

# The history of the Resistance taught in Italian schools by its key players. The commitment of the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI) in Tuscany

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To Osmana, Giuseppe, Guido, Vittorio, Claudio, Giorgio, Ameglio, Nello  
and for the memory of Mauro, Garibaldi and Ezio

## 1. *The topic*

The history of the Italian Resistance to Nazi-Fascism is by its very nature variously constructed and subject to political and cultural changes. Indeed, the historiography on the Resistance has benefitted from the contribution of specialists, common people, and even the contribution of witnesses who were key players in the struggle, i.e. the partisans<sup>1</sup>. After joining together in ANPI, the National Association of Italian Partisans, in the aftermath of the Second World War, many partisans have produced a fair amount of memoirs, dedicating part of their time to defending and disseminating the value of their battle with the younger generations, including in schools.

This contribution intends to weigh the educational and didactic commitment of ANPI taking as a case study the region of Tuscany, one of the areas in which the partisan struggle was most intense. Founded in 1944 and still very active, the Anpi now has approximately 120.000 members. In 1945 it was recognized as Moral Agency with legal value as and factual became the official association of all the Italian partisans<sup>2</sup>.

However, due to the level of radicality assumed by the confrontation between the parties during the first electoral round Republican, since 1948 it underwent several divisions, with the output of a part of Catholic partisans (who founded in the 1948 the Italian federation volunteers of freedom the FIVL), and a part of the partisans who they related to the the Action Party and the Socialist (who founded the FIAP, Italian federation partisan associations, in the 1949)<sup>3</sup>. So within the ANPI prevailed Communist inspiration

<sup>1</sup> S. Neri Serneri (a cura di), *La Resistenza e le sue storie. Interventi di Jürgen Zarusky, Bojan Godeša e Boris Mlakar, Olivier Wiewiorka, Roberto Chiarini, Simone Neri Serneri*, in «Contemporanea», 1, 2006, pp. 115-150.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.anpi.it/articoli/1419/chi-siamo>, november 10th 2015.

<sup>3</sup> L. Cecchini, *Per la libertà d'Italia per l'Italia delle libertà: profilo storico dell'Associazione nazionale partigiani d'Italia*, vol. I 1944-1960, Roma, Jasillo, 1996, pp. 63 e ss.

but remained deeply rooted the unitary spirit of the Resistance and of the Republican Constitution. After divisions many Catholics and socialists were in fact within the association in which militated for a long time even some monarchists. The partisans today are, of course, for age reasons, only a very small part of the membership. Since 2006 in fact, through an amendment to statute, the association is open to anyone applying for registration, registration accepted with the title of anti-fascist. Since 2007 me too am a member of the ANPI and I have been elected by a few years in the executive bodies of the association of the province of Livorno.

My active participation in the governing bodies of the association is undoubtedly an important element in the research. On the one hand my role as an executive could adversely affect the distance needed own historian and therefore it is a not to be underestimated. At the same time, however, this activity of mine offered me opportunities that I otherwise would not have had or that I would have had with difficulty. The sharing of a project, a common militancy, indeed allowed me to overcome the distrust of some former partisans against the Academy and it anyway has greatly facilitated the overcoming of some key passages of the collection of oral sources. For example I did not have the need to explain at length the purposes of research and I have not had the need to use a mediator.

The ANPI throughout the whole its history has committed itself to defend the values of the Resistance, of the anti-fascism and of the Constitution.

Indeed one of ANPI's goals has been to keep alive the profound significance of the opposition to Nazi-Fascism, disseminating the principles and values of this struggle. ANPI thus seeks to prevent that the history of the liberation movement can one day be forgotten or reduced to a few lines of text in history books. In partnership with historical institutes on the resistance and other veterans associations, ANPI has for a long time committed itself to teaching the history of the war of liberation in the nation's schools, with their collaboration. This communication attempts to draw a framework for ex-partisans in the schools of Tuscany, in an effort to identify the themes and timeline of these activities, whether they have covered the Tuscan territory uniformly, and how they have been intertwined with the educational curriculum.

## 2. *Anpi, partisans and school*

This research, which I'm still carrying out, has already given some results. The main source of my work is the testimonies of partisans who mainly through ANPI have had the opportunity to participate in classrooms. The written sources or sources audio visual related to these meetings are in fact very few. For instance there are rare cases where, recently and independently, some sections ANPI have decided to document the meetings although no systematic and no epistemological foundations.

