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Beyond The Myth:

The Truth About "Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli"



Robert Capa's photograph of a *scugnizzi*

Rosa Maria Celeste

*Caesar died, and tyranny lived on.
For the seat of tyranny
was not in the heart of Caesar:
it was in the heart of the Romans.
Not from others will the Italians receive freedom,
but from themselves. --- G.A. Borgese, 1937*

Dedicazione

*Per il mio padre, Antonio Celeste,
che mi ha insegnata tutto del' Italia
e mi ha fatto amarla,
alla memoria dell' mio nonno,
Gaetano Celeste, un vero Napoletano,
e ai Naploetani ----
perchè non dimentichiamo MAI.....*

Beyond The Myth:

The Truth About “Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli”

The Italian Fascist State, surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on September 8th 1943. There were many steps that led up to the surrender of the Italian state to the Allied forces. Starting from July of 1943, the Allies had made considerable progress in Italy. In the beginning of July, circa the 10th, they had successfully completed an invasion of Sicily. After about 12 days of fighting the Allied forces captured the capital city of Palermo. After the capture of Palermo on July 22nd, 1943 by the Allies, the Germans quickly evacuated the island and Sicily soon fell to the Allied forces. On September 3rd the Allies landed in Italy proper where they encountered severe German resistance. By the 8th of September, the Italians had surrendered unconditionally to the Allied forces. It would take a little less than a month before the Allies reached Naples, but by then the Neapolitans would have already forced the Germans out of the city.¹

The Italian people were generally jubilant and overjoyed upon hearing about the armistice. However, their happiness would be short lived. The war was not over; in fact it was far from over. A new enemy, already deeply entrenched in Italian society, was already mobilizing. This new enemy was the Germans. When the armistice was declared, the King, Vittorio Emanuele II and Marshal Pietro Badoglio had already assumed control in some portions of

¹ Phillips, Roderick. *Society, State, and Nation in Twentieth-Century Europe*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996), 302.

Italy. Prior to the armistice, popular opposition to Mussolini and the war had been festering. Many Italians knew that Italy could not successfully disengage itself from the war without severing ties with Hitler, which Mussolini was disinclined to do. It was only after a series of votes and discussions on “July 25th” he [Mussolini] was received by the king and was told that he had been relieved of his office and had been replaced by Marshal Badoglio.”² It was at this point that a new declaration of war was issued by the ‘new’ Italian government, headed by Pietro Badoglio. This declaration of war was against the Germans.

When the Italians surrendered to the Allies, the Germans felt betrayed by their comrades. To make matters worse, the declaration of war against the Germans by the new Italian regime caused many Germans to resent their newly acquired enemies. All over Italy, resistance movements erupted against the Germans and the Italian Fascists, who were also seen as collaborators with the Germans, simply because they often represented the same ideals that the Nazi oppressors did. Moreover, many Italians despised the Fascists because they willingly collaborated with the Germans during this time. Ironically, many places where the Germans met the strongest resistance were the very same places that they had become interwoven so tightly with the locals. The Germans fraternized a great deal with the Italians: dating the women, playing cards with the men, going to local cafes. This phenomenon occurred in many places throughout Italy, but especially in Naples.

² Clough and Saladino. *A History of Modern Italy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 515.

Naples, a city in the Campania region of southern Italy, was beloved by the Germans for its majestic views, breathtaking weather, and the friendliness of the locals. And it was here, in this picturesque Neapolitan setting that a bloody, violent, sporadic grassroots resistance movement headed by locals erupted into one of the most unforgettable moments in Neapolitan history, known generally as 'Le Quattro Giorante di Napoli' or rather, 'The Four Days of Naples'.

Unforgettable for whom? This period of history which lasted from September 28th, 1943 till October 1st, 1943 in Naples seems to only be remembered accurately by Italian historians from the Campania region. In the absence of widely disseminated and accurate historical analysis, a postwar 'mythology of the resistance' was created by many Neapolitans. The mythology grew to fantastical proportions, and venerated the participants, casting them as heroes equal to the gods of the ancient Roman Empire.

This paper will discuss the actual events of the 'Four Days of Naples'. It will then discuss the mythology of the resistance that was created after the events took place and attempt to offer explanations as to how this mythology grew and why.

By the time the Italian government had decided to surrender to the Allies on September 8th, 1943, Italy had been ravaged and rocked to its very foundations. The people were in dire need of relief from the oppression that their own government had placed on for many years. The majority of the Italians abhorred their own fascist government, and despised the Rome-Berlin axis that lasted throughout much of the war. There was always some form of anti-fascist

resistance during Mussolini's reign as dictator of the peninsula, yet, as Slaughter states "the final revolt was against a system of government that no longer functioned in an orderly manner and against a leader who failed in wartime."³

It was not only men who felt a deep seated hatred for the fascist regime; women did as well. Fascism had failed the masses of Italian women, since, as Slaughter observes, "poverty, a stingy welfare system, and, finally, war-making made mothering an exceptionally arduous undertaking."⁴ Women, men and children found the oppressive nature of the Fascist and Nazi regime too much to bear. This was the case not only in Italy, but throughout the occupied countries in Western and Eastern Europe, including Germany. Many of the people in these occupied lands could not and would not collaborate with the Nazis and Fascists any further. The Resistance movements were the "mirror image of collaboration: they varied from country to country and took many forms."⁵ Members of the resistance groups in these countries had varied motivations. However, among the most important reasons for the surge of resistances in these countries, especially Italy, was the idea of nationalism, and strong ideological opposition to Fascism.⁶

The question still remains: why at that particular moment, after years of collaborating with Fascist and Nazi ideas, were these people - not only in Italy, but elsewhere in Europe-finally moving to drive out their oppressors? The

³ Slaughter, Jane. *Women and the Italian Resistance 1943-1945*. (Denver: Arden Press, 1997), 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵ Phillips, *Society*, 302.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

answer lies in the events that took place during the war. In 1939, the Germans and Soviets had signed a non-aggression pact known as the 'Comintern Pact'. This pact stated that neither side would attack the other. It did not make them allies, yet eliminated the threat of invasions for the time being. Despite this non-aggression pact in June 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. It was at this moment that many of the communists in other Western and Eastern European countries took up arms against the Nazi-Fascist axis. These communists became strong leaders in their respective countries within the resistance movements.⁷

These factors, fueled resistance movements all over Europe, but the situation in southern Italy was unique. Cut off from most of the news broadcasts which came from Rome, and with the only local newspapers under the fascist thumb, it became more and more difficult for locals to understand what was occurring outside of Naples.

