary space as a form of continued resistance in two different ways. First, I showed how Capponi's narrative is a very personal and meticulously constructed form of self-defense. In analyzing her choice of events to include in her narrative, her construction of a self that is at once brave but extremely compassionate, and her explicit intention to provide testimony to this period in Italian history, I showed how Capponi's narrative directly addresses misrepresentation of events in which she took part, and how it resists historical revisionism (with specific attention to the events of via Rasella and the Fosse Ardeatine). I further highlighted the way Capponi addressed the issue of gendered participation in the Resistance through her own self-fashioning as a humane, yet valiant warrior who is just as capable of procuring and wielding firearms as her masculine counterparts. In these ways, I showed how this narrative is concerned with both personal and collective historical documentation, and how this concern is intensified by the distance between the time of the events discussed and the time of writing—a fifty year difference. When considered together, these three writers demonstrate that issues of gender, whether explicitly stated, as in Oliva's text, or addressed inferentially through narrative choices, as in Gobetti, and, to a lesser extent, in Capponi, are involved in their own self-fashioning. They also accentuate the diversity of self-representations of women involved in the same historical moment, and they call attention to the shared characteristic of using their writing as a place to crystallize their experiences for themselves and for others.

In carrying out this project, I have found that the literary space of autobiography, with particular regard to those narratives centered around experiences of the Second World War, seems to be a place in which women can demonstrate and validate their personal inclusion in the resistance movement. This is especially notable because the memory of the Resistance, as I have discussed, is often dominated by masculine narratives and masculine protagonists, and remembered as an event conceived of and primarily actualized by men. Further, it has become evident to me that the autobiographical space is one where women, in all of their individuality and not as icons, can and do exercise agency in resisting standard classifications of their own involvement, and they provide testimony to not only their own actions, but often to those of their comrades as well. Because of its literary attributes, as exercises in self-fashioning, in these texts women are able to shed impersonal, stereotypical representations assigned to them by incomplete histories, or fictive narratives, thereby forging their own way to contribute to popular discourse. Female-authored autobiographical narratives of the Italian Resistance, therefore, provide a unique venue in which issues of personal and national identity can be explored, grappled with, and manipulated by women and in which women are in control of the image they present. In my research, I have found then that the pen in this context is often used as a weapon against revisionism, false or incomplete characterizations, or towards reforming commonly held belief systems. Women's autobiographical accounts of the Resistance are spaces where these women are engaged in history and create, correct, and defend personal and collective identities in ways that other literary genre's do not do. Understanding the way self-fashioning functions in autobiographical texts

helps us to understand more comprehensively the historical situations where it wasn't otherwise part of the discourse.

In some ways, it might be said that these kinds of narratives support a redefinition of national identity, or, better perhaps, in as much as they are personal accounts, they participate in the still very relevant, and much engaged in discussion of the ways in which the Resistance is remembered and revisited in contemporary Italy. That is, revisiting and rewriting history means changing the way that a country views and understands its own past. National identity is often significantly tied to this historical understanding.

Therefore, if you change the way that the past is understood and remembered, as these autobiographical narratives potentially do, then national identity is necessarily influenced. As an example of the still current discussion of the memory of the War, we can point to a screening of a documentary film based on *Roma clandestina*, the diary of female Roman Resistance participant Fulvia Ripa de Meana, which was held in the Casa della Memoria e della Storia in Rome and sponsored by ANPI (Associazione Nazionale di Partigiani Italiani) on 26 May 2009. After this screening, which, rather than focus on Ripa de Meana herself, centered upon the life of Colonel Giuseppe Montezemolo, Resistance leader and Ripa de Meana's cousin, several audience members insisted on speaking about their Resistance experiences. The common word in this discourse, however, was *testimoniare*. That is, nobody wanted to *raccontare*, or *condividere*, but all wanted to provide some kind of testimony, inherently a juridical word, not only to personal experiences, but also to those experiences of deceased relatives. As one person commented, “spero che la memoria non passi,” as if this were a distinct possibility.