In particular, for this paper I use 10 interviews I conducted and collected concerning the provinces of Arezzo, Siena, Prato, Livorno, Grosseto and Massa Carrara.

Unfortunately, it will not be possible to carry out many more interviews because the partisans still alive or able to talk about my research subject are, due to health reasons, not very many at all. Indeed three witnesses whom I interviewed are no longer with us.

Moreover, over the past decades only a small number of partisans have had the opportunity to speak in schools, sometimes by personal choice, others times due to decisions of the local management, who in some cases have excluded them. And this is the first interesting aspect of the matter to be taken into consideration.

It must be said then that the systematic effort of ANPI in schools, didn't begin immediately after the war but more recently. In some cases, no more than ten years ago.

This is due to several factors:

First, the ANPI had priority objectives that varied according to the ever-changing socio-political context, nationally and internationally. In regards to this, the association took its stance and has organized campaigns.

During its first decades of existence, the ANPI was strongly influenced by the Cold War. Moreover, along with the domestic political climate of Italy, this didn't always favour a full recognition of the values of the Resistance. But the ANPI was also taken up with some other pressures. For example, several years after it's founding, it's priorities were defence of the political, social and economic interests of former Resistance fighters. So much so, that in one congress, transforming the association into a charity for ex-partisans, was even discussed<sup>4</sup>. Even the political and social pressures emerging in the country dictated the association's activity, such as terrorism in the seventies and the fight against the Mafia in the 1980's<sup>5</sup>.

As for the specific attention of the Anpi to the school and to the new generations, the first concern of the association was to promote the process of school democratization, (achieved in part through the implementation of a middle school in 1962) and then the need to 'defascistizzare' (remove the fascist elements) textbooks and ensure adequate space to the history of liberation as well as a critical analysis of fascism, which wasn't featured in school books. «Patria Indipendente» (Independent homeland), ANPI's national magazine, committed itself on several occasions to a detailed analysis of school manuals and backed a conference in Ferrara in 1970<sup>6</sup>. The conference of Fer-

<sup>4</sup> Ivi, pp. 79 e ss.

<sup>5</sup> L. Cecchini, *Per la libertà d'Italia per l'Italia delle libertà: profilo storico dell'Associazione nazionale partigiani d'Italia*, vol. II 1961-1997, Roma, Jasillo, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 102-13; E. Fietta, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», september 26th 1966, pp.6-7; E.Maizza, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», october 9th 1966, pp.6-7; S. Canzio, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», october 30th 1966, pp.6-7; E. Fietta, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», november 6th 1966, pp.6-7; A. Sironi, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in

rara was an important opportunity to take stock of the relationship between school and Resistance. The conference hosted precious reports of some of the protagonists of the pedagogy of the time (as Lamberto Borghi and Antonio Santoni Rugiu) and which marked the historiographical debate<sup>7</sup>.

Then, the centrality of young people in the sixties and 1968, no doubt influenced the opening of the association to “new generational” issues. The ANPI took a stance and observed with attention the anti-fascism of the youth. It backed many of the student movement requests, even if it didn’t accept the movement’s global criticism in respect to all political and social realities of the country without distinction<sup>8</sup>.

In fact, it’s no coincidence that in 1970 the statute was amended by adding point “i” to Article 2, which gives backing to the prospect of intervention in schools or «To fight, so that the principles of the Liberation War become essential elements in the formation of the new generations»<sup>9</sup>.

The ANPI, during the eighties and nineties, began a more organized work program in schools. This push was perhaps due to concern about the rise of the new right-wing governmental organizations (Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord per l’indipendenza della Padania). This was an absolute novelty for Republican Italy where the right had raised serious concerns, but different ones, as until then they’d been an extremist force. The right-wing of government, indeed, regenerate the neo-fascist forces, regenerate the right’s culture and questioned the fundamentals of the Republic: the Constitution and the national unity<sup>10</sup>. The urge to go in schools due to the partisans who were gradually getting older should also not be underestimated. This gave urgency to the need of passing on the values and memories of the Resistance.

Until then, then it was not so easy for former partisans to be welcomed into the school where, especially during the Cold War, the influence of conservative political circles had considerable weight. On the other hand it is known that

«Patria indipendente», december 4th 1966, pp.6-7; C. Milanese, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», december 18th 1966, pp.6-7; T. Codignola, *Contributo della Resistenza per una scuola moderna*, in «Patria indipendente», march 19th 1967, pp.2-3.