Rumors began spreading through the countryside. With each retelling of the alleged arrival of the Allies and the talk of a 'real peace', the demoralized Italians, according to historian Roger Absalom, embellished the story with "astonishing rapidity and with ever greater exaggeration at each telling...they were psychologically impelled to nurture the wildest hopes that the armistice really had

⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

signaled the breakout of unconditional peace.”⁸ Yet, unconditional peace was not what the Germans had in mind for the Neapolitans.

On the contrary, the situation in Italy actually worsened after the armistice was declared. According to Giacomo De Antonellis, an Italian historian, there “was a scarcity of food and other necessities.”⁹ In addition to the food shortage in Naples, De Antonellis also describes the area as being “a breeding ground for revolutionary movement of the classes because there was not a leader who arose to unite the people into one homogenous Italian society.”¹⁰ Thus, the region was the site of substantial social unrest, food shortages, Nazi oppression and vindictiveness, and an alliance of local communists. The result was the infamous four days of Naples.

The resistance movement in Naples was not the work of a single group or class. As will be seen, many different people from different backgrounds participated in the movement. From ex-military officials, to communists, to old, young, and middle aged men, to women and young girls, the resistance was a community effort. According to Jane Slaughter “universities in Italy became a scene of protest in which women participated”¹¹ Contrary to popular belief, many women were involved in the resistance movement, and for different reasons. For example, carrying bombs, transporting arms and messages, feeding, clothing,

⁸ Abasalom, Roger. “Hiding History,” in *The Historical Journal*, 38, I, 114. (Ohio: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114.

⁹ De Antonellis, Giacomo. *Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli*. (Milan: Bompani, 1973), 17.

*Nota Bene: All translations unless otherwise noted are my own.

¹⁰ *Ibi.d*, 17.

¹¹ Slaughter, *Women & Resistance*, 46.

and caring for the partisans became roles assigned to the women. These women were known generally as *stafette*. Many women received gold medals of honor after 1945 throughout Italy for their services as *stafette* during the resistance movements. Carla Capponi remembers her service in the resistance:

This was the most difficult period of time for me. It was very stressful because of the constant traveling in the incredible cold, inadequately dressed, and inadequately fed. I slept very little and was constantly hunted. In Rome I slept in a cellar, and at Centrocelle I slept on a floor without a mattress... [T]his kind of life left a scar. It was very, very, hard sleeping on cellar floors with fifteen to sixteen men, dirty, cold, and infested with lice. I suffered from scabies and other diseases that eventually resulted in the loss of one of my lungs.¹²

Many women suffered through such perils on a daily basis. Women joined for a multitude of reasons. Either they had a brother, husband, or father who was a *partigiani* and somehow became enlisted through that person; sometimes they felt a need to do something about the situation and sought out local groups to join. However, there were many women who took part in the struggle for no other reason than because life was so hard that they just ‘snapped’. Slaughter states that “women’s goals were most often practical ones determined by immediate material needs”¹³ For example, some women stormed bread lines to demand a bigger rations. These women were not acting based on a premeditated political plan, but rather just trying to survive.

It is this kind of survival instinct that sets apart the Neapolitan resistance from other resistance movements throughout Europe. The people in Naples did

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 129.

not convene for meetings and discuss the problems that they were having. They did not discuss 'politics' per se. They simply acted based on their needs and the situations they saw around them. That is precisely the reason why "to call the four days an insurrection suggests a well organized, planned revolt of the type seen later in the cities of the north. This was not the case in Naples"¹⁴ However, there were women who simply were antifascist, and therefore anti-German. For example, Laura Conti, a *staffeta*, "disliked the Fascist vision of women and was even more repelled by racial doctrines."¹⁵ She even went as far as to say that the "world was too small to accommodate the Nazis and me, it was even necessary to die...I[she] became a war machine: I wanted only to get rid of the Germans."¹⁶ Another woman, also a *stafetta*, Maria Gaurdino, actually took up arms against the Germans;"I fired for more than two hours! I thirst[ed], and thus that day I was possessed by a great anger...I understood very well what the Fascists and Germans against who I fought represented..."¹⁷

Women had advantages when carrying out secret missions simply because of the fact that they were women. The Germans would rarely search a woman, especially if she was with a child, or pregnant. It was allegedly women's 'nature' that helped them to go unnoticed. When questioned about her work as a *stafetta* and how the Germans acted towards her, Maria Gaurdino responded in a joking manner by saying:

¹⁴ De Blasio, Maria. *The Other Italy*. (New York: Norton and Company, 1988), 36.

¹⁵ Slaughter. *Women & Resistance*, 46.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 59.

The Germans? But it was they who took me from one place to another on their trucks. You only had to give them a few smiles. They all squinted at me. And I looked at them and laughed. And that was enough.¹⁸

Sources from the period and memoirs also reflect the fact that, women played a major role in the resistance movements in Naples, all over Italy, and throughout Europe. It is very interesting to see how the postwar mythology nearly erased them from the history of the resistance, denying them a much deserved recognition.