Another comment negatively called attention to the fact that in many Italian schools it is being said that the *repubblichini* were partisans of the right—a comment that signals pervading historical revisionism in popular dialogue. This post-screening discussion/testimonial session is just one example that the fervor to provide testimony to this period in time is still quite alive in Rome. Almost sixty-five years after the event, the Resistance, and the worry that it will be forgotten or misremembered, still emerges in contemporary discourse, and while this is not surprising, it is certainly striking.

This frenzy to tell recalls Calvino's famed introduction to *Il Sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, in which he describes the post-war climate of Italy as a place where there was a distinct sense of an immediacy of communication and as a place where everyone's personal stories morphed into a sort of collective narration of war time experiences. In contemporary Italy, however, the frenzy to tell seems to herald from a place of defense more than of sharing and communicating, and there seems to be more of an emphasis on the personal and individual. This is why the audience at *Roma clandestina* felt the need to *testimoniare* and not *raccontare*. In my own research, I have found that this evolution from the desire to *raccontare* to the need to *testimoniare* is mirrored also, in part, in the motivations behind the production of autobiographical narratives of the Resistance whereby earlier narratives are primarily motivated by the desire to tell and to share, and later narratives embrace more fully the testimonial fervor pervasive in contemporary Italy. We can remember that Oliva's 1946 text exemplifies the former while Capponi's book, published in 2000, represents the latter.

In present day Italy, there is now not only an ambivalence towards the legacy of the partisans, as there arguably has been for a long time, but now there is also more open debate about it and about the morality of the partisans.²⁵⁴ This creates a renewed urgency in those that had participated in the Resistance to contribute their personal experiences to the discussion as Italy, as a country, tries to understand, reinterpret, and perhaps, in some cases, rewrite its history and fashion its national identity. This popular revisiting of the Resistance is evidenced, for example, by the recent film *Il Sangue dei Vinti* (Dir. Michele Soavi, 2008) in which the civil nature of the war is heavily emphasized and in which the morality of both sides is problematized. In the same vein, just this past winter a law was proposed in Italian parliament, n. 1360, which would award veteran status to those who fought for the Republic of Salò. This proposal has been met with much resistance, primarily by the national partisan organizations. ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia) mobilized immediately in action (demonstrations and conferences) against this proposition. ANPI of Umbria even issued a printed communication stating that this proposal is resultant of falsification of modern history by the center-right and that they denounce “la provocazione antistorica.”²⁵⁵ The proposal of this law, and the widespread opposition with which it is met, reaffirms that national memory about the event is not stagnant, but very much in motion according to the political and national exigencies of the times.

²⁵⁴ To this effect, we can reference Claudio Pavone's already seminal, new history: *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità della resistenza* (1991). This text also notably explores the myth of the Resistance that Italians resisted the Fascist regime and were united in this cause. Pavone admits into popular historical discourse the idea of civil war in relation to this particular historical moment.

²⁵⁵ 3 February 2009, “Mobilitazione Contro la Proposta di Legge 1360” [http://anpiumbria.blogspot.com/2009/02/mobilitazione-contro-la-proposta-di.html] accessed Sept. 4, 2009. Also see: <http://www.anpi.it/1360/index.htm> for more about their reaction to the proposal.

The fact that history about this period is still in the making and is still being written, and that national identity with regard to the Second World War is still in flux, makes investigation and critical reading of first-hand, autobiographical accounts of women all the more compelling and relevant for the documentation and interpretation of collective history they offer. As this project has demonstrated, women's autobiographical narratives of the Italian Resistance both affirm personal identities for the women who wrote them, and they contribute, often through continued resistance, to the formation of a national history and a national identity that will account for the fullness of their individual experiences, and the value that they assign to those experiences. It would be fruitful, I believe, in future research, to look at many more of these kinds of narratives in an effort to individuate other, or similar, forms of continued resistance that would expand our understanding of this moment in history and the way that women view their places in it, and, accordingly, the way that they fashion their own identities to reflect these places.

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