<sup>7</sup> G. Quazza, L. Borghi, A. Santoni Rugiu, C. Dellavalle, *Libri di testo e Resistenza*, Roma. Editori Riuniti, 1971.

<sup>8</sup> G. Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta*, Roma, Donzelli, 2005, pp. 187 e ss.

<sup>9</sup> L. Cecchini, *Per la libertà d’Italia per l’Italia delle libertà: profilo storico dell’Associazione nazionale partigiani d’Italia*, vol. II 1961-1997, Roma, Jasillo, 1998, pp. 122 e ss; ANPI, Stuto, in «Gazzetta Ufficiale» n. 11, may 5th 1970

<sup>10</sup> G.E. Rusconi, *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione. Tra etnodemocrazie regionali e cittadinanza europea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993; Id, *Patria e repubblica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997; P. Ginsborg, E. Asquer, (a cura di), *Berlusconismo. Analisi di un sistema di potere*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011; G. Turi, *La cultura delle destre. Alla ricerca dell’egemonia culturale in Italia*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2013; S. Colarizi, *Storia del Novecento italiano. Cent’anni di entusiasmo, di paure, di speranza*, Milano, BUR, 200, pp. 498 e ss.

the Italian school until the eighties was not always an environment hyper-democratic, just think of the decades-long debate on school selection, from don Lorenzo Milani onwards<sup>11</sup>. But, at least in Tuscany, the framework for participation in schools was unevenly spread, as were the implementation times.

With regard to the geographical distribution, probably the local areas most affected by the Nazi and Fascist atrocities also have had a particular awareness in promoting the voice of the Resistance in schools, as it would seem from an initial analysis that I could do. In addition, the national leadership of the ANPI doesn't seem to have given specific directives to former partisans in carrying out school talks. The national leadership of the ANPI is currently studying shared forms to work in schools, urgency once again dictated by the emergency and imminent arrival of a future (sad but inevitable) where there will no longer be partisans alive or able to speak<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, even the overlap with the school curriculum seems to be extremely variable and difficult to measure.

However, for all cases that I've studied, it can be said that the interests of children and young people to hear the voice of partisans was constant and very much alive. Having a chance to talk with the real-life protagonists was generally an exciting experience for several generations of students.

All the partisans I've interviewed have had experience in primary and secondary schools and haven't noticed particular differences in the reactions to their talks. For most of them, speaking to the student was a civil commitment that couldn't be renounced. A commitment that has given them a way to finding a more effective form of communication to tell young people about their experience as partisans. Although with different nuances, for all them it can be said that it was essential to incorporate the story of the Liberation into the story of their lives, starting from their childhood lived during the Fascist period.

Generally, the number of school interventions by partisans has been rather limited over the course of various school years. Only in a few cases have real projects been initiated, which actually integrated with the school curriculum. One such example happened very recently in the province of Carrara (with the collaboration of the Historical Institute of Apuan Resistance). Another example is San Gimignano where for several years there is an agreement protocol between the municipality, the school and ANPI that involves the participation of the ANPI in curricular activities<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa. Quarant'anni dopo*, Firenze, Lef, 2007; G Ballarino, D. Checchi, *Sistema scolastico e disuguaglianza sociale: scelte individuali e vincoli strutturali*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> *Protocollo di intesa tra Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR) e Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia (ANPI)*, July 24th 2014, [http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/Protocollo\\_MIUR\\_ANPI\\_240714.pdf](http://www.istruzione.it/allegati/2014/Protocollo_MIUR_ANPI_240714.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> *Protocollo di intesa tra Comune di San Gimignano, Istituto Comprensivo Folgore da San Gimignano, Sezione A.N.P.I. San Gimignano*, January 27th 2012

The effectiveness of the interventions by partisans remains mostly almost impossible to verify, just because of the nature in large part occasional, non homogeneous on the territory and not designed didactically of the interventions of ANPI.

### 3. *The interviews*

Coming to the cases I have examined, as I mentioned, they regard school interventions in the areas of Livorno, Siena, Grosseto, Carrara, Arezzo and Prato. In the other provinces, very few partisans are still active in schools, in Pistoia there is no one alive and in other areas (Firenze and Lucca) I'm still finishing the research.