In September 1943, people were gathering throughout Naples, uneasy, and full of hatred for the German occupation. For years their misery had but one name, fascism, but suddenly misery turned to hate, and it was now directed against Germany. There was a feeling of euphoria at that moment, a popular consensus that Neapolitans could change their region if they only banded together. Paolo Gobetti, who took part in the resistance movement, put it best when he said:

We felt completely free and secure. We were armed and we knew who the enemy was. This was a moment of absolute liberty because the state had vanished, both the Fascist State and the state of the King and Badoglio --- there was no more state. The state was the Germans, who were oppressors and invaders and had no legitimacy, nor did the Fascists who worked with them. So as we walked among the trees and the mountains we had a feeling, almost a sensation, that we could reach out and touch utopia, the possibility that we could build something entirely new.¹⁹

For twenty days after the September armistice, the problems within Naples festered and grew. The Germans enacted various new regulations such as the

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

¹⁹ De Blasio, *The Other Italy*, 35.

imposition of a new curfew. There were checkpoints everywhere one went, and armed guards everywhere. According to Antonio Tarsia in Curia, a key player in the Vomero region of the resistance, the “German troops considered themselves to be in an enemy country”²⁰ The German forces had not received any reinforcements for the entire month of September. Tarsia in Curia noted that, the Italian “superior officials did not give orders to their troops, and did nothing in the way of maintaining a healthy and active spirit within the army, and ordered the army not to resist against the Germans.”²¹ If indeed the Italian army had pulled together and acted as a unit, it is quite possible that the ‘Quattro Giornate’ would not have occurred. If there “was a commanding military officer in Naples at the time of the armistice, they [Neapolitans] would have most likely been able to throw the Germans that were found in Italy out very easily, the situation, however, became the opposite.”²² Instead, it was the Germans who dominated the situation in the beginning of the month. The Neapolitans had no one to turn to for help. It became clear that the inhabitants of the city could only achieve freedom through their own efforts.

Colonel Hans Scholl was the commander of the Nazi army that was stationed in Naples. He was responsible for many of the atrocities that occurred after the armistice on September 8th, 1943 and throughout the rest of that month, including the four days of resistance. He “...personally ordered that Naples be

²⁰ Tarsia, in Curia, Antonio. *La Verita sulle ‘Quattro Giornate’ di Napoli*. (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1950), 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

reduced to 'mud and ashes '."23 He had general reasons for wanting to completely destroy the city. Scholl apparently felt betrayed by his former allies, and now wanted retribution. Tarsia in Curia, a 'commander' of the local resistance movement, later wrote in his memoirs that "Naples, however, was the first city that the Germans let loose their implacable anger against the Italians who no longer wanted to fight the war on their side."24 However, this alone was not enough to explain the destruction Scholl wreaked upon Naples. The other, more important reason was that Scholl and other high Nazi officials did not want the Allies to occupy a city that could be used as a base, as the Allies moved up the Italian peninsula. Tarsia in Curia states that the "German commander in case of an eventual retreat of German forces from Naples towards the North; he would abandon Naples in a condition that would not permit the Anglo-Americans to use it [Naples] as a war operations base."25 This is why Scholl ordered for water supplies to be ruined, buildings to be bombed, and bridges to be destroyed. He had no care for the innocent civilians who depended on the water supply. He only cared about robbing the allies of a functional home base in Italy.

In addition to property damage to the city itself, on September 12th, Commander Scholl posted notices all over Naples. The ordinances stated that the city of Naples was under the jurisdiction of the German army. In addition,

²³ De Blasio, *The Other Italy*, 41.

²⁴ Tarsia, in Curia, *La Verita*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

citizens were told that if they remained calm, they would have his protection; otherwise they would be treated as enemies of the German state. There was also a curfew imposed from 8 p.m. till 6 a.m. every night, and only in the cases of extreme danger could this be broken. Scholl also stated that every German soldier injured or killed would be avenged a hundred times over. All arms were to be handed over to the German forces within twenty four hours of the date the ordinance was posted. Additionally all men were to report to their assigned locations for the beginning of forced military assignments; either in the German army or at the German concentration camps. Scholl then signed the ordinance with an addendum that this was necessary because many German soldiers were being violently attacked, killed, or injured.²⁶ Below is a copy of the notice posted all over Naples on September 12th requesting all men to report for forced labor the next day.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.



27

However, even the harsh rules and orders of Colonel Scholl were not enough to move the Neapolitans to violence. The straw that broke the camel's back was the burning of the University of Naples and the Historical Archives. Allegedly a German soldier was killed, and Scholl sought retribution. First his henchmen set the University of Naples, one of the oldest institutions in the world on fire. They then ordered a young boy to walk into the flaming building, even though he

²⁷ Giannini, Giovanna, La Resistenza, 2000, <http://www.cronologia.it/storia/a1943ee.htm>

(17 April 2005). ** N.B. Please note that on the seventh line a printing error occurred. The number 3,000 should be 30,000.

professed his innocence and screamed for his mother. Just as he was about to walk into the burning building, a German soldier shot him in the back of the head, killing the young man instantly.²⁸ The museums and houses of wealthy people were sacked. Additionally, the San Carlo Theater, one of the most famous and beautiful theaters in the world, was destroyed when the Germans set it ablaze. The destruction was shocking. Tarsia in Curia stated that the Germans wanted to carry out the order for the total and complete destruction of Naples with '*tenacia teutonica*,' that is, with Teutonic tenacity.²⁹ Several days before the Germans evacuated Naples, Norman Lewis discovered that:

It now came out that several days before the Germans abandoned Naples, Colonel Scholl, the officer in command of the garrison, reported to have been unable to accept Italians as even 'honorary Aryans', had given an order that an area to a depth of 300 meters from the sea-front be evacuated by the civilian population. The Italians had been led to believe at that time that a naval bombardment, followed by an allied landing, was expected in the city itself. The supposition now was that the real motive was to clear the area to enable this to be secretly mined, and that a large number of sea-front buildings had been mined in this way, and might blow up at any time.³⁰

After the ordinance of the 12th of September that required all able bodied men to report for duty was widely ignored, Scholl declared on the 25th of September that whoever did not report for duty would be shot immediately. Norman Lewis, an Allied soldier, declared upon arriving in Naples that it had become "a city so shattered, so starved, so deprived of all things that justify a city's existence to

²⁸ De Blasio, *The Other Italy*, 35.

²⁹ Tarsia in Curia, *La Verita* 28-32.

³⁰ Lewis, Norman. *Naples '44*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 41.

adapt itself to a collapse into conditions which must resemble life in the dark ages.”³¹ The ‘Four Days’ was now set in motion.

