

Con gli occhi di una bambina. Maria Cervi, memoria pubblica della famiglia, by LAURA ARTIOLI, Rome, Viella, 2020, 204 pp., €23.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-3313-259-4

On 25 November, 1943, in Gattatico, Italy, ‘Campi rossi’ (Red Fields), the farmhouse of the Cervi family, was surrounded by the Fascists. The seven Cervi brothers were members of the antifascist Resistance. The house itself – secluded and discreet, protected by crops and plantings – was a hiding place for anyone who was in danger of being arrested. Captured after a brief firefight, the brothers were transported to the prison in Reggio Emilia and later shot, in retaliation for the killing of a Fascist municipal secretary.

The brothers left behind their parents, Alcide and Genoeffa, their wives, and their children. Alcide told his excruciating story – that of a father who survives his seven sons – in his book *I Miei Sette Figli* (*My Seven Children*). The book, published by Editori Riuniti in 1955, when Alcide was 80 years old, was incredibly successful and has been translated into 14 languages. According to historian Sergio Luzzatto, Alcide’s book had been written to counter the anti-communist propaganda committed to presenting the partisans of the lower Emilian region as criminals (cited in pp. 155–6).

In Laura Artioli’s new book, this story is told ‘through the eyes of a child’: Maria Cervi, Alcide’s oldest grandchild, who died on 11 June 2020, and whose wide-ranging testimony the author collected. Artioli’s well-researched book features a preface by Walter Veltroni, the first leader of the Italian Democratic Party, who met Maria when he was Minister for Cultural Heritage in the first Prodi government. The book comprises an introduction, 20 chapters, and an epilogue, and is mostly organised chronologically. Its afterword, by historian Luciano Casali, describes the Cervi Institute, devoted to the memory of the Cervi family.

The importance of memory and of bearing witness is at the centre of the story. Maria – nine years old at the time of the events of 1943 – needed time to overcome the trauma. But if remembering was a ‘private fact’, memory became for her a ‘civic duty’ (p. 189). She developed a true ‘pedagogy of memory’ (p. 193). Hers was a mission: keeping the memory of the Cervi brothers’ sacrifice alive, while highlighting what the family as a whole had done for the Resistance. After the seven brothers were shot, the family continued to assist the partisans, hosting men, hiding weapons, and helping in other ways. Most of this labour fell on the women, who had no time to cry over the loss of their loved ones.

The women’s point of view seldom takes centre stage in the public narrative. Artioli’s research started from the archives – mostly focusing on Maria’s correspondence and speeches – and had a specific goal: highlighting the neglected voices of the women and children in the story. Artioli ‘searched for the crumbs of the daily life of this large peasant family in parish documents, at the registry office, in school registers, among hospital papers, to find traces of individualities and ties’ (*Ho cercato le briciole del quotidiano di questa grande famiglia contadina nei documenti parrocchiali, all’anagrafe, nei registri scolastici, fra le carte degli ospedali, per ritrovare le tracce delle individualità e dei legami*) (p. 18).

Artioli also highlights a recurring theme of the memory of the Resistance: it was difficult for the adults to shield the children from the pain. Artioli recalls that Natalia Ginzburg, a fugitive with her three young children, after her husband Leone was killed in prison by the Nazis, wrote that it was hard to lie to children: ‘We cannot do this with children whom we woke up at night and dressed frantically in the dark to escape We cannot do this with children who have seen the fear and horror on our face’ (*Non lo possiamo fare con dei bambini che abbiamo svegliato la notte e vestiti convulsamente nel buio per scappare Non lo possiamo fare con dei bambini che hanno veduto lo spavento e l’orrore sulla nostra faccia*) (p. 101).

Maria experienced this pain for a long time. The Cervi family's tribulations did not end with Italy's liberation. During the summer of 1945, the farmhouse was twice set on fire. Maria's mental and physical health, affected by trauma, culminated in a nervous breakdown during her school years. But her resilience allowed her to overcome these struggles, specifically through her political militancy. Starting in 1950 Maria was enrolled in the Caprara section of the 'Ari', the Italian girls' association, one of the grassroots organisations of the Communist Party. The Cervi family and the 'Campi rossi' farmhouse became symbols of the Resistance for the Communist Party, visited by – among others – party leader Palmiro Togliatti and his partner Nilde Iotti on 17 September 1954. In Artioli's words, that day 'marked the emotional and political culmination of a path that was making the Cervis the model of the best of Italian reformism' (*Quella giornata segnava il culmine emotivo e politico di un percorso che andava facendo dei Cervi il modello del migliore riformismo italiano*) (p. 153), in contrast to dangerous extremists in the Communist Party who still yearned for an armed seizure of power.

Artioli's depiction of Maria's trajectory – from coping with trauma to developing a political conscience – is very effective. There is perhaps a missed opportunity to engage with trauma studies. Such an engagement would have further enhanced the feminist agenda of the book, highlighting a common trajectory for women who were connected to the Resistance and suffered violence and losses, going from painful silence to the need to reset the narrative and bear witness in the postwar period. Nevertheless, Artioli merges beautiful writing with rigorous historical analysis: she lets the many sources she consulted carry the narrative, creating an immersive experience for the reader. She also pays careful attention to context, reconstructing the life of the peasants of the time in colourful detail. By the time we finish reading, we have the impression of having personally met Maria, heard her energetic voice, and inherited some of her humanity.

Benedetta Luciana Sara Carnaghi

Cornell University

bc552@cornell.edu

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Storia e storie del mazzinanesimo femminile. Dalle origini all'Italia repubblicana, by MARCO MARINUCCI, Rome, Stamen, 2019, 324pp, €17.82 (paperback), ISBN 978-8831928489

It would be easy to dismiss the group of *'mazziniane'* – the focus of this monograph – as a 'minority within a minority': this may well be the reason why, as Marinucci argues, this group of women has been largely overlooked by historians. Yet this would be a mistake. By collating documents from an array of Italian archives, Marinucci has succeeded in tracing the gendered universe of Mazzini's followers, showing how women played a pivotal role in the pursuit of the political project of a united, republican Italy. As Marinucci convincingly argues, unearthing this forgotten chapter in the history of Italian women helps us to get to the roots of the history of women's emancipation in Italy too.

The small circle of women who gathered around Mazzini during his long English exile has been the focus of previous studies (Isastia, Pesman). This book, however, substantially enriches the historiography due to its ambition not only to identify a broader movement of Mazzinian