I interviewed 8 partisans and two "staffette" (dispatch messengers) united by their communist militancy, which had developed for some already in family during the regime and for many of them is still very much alive.

In Livorno I collected the testimony of Garibaldo Benifei, his wife Osmana Benetti (dispatch messengers) and Giuseppe Fusario, perhaps amongst those who given the highest number of talks in the schools of Livorno, and the only ones left in a position to talk about it.

Garibaldo, national president of the ANPPPIA; focused his numerous school talks on the Fascist persecution that his family of origin first endured, starting in 1921 and that he himself then endured because he was a clandestine PCI militant, sentenced by a special court to a total of eight years in prison<sup>14</sup>. In the War of Liberation, he held many almost exclusively political functions in the territory of Livorno. In all the school meetings he was always coupled with his wife Osmana whose commitment was essential to give due importance to the vital contribution of women to the Resistance<sup>15</sup>. A commitment that is often forgotten<sup>16</sup>.

Giuseppe Fusario, soldier of the Italian army until September 8, 1943, instead operated as a partisan in Garfagnana, to then enlist in the new army of liberation, but he spoke in the schools of Livorno where he's always been a lifelong resident<sup>17</sup>.

From 1987 to 2006, Fusario then played the role of coordinator for the ANPI of Livorno in the school discussions. He devised a format that former partisans

<sup>14</sup> G. Benifei, *Per la libertà: trent'anni di memorie fra antifascismo, Resistenza e cooperazione: 1920-1950*, Livorno, Frediani, 2002; I. Tognarini, *Livorno nel 20° secolo: gli anni cruciali di una città tra fascismo, Resistenza e ricostruzione*, Firenze, Polistampa, 2005, p. 157; cfr. anche S. Gallo, *La Resistenza nella provincia di Livorno, 1943-1944*, in press.

<sup>15</sup> M. Paoletti, *Erminia, Osmana, Ubaldina: storie di donne nell'antifascismo livornese*, [http://www.comune.livorno.it/\\_cn\\_online/index.php?id=184&lang=it](http://www.comune.livorno.it/_cn_online/index.php?id=184&lang=it), november 10th 2015

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. M. Mafai, *Pane nero. Donne e vita quotidiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, Milano, Mondadori, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> G. Laterra (a cura di), *Giuseppe Fusario partigiano e fante tra quelli dell'8 settembre*, Supplemento a «CN - Comune Notizie» n. 81, ottobre-dicembre 2012.

should supposedly follow in their school talks<sup>18</sup>. In summary, Fusario as coordinator, asked former partisans to give a sort of history lesson of the resistance rather than bringing an eyewitness biography of their lives. This, from his point of view was intended to give a greater foundation to the Resistance<sup>19</sup>.

Fusario then carried out a rigorous selection among former partisans, choosing as school speakers «only those whom he trusted», exercising de-facto control over the content and methodologies to be adopted in the school<sup>20</sup>. A form of coordinating very much in line with that of the Communist Party, whose sphere of influence, either direct or indirect, on the ANPI was substantial. Former partisans such as Fusario or Garibaldi were unsurprisingly long-time party officials. In fact, they incorporated the rules without even needing to have them imposed or proposed. This is another topic that deserves much more in-depth analysis, but I hope to accomplish that in the future<sup>21</sup>.

In Grosseto, I interviewed the partisan Ameglio Macchetti and the despatch messenger Nello Bracalari, who've been involved in the classrooms for only about ten years and normally work as a pair. The first focuses his story on military action, whilst the second talks about fascism and the resistance as seen through the eyes of a child. Both come from anti-fascist families.

In Prato, Mauro Loreti, also from an anti-fascist family, spoke only a few years ago with continuity in schools and made his story very effective because he adapted it for children and teens. He started his first guerrilla partisan actions when little more than a child, and therefore raises great interest among the students.

In Siena, I interviewed Vittorio Meoni, the only survivor of the Montemaggio massacre in the province of Siena. This is where the fascists murdered 19 partisans; he managed to escape although seriously wounded. Meoni after the war has always covered institutional roles, which probably made his school talks very celebratory, even if his story about Montemaggio was essential for the reconstruction of a collective memory and historiography.

However, cases like Ezio Raspanti, Giorgio Mori and Guido Lisi deserve special attention.