When thinking about the ‘Four Days’, it is important to remember that this was not an insurrection. The very word insurrection implies an organized revolt and this certainly was not the case for Naples. According to historian Maria De Blasio, “the spontaneity of the rebellion in a city of over a million is the phenomenon that makes the ‘Four Days’ so special.”³² The degree of organization that term “insurrection” implies was something only seen in the North. By contrast, the resistance in Naples consisted of small groups of partisans, or *partigiani* operating on their own, independently. These groups usually consisted of neighbors from the same building, or *palazzo* and had some sort of unofficial leader. The resistance movements were organized by neighborhoods, or *quartieri*.

For example, the Vomero group, which represented Via Vomero, was led by Antonio Tarsia in Curia, while another group from a different block, would have had a different leader. These leaders did not meet and discuss plans of action. On the contrary, they simply acted.

On the morning of September 28 “the streets of Naples were flowing with armed citizens of every age; there were even young children and women; here there were people of every category; artisans, students, employees,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³² De Blasio, *The Other Italy*, 35.

professionals, soldiers, and sailors...”³³ Accounts of that morning by Tarsia in Curia say that the “Oxygenated, free air [was] in decided contrast to the heavy and toxic air of the previous days, during, which all was hatred, sadness, vendetta, and suffering for unarmed people, gasping for liberty, from the ferocious oppression of the enemy.”³⁴

The Neapolitans fought bravely during the ‘Four Days’ with a “ferociousness aimed at vindicating through the spilling of German blood all the offenses they had received [from the Germans]”³⁵ According to Tarsia in Curia, the ‘Four Days’ was “conducted with extreme violence with isolated persons, groups, and little groups doing whatever actions they wanted when and where they wanted.”³⁶ The Germans acted in turn very savagely towards the Neapolitans. It was understandable that there were going to be deaths in a resistance movement; however, what was not understandable was the manner in which the Germans killed the Neapolitans. They were utterly cruel and barbaric. The following photos taken from Corrado’s memoir serve as an example of the savagery the Neapolitans suffered at the hands of the Germans:

³³ Tarsia in Curia, *La Verita*, 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.



“Patriotti del Rione Vomero, caduti nelle Quattro Giornate (28 settembre - 1° ottobre 1943).”³⁷ (Patriots of the Vomero Region, who fell during the Four Days)

The photo above shows resistance fighters of Naples who have died. One of the men was badly burned by a German soldier. As can be seen by the enormous crucifixes and abundance of flowers, these people were mourned greatly by the Neapolitans that they fought for.

³⁷ Barbagallo, Corrado. *Napoli Contro il Terrore Nazista*. (Naples: Casa Editrice Maone, 1944), appendix,



“PALUMBO GIUSEPPE, (cadoto a La Pfgna accerchiato da quattro tedeschi e tre fascist!, i quali, dopo averlo trucidato, lo motilarono con tremenda bestialita.”)³⁸

PALUMBO, GIUSEPPE (Killed at La Pfgna, killed by four Germans and three fascists! And after they murdered him they mutilated him with tremendous bestiality)

Perhaps a more telling photo of German savagery is that of Giuseppe Palumbo, a Neapolitan who was killed at La Pfgna by four Germans. Not only was this man killed by Germans, but after he was killed he was severely mutilated. As can be seen above, The Germans created an incision on his stomach and ripped out his intestines. Taking a life alone is horrendous, but mutilation for the sake of entertainment is disturbed, disgusting, and savage.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, appendix.

Besides being decentralized in terms of organization, the Neapolitans were also underequipped. The Germans had far superior arms. Around three hundred patriots who fought along side the partisans were also unarmed. The only desire of the Neapolitans had been to see the Germans go.

The Naples rebellion which lasted from September 28th, 1943 to October 1st, 1943 was the bloodiest in all of Italy. Although the Neapolitans were victorious on several occasions, that did not mean that the Germans did not engage wholeheartedly in the battle. Norman Lewis, a British soldier, noted that on September 30th, 1943 “at the cross roads of the main street and the Avese highway...there took place a massacre conducted by the Germans.”³⁹ The battle raged on for the four days and nights. With each victory, the Neapolitans grew more courageous, and since Scholl was being isolated in the south and with no reinforcements, the victory of the Neapolitans was imminent. On October 1st, 1943 Scholl drove out of Naples, waving the white flag. The Neapolitans had won. They had fought the Germans at their own game and won. According to Clough and Saladino, historians, “this was the first time that the most rigidly militaristic army in the world had surrendered to civilian fighters.”⁴⁰

The bravery that was exhibited by each person who participated in the movement was remembered by all for many years. To this day, people continue to speak of the ‘Four Days’. Yet is what they speak of an accurate reflection of what really happened? I would argue that the answer is no. The postwar

³⁹ Lewis, *Naples*, 68.

⁴⁰ Clough and Saladino, *History of Modern*, 526.

‘mythology of the resistance’ that developed in Naples was so overwhelming that not even local Neapolitans know the truth anymore.

The myth has completely overtaken the reality. What exactly was the myth that grew out of the resistance movements that lasted from September 28th, to October 1st, 1943? The myth, for the most part, revolved around the story of the *scugnizzi*, or street urchins of Naples. These boys, who spent their days diving for quarters and pick-pocketing, became glorified as the liberators of the city. They were said to have killed one German, and then went on to kill others, stealing the Germans’ weapons and continuing until they had amassed a large amount of artillery. According to Norman, these “ragged, hawk-eyed boys – the celebrated *scugnizzi* of Naples” have had films, and books created all around their ‘story’.⁴¹ In Aubrey Menen’s allegedly ‘true story’ entitled *The Four Days of Naples*, she attributes the entire Neapolitan victory to the street urchin *scugnizzi*. She stated that she first arrived in Naples in 1948 and it was then that she discovered the heroic tale of the boys.

