A Resistance Twice Betrayed: Gender and Memory in the Autobiographical Accounts of Italian Partisans

This Honors thesis explores the intersection of gender, memory and politics in postwar Italy by focusing on the analysis of four autobiographical accounts, two each by men and women, published between 1946 and 1963, in order to show how and why these recollections were deeply gendered. It locates these accounts within the broader context of the postwar memory construction of the Italian partisan struggle against Italian Fascists and Nazi Germany, in which a variety of memory media such as film, literature and monuments supported and popularized a gendered narrative of the Resistenza that became the foundation for the post-Fascist Italian republic. In this myth, only male partisans fought the enemy, while female partisans contributed to the partisan struggle via unarmed assistance of the resistance. This gendering responded to the challenge that women’s mobilization for the war effort and direct engagement as female partisans had posed to the conservative and deeply Catholic Italian society, in which men were the breadwinners and protectors of women and children, whereas women’s “natural” spheres were limited to the household and family in need for protection. This thesis shows how an essentialist understanding of gender and conventional gender norms, shared by many men and women from the left to the right of the political spectrum, functioned as a unifying element of a shared collective core narrative of the Resistenza.