For some years now, Giorgio Mori has been involved with numerous schools in the province of Massa-Carrara. Mori started this activity only a few years ago, and up to then had essentially remained on the margins even in association life. This aspect is of no little interest.

The story of Mori is very effective because it not only regards the liberation struggle, but also his previous life and especially the life he had to choose after the war. In fact, his militancy in the Resistance and in the PCI procured Mori

<sup>18</sup> Typewritten document, for internal use, preserved by Giuseppe Fusario.

<sup>19</sup> Interview to Giuseppe Fusario, June 27th 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista*, Roma. Carocci, 2000; S. Bellassai, *The Party as School and the Schools of Party*, in «Paedagogica Historica», 35, 1, 1999, pp. 87-107.

serious difficulties in finding gainful employment, to the point of forcing him to immigrate to Belgium, where he was a miner until 1963. Mori is thus able to give a more comprehensive picture to students and his contribution was essential for the success of some projects carried out by the 'Historical Institute of Resistance of Carrara' in several schools.

Raspanti and Lisi are instead almost "professional" school speakers, since they started in the fifties.

Raspanti was a partisan in Foiano della Chiana, where he's always lived and spoken at many schools in the province of Arezzo. His employment as a janitor at a school introduced him to classrooms in a very natural way, where he's been bringing his story since 1956. The schoolteachers where he worked "initiated" him into this activity by inviting him into the classroom.

Raspanti started being a partisan at 16, a fact which gives rise to substantial enthusiasm among the students. But what distinguish the school talks by Raspanti are his drawings of battle scenes. Ezio always had a passion for ink drawing, however without knowing that he was very good. In a meeting with the students, he brought along a couple of drawings of battle scenes. These were met with considerable success and made his story much more effective. And so, stimulated by the meetings with students, Ezio has since made numerous drawings, particularly useful for school discussions<sup>22</sup>.

Instead, Guido Lisi was a partisan in San Gimignano, near Siena, where he still lives. He then enlisted in the New Liberation Army and was among the first Italian soldiers to cross the Gothic Line.

Guido has invested a lot of his time to keep the values of the Resistance alive. In fact, in addition to participating on several occasions with schools, as president of the local association, he has been successful in trying to formalize the relationship between ANPI and schools in the district of San Gimignano. So, the actions of the association and of the partisans have in fact become an integral part of the teaching curriculum<sup>23</sup>.

Guido was involved in various guerrilla actions and was also immortalized in several photos taken during those months of resistance. These have now become part of the collective memory of San Gimignano<sup>24</sup>. So, his school talk is very rich in detail and also accompanied by some pictures.

Furthermore, Guido is also a great storyteller. To his children and grandchildren he read his partisan diary almost every night before bed. A

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. E. Raspanti, *Racconti in bianco e nero di Ezio Raspanti (1943-1944)*, (Catalogo della mostra Foiano della Chiana 19 aprile-4 maggio 2008) Foiano della Chiana, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> *Protocollo di intesa tra Comune di San Gimignano, Istituto Comprensivo Folgore da San Gimignano, Sezione A.N.P.I. San Gimignano*, January 27th 2012;

<sup>24</sup> AA. VV., *1945: i volontari sangimignanesi nella guerra di liberazione: testimonianze, ricordi, riflessioni dei protagonisti quarant'anni dopo*, San Gimignano, Sezione ANPI di San Gimignano, 1984; U. Pasqualetti (a cura di), *Fischia il vento urla la bufera...: testimonianze ed episodi della Resistenza sangimignanesi, 1920-1945*, San Gimignano, Sezione ANPI di San Gimignano, 1993.



fine diary that is now published and dedicated to his grandchildren and all young people.

Therefore, it is with an anecdote taken from his diary that I would like to conclude, because it sums up the spirit that animated these extraordinary people in their work of testimony and civil commitment towards the younger generations.

One day, in front of the monument to the fallen partisans of San Gimignano, his nephew Igor, who was a child, asked Guido: «O grandfather! But where's your monument?» Guido a bit surprised replied: «the partisans who've had the good fortune of growing old don't have a monument. Monument were only made for the partisans who died young killed by fascists or Nazis. Luckily I was saved, and so today I can tell you what I saw directly».<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> G. Lisi, *Le torri, il bosco, il fiume : storia tra diario e ricordi del partigiano Guido Lisi*, San Gimignano, Anpi San Gimignano, 2005, p. without number.

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