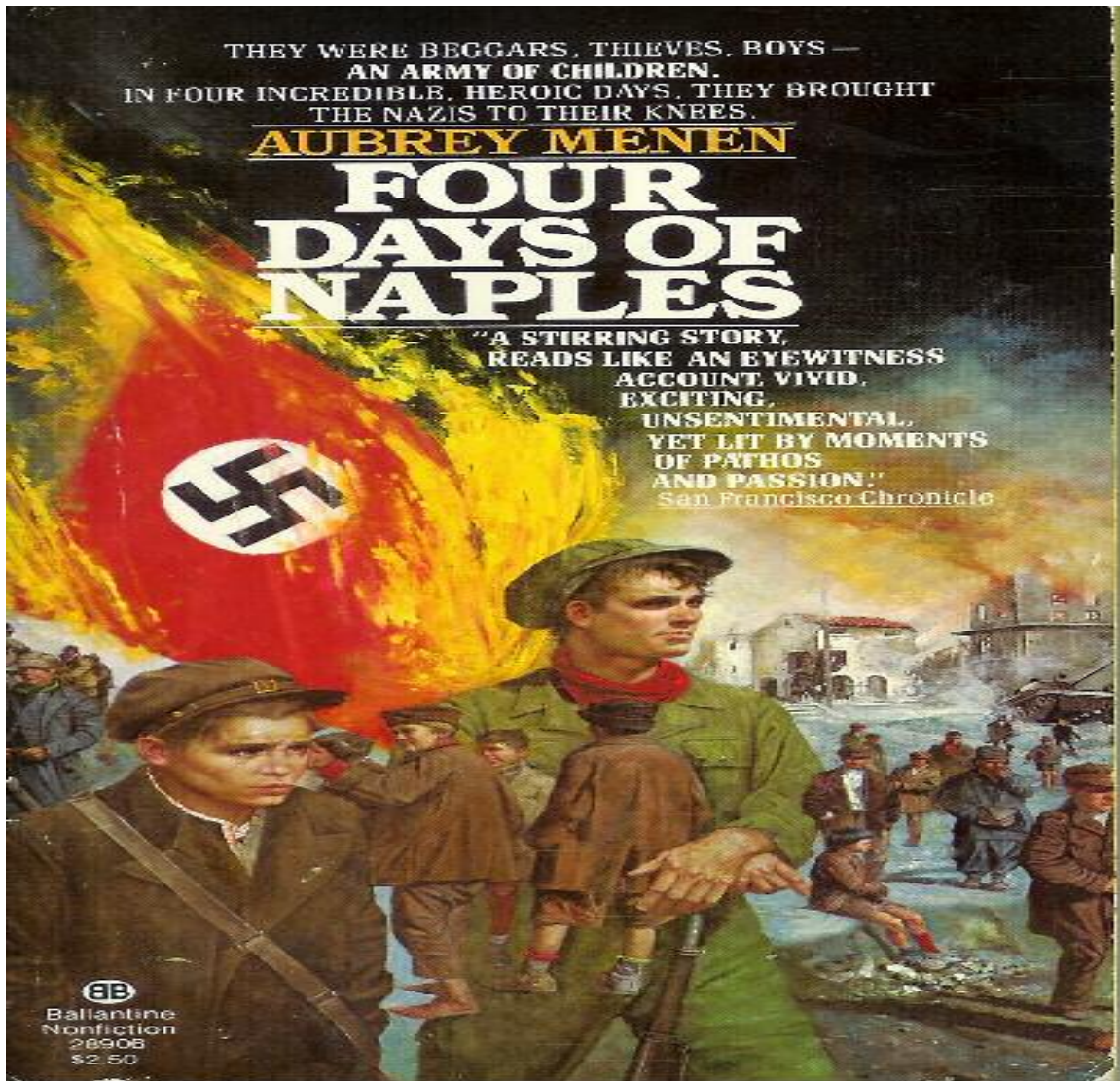
It was then that I first heard of the extraordinary revolt of the Neapolitan Street boys --- the *scugnizzi*, as they are called. They are urchins, very poor, often dirty, but always intelligent and sharp. The boys themselves told me of what they had done. With the aid of the institute for the history of the Resistance, the Municipal Archives, the *Biblioteca Nazionale*, and the research of previous investigators, I have established the truth of the events described in this book.⁴²

The cover of her book, shown below, stated “they were beggars, thieves, boys--- any army of children. In four incredible days they brought the Nazis to their

⁴¹ Lewis, *Naples*, 52.

⁴² Menen, Aubrey. *Four Days of Naples*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979). xi.

knees.”⁴³ Below is the cover illustration of *The Four Days of Naples* by Menen. As can be seen, the cover art clearly depicts young boys, better known as *scugnizzi*.



44

Although, her story sounds very adventurous and most likely drew people to read her supposedly ‘historical’ book, she is very mistaken about the events. The

⁴³ *Ibid.*, cover.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, cover.

famous *scugnizzi* were indeed active in the resistance in Naples, but they were by no means an army of boys 'bringing the Nazis to their knees' single-handedly. There were many young people, or *giovenetti*, who were extremely courageous during the Four Days, such as Giacomo Lattanzi, who was awarded the gold medal for valor after his death. Tarsia in Curia devotes part of his memoir to this heroic young boy. A few Germans were causing trouble and attacking local Neapolitans. Many people fled yet,

The only one who remained was the young boy of only 16 years, Giacomo Lattanzi. Instead of fleeing he wanted to confront the assassins. He was witness to the savagery and aggression of the enemies from the door of the electrician's shop where he was an apprentice. Through his generous spirit he grabbed the gun of a *carabinieri* who had leaned it [the gun] against a wall and he began to shoot at the Germans. A little time had passed and he had used all of the bullets in his gun. However, he had the satisfaction of seeing a place on the dirt that was running with the blood of his aggressor.⁴⁵

Lattanzi remained in hiding for days until he decided to join a partisan group. On the way to an alleged meeting he was duped by a fascist spy for the Germans and was caught. He was taken away, forced to dig his own grave, and was shot in the head.

It is stories such as these that have helped to generate the myth of an army of poor boys taking back the city. There is another reason why the *scugnizzi* have become a symbol of the Italian Resistance: photos taken by the *LIFE* magazine photographer, Robert Capa. Capa's portrayal of the street urchins created a romanticized version of the *scugnizzi* that many people could not help but find attractive. Below is one of the many photos of Robert Capa which

⁴⁵ Tarsia in Curia, *La Verita*, 18-19.

helped to create the myth of the resistance. This photo is entitled “Grieving Mothers of Naples”. Included are the comments written by Capa himself.



46

The narrow street leading to my hotel was blocked by a queue of silent people in front of a schoolhouse. Inside were twenty primitive coffins not well enough covered with flowers and too small to hide the feet of children --- children old enough to fight the Germans and be killed, but just a little too old to fit in the children's coffins.

These children of Naples had stolen rifles and bullets and had fought the Germans for fourteen days while we had been pinned to the Chiunzi pass. These children's feet were my real welcome to Europe, I who had been born there. More real by far than the welcome of the hysterically cheering crowds I had met along the road, many of them the same that had yelled 'Duce!' in an earlier year. ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Capa, Cornell. *Concerned photographer*. (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid., notes.

Yet another photo of Robert Capa's, shown below, also refers to the schoolhouse funeral scene he describes above. This photograph shows the coffin that was "too small to hide the feet of children --- children old enough to fight the Germans and be killed, but just a little too old to fit in the children's coffins."⁴⁸



I took off my hat and got out my camera. I pointed the lens at the faces of the prostrated women, taking little pictures of their dead babies, until finally the coffins were carried away. Those were my truest pictures of victory, the ones I took at that simple schoolhouse funeral. ⁴⁹

In Capa's work entitled *Images of War*, from which this photograph was taken, he breaks up each country by photos. When he describes the photos of Italy

⁴⁸ Capa, *Concerned*, 26.

⁴⁹ Capa, Robert, *Images of War*. (New York: Paragraphic Books), 100.

during this time he created an entire section dedicated to only to Naples. Yet all the photos in this section deal with the *scugnizzi*. There is not one photo of an adult, besides the ones grieving for the children. It was this kind of selective 'reporting' that allowed the mythology of the resistance to grow. But perhaps one of Capa's most popular images of World War II Italy is the one entitled "The *Scugnizzo*".



This photo shows a young boy, a *scugnizzo*. He is wearing a military style helmet as well as chain of ammunition around his neck. It was these types of obviously posed photos that were published in *LIFE* that created the illusion that the Neapolitan street urchins had brought the Nazis 'to their knees'.

The *scugnizzi* were contributors to the resistance, of course. Yet they are no more important than any of the other participants in the resistance. According to De Blasio, a historian, the “*scugnizzi* had been especially adept at raiding arsenals and even occasionally the unguarded vehicles of German soldiers...and during the night a house by house distribution of weapons was underway.”⁵⁰ So indeed the boys were integral and important but the reality was that boys participated, alongside men of all ages, and women too.

The myth has become so integrated into Neapolitan culture that one would be hard pressed to find even a local that would be able to describe the “Four Days” in its actuality. An interview with Antonio Celeste conducted on April 11th, 2005 illuminates the incorporation of the ‘myth of the resistance’ into Neapolitan popular culture. Antonio Celeste was born in Afragola, Provincia di Napoli in 1956. He resided in Naples until he was 17 years old, when he and his family immigrated to the United States. Below is a portion of the interview.

Rosa Maria Celeste: When was the first time that you heard or were told about the “Four Days of Naples”?

Antonio Celeste: My father told me the story when I was very young. Then, when I was 12 years old I went to the movie theatre and saw the movie “Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli”.

Rosa Maria Celeste: Please describe the events of the “Four Days of Naples” as you believe them to be.

⁵⁰ De Blasio, *Other Italy*, 49-50.

Antonio Celeste: There were street boys, *scugnizzi*, that took the law into their own hands against the Germans and they kicked the Germans out of Naples in four days....That's why they call it "Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli" [The Four Days of Naples]

Rosa Maria Celeste: Did you ever hear about the "Four Days" in school?

Antonio Celeste: Yes, they told me the same things that my father told me about the "Four Days of Naples". It was also the same story that I had seen in the film "The Four Days of Naples". We even used to watch the movie in class sometimes...

Rosa Maria Celeste: What would you say if I told that the story as you believe it to be is wrong?

Antonio Celeste: I would get very angry. This is the truth! There is even a monument in Piazza Perbisha that is called 'Lo Scugnizzo'!!⁵¹

In an earlier interview conducted on October 18th, 2005 with Gaetano Celeste, father of Antonio Celeste, reflects many of the same beliefs. Gaetano Celeste was born in Naples in 1932 and lived there until 1978. When asked about the Germans he responded "Those bloodless swine? They didn't deserve to be allied with us. We were so happy when the alliance was broken. ...in Naples there was a huge resistance movement against the Germans by many of the young people."⁵²

⁵¹ Antonio Celeste, interview by Rosa Maria Celeste, 11 April 2005.

⁵² Gaetano Celeste, interview by Rosa Maria Celeste, 18 October 2004.

The film, “Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli”, directed by Nanni Loy, which Antonio Celeste referred to in his interview, appeared to have been for the most part an accurate recounting of the Naples rebellion. Loy’s depiction of the film relied on primary sources, and interviews of people who either fought in the rebellion, or knew someone that did. What was interesting about the film was that although viewers, such as Antonio Celeste, seemed to remember it as the movie of the *scugnizzi* it actually included many historical aspects that were for the most part accurate. Throughout the film, the viewer can see a variety of people participating in the resistance. These people included women, men, soldiers, and teenagers.

Another myth perpetuated by postwar writers was that women did not participate in the rebellion. Menen’s book seems to have showcased these young boys as heroes, yet mentions only one girl who seemed to have joined for the love of her boyfriend. She was the only female in the entire story that was discussed. Her presence was presented as odd in Menen’s account of the story.

Yet, in fact women were a huge part in the resistance movement, not only in Naples, but throughout Italy. Slaughter, states that “during the war, as already discussed, women struggled to feed their families and then became the major, providers for partisan units.”⁵³ Women also formed groups such as the GDD, *Gruppi Defensi delle Donne*. Groups like the Women’s Defense Groups, or the GDD, turned individual despair into public activism. The GDD gave “form to spontaneous rebellion, which launched recruitment drives, encouraged all

⁵³ Slaughter, *Women & Resistance*, 68.

women to act, and channeled women into many resistance functions but also sponsored major civilian resistance and above all connected women to the broader social and political goals of the Resistance.”⁵⁴ It was in these groups that women were able to turn to for an outlet for their problems and also to discuss situations. They were able to join these groups and become involved in the resistance movements in their towns.

Women were the information couriers of the resistance movements throughout Europe, and especially in Italy. The *stafette*, women couriers, were vital. They transported bombs, guns, messages, and had countless other necessary duties. According to Slaughter, a majority of women who participated in the movements who were apart of the “opposition to the political community or ‘family’ [Mussolini’s version of the family] prior to 1943 were driven by personal loyalties and party ideologies and platforms, and some were specifically concerned with social and political reforms that could benefit women”⁵⁵

However, in Naples during September of 1943, many women began to mobilize because of the sheer horrific scene around them. They hid partisans, fed groups, and clothed people. They even acted as doctors for the sick. The role of women in the resistance was essential. DeBlasio states that “when women take up a cause you can assume it has been won.”⁵⁶ This statement could not have been truer. Without the women the resistance would not have

⁵⁴ Slaughter, *Women & Resistance*, 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁶ De Blasio, *Other Italy*, 49-50.

been won. They were the backbone of Italian society, so it only made sense that they would be the backbone of the resistance.

Another common myth about the resistance is that the Communists did not play a part. This is completely erroneous. The Communists played an important role in resistance movements in Italy, and all throughout Europe. Despite their contributions, there seems to have been an erasure in popular memory of the Communist participation in the resistance movement. Communism was seen as an evil by many different parties throughout Europe. Since Italy was a strongly Catholic country, it was only natural that the Italians would not revere a party, such as Communism, which denied religion. More importantly, immediately after the war a party known as the Christian Democrats rose to power in Italy. Under their leader Alcide Di Gasperi the “Christian Democrats and the Liberals found themselves frequently at odds with the Socialists and the Communists.”⁵⁷

The political climate of post war Italy was very charged. According to Cough and Saladino “on the domestic scene, the retention or disbanding of military bands loyal to certain parties; on the international scene they meant the attitude of Italy should adopt towards the latent but not yet public cold war between the East and the West.”⁵⁸ The Christian Democrats were opposed to Communism and other leftist parties. The Christian Democrats were also very rigid in their views towards women. Thus, the erasure of the Communists and

⁵⁷ Clough and Saladino, *History of Italy*, 535.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 536.

women from the post-war literature of the resistance also reflected the influence of the Christian Democratic government of Italy.

However, the Communists were active, and very integral to the resistance. After many works were published omitting the Communists, authors like Italo Calvino felt compelled to make the point that the Communists really were active and important in the resistance movement in Italy. His tale, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders*, is a story of a young boy named Pin and his story about the resistance. It is clear that Pin was affiliated with a group of Communists. The Communist group that Pin belonged to was apart of a larger network of Communists groups in the area. The Italian Communist partisans even created a hymn of communist pride, known as '*Bandiera Rossa*'. This hymn can be found in Italo Calvino's novel as well. Pin sang the hymn loudly as the others looked on:

Forward people, to the victory
The Red Flag, The Red Flag
Forward people, to the victory
The Red Flag will triumph
There are no more enemies and no more frontiers
Everything is within the confines of the Red Flag
Proletariat – forward to victory
The Red Flag will triumph
The Red Flag will triumph
The Red Flag will triumph
The Red Flag will triumph
Long live socialism and liberty

Another part of the mythology of the resistance was that everyone who participated was a heroic patriot, perfect in all ways and devoted to the cause of freedom for Italy. This was also not true. Italo Calvino was once again a vital player in the debunking of this part of the myth. After the war was over, everyone had supposedly fought bravely, and for the right reasons. A sort of 'canonization' of all resistance participants occurred. Calvino would not participate in this myth. Instead he sought to destroy it. He states very clearly his reasons for writing his work on the resistance in the prologue of *The Path to The Nest of Spiders*.

There, we said so all along; these partisans, they're all like that; they needn't come telling us tales of the resistance; we know perfectly well the sort of ideals... This was the climate in which I wrote my book, which was meant to answer those right minded paradoxically: "Very well, I'll act as is you were right. I won't portray the finest partisans, but the worst ones possible". You want the 'Socialist hero', eh? You want 'revolutionary romanticism', do you? Well I'll write you a partisan story in which nobody has any class consciousness. I'll give you a world of the lingerie, the tramps, the Lumpenproletariat!!!⁵⁹

And that is exactly what he did. His characters are felons, whores, prostitutes, deranged lunatics, and people like Pin, who just joined the resistance for lack of a better offer. Calvino's work starkly contradicts the erroneous beliefs that many people had, and still have today about what kind of people took part in the resistance.

But how was all this mythology created? The answer is linked to the fact that most of the work on the resistance movement in Italy has focused primarily on the Northern regions of Italy, such as Tuscany, and Florence. There do not seem to be any historians outside of Naples who took the time to analyze the

⁵⁹ Calvino, Italo. *The Path to The Nest of Spiders*. (New York: Ecco Press, 1947), xiii-xiv.

'Four Days'. There could be many reasons for this occurrence, including but not limited to the ever present '*mezzogiorno*' problem in Italy: the wealthy, industrialized north overshadows and overpowers the agricultural, and poor southern half of Italy in all aspects of life, including literature. This phenomenon has occurred in many periods of Italian life, including but not limited to the Renaissance, which took place in Florence. In addition, the wealthier cities such as Milan and Rome attract more businesses because of the fact that they are highly industrialized. The South has been excluded from this 'high culture'.

But the main reason for the predominance of the North in historical accounts is much simpler than that: The 'Four Days' incident was not widely written about outside of Naples because of the very nature of the event. The 'Four Days' was chaotic, decentralized, and sporadic. There was no central leadership, and definitely not any sort of network like that of the North. Northern resistance movements were quite different. They were organized, well documented, and had strong networks of communication. It was the very sporadic nature of the 'Four Days' that made it so special, but these same factors created tremendous barriers for historians in doing research.

For the most part, the secondary literature did not speak of the 'Four Days' at all. Where it was mentioned, it was only mentioned briefly, and not in detail. Most of the information for this thesis was gathered from the primary sources, such as memoirs. The secondary sources described the resistance movements in other parts of Italy in a manner that made them seem completely different from the events in Naples. The Neapolitan resistance movement was much more

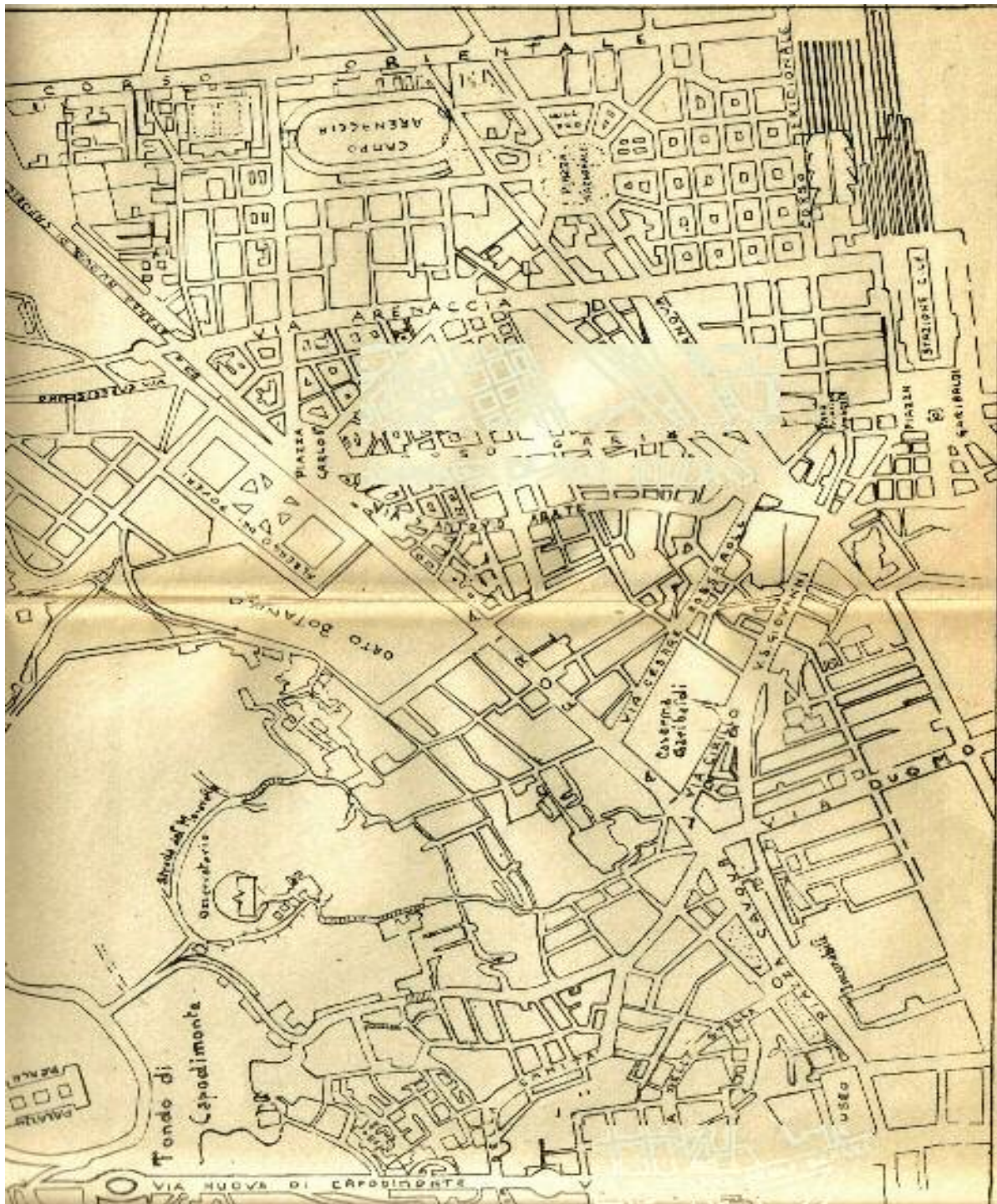
bloody and violent than anything described in the secondary sources about the Northern resistance movements.

The mythology of the Neapolitan resistance movement that erupted after World War II arose from the lack of secondary analysis on the part of both Italian historians and foreign historians. This lack of analysis was rooted in the nature of the movement, which was very decentralized and chaotic, making it very hard to study. In addition, the influence of the Christian Democratic Party which practically erased the participation of the Communists and women from the resistance was also very crucial in this lack of analysis. Furthermore, the focus of many historians on the northern sections of Italy also played an important role in the lack of the analysis of the Naples rebellion. Lastly, the romanticizing of the events of the rebellion, by people such as Capa and Menen, also played a major role in the growth of the myth which also helped to contribute to the lack of analysis.

Because of the lack of scholarly research, a mythology was born. In addition, because most of the sources of information for this event were primary accounts, it became very hard to separate what the participant actually did from what he claimed to have done. That is how many people and groups became glorified as heroes, because of course no one will admit in their recounting of the 'Four Days' that they were cowards and did nothing for the resistance.

For this reason, it is extremely important to read various forms of primary accountants from participants from all levels of the social stratosphere. Doing so created a more complete version of the 'real' truth. Although many writers have

claimed to be telling the 'truth' about what occurred in Naples between September 28th, and October 1st, 1943, the truth has not been told in full until now. I have attempted here to offer a factual account of the 'Four Days of Naples' that goes beyond the myth, although many Neapolitans would refuse to believe it.



Map 1: Taken from Corrado's *Napoli Contro il Terrore Nazista*, shows a handmade drawing of the north quarters in Naples where many battles were fought. It is useful to refer to it when reading so that a clearer image of the zones where the battles were fought are located.

Glossary of Key Terms

Scugnizzi (plural) **Scugnizzo** (sing.) – a street urchin of Naples; refers to a male.

Giovanetti (plural) – refers to young people in general.

Stafette (plural) – women who were couriers and messengers during the resistance.

Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli – The Four Days of Naples

Mezzogiorno – literally midday. Depending on context of sentence it can refer to the great divide that exists between Northern and Southern Italy. The Mezzogiorno problem refers to the economic dependence of the South on the North. For this thesis, Mezzogiorno will always refer to the economic disparity between Northern and Southern Italy.

Carabinieri – police men

Quartieri – neighborhoods

Partigiani - partisans

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