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Title Page

Working through the violent past. Practices of restorative justice through memory and dialogue in Italy.

Abstract

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s Italy suffered a prolonged period of political violence and ideologically inspired terrorist acts, which caused deep social wounds and led to a sharply divided memory, as epitomized by the numerous memoirs written by former terrorists and victims since the end of the violence. This paper explores the prevalent modes that have characterized these memoirs as well as instances of reconciliation and dialogue in the Italian context. It argues that some of these memoirs and above all a recent dialogue between former perpetrators and victims can be best viewed through the lenses of agonistic memory and reconciliation. The latter should not be conceived in terms of re-establishing a mythical harmonious and consensual society or constructing a single shared memory of the past. Rather, it requires former enemies to confront each other with their divided memories and perspectives in an open-ended manner.

Keywords:

agonism, terrorism, Italy, memory, dialogue, reconciliation

Contact details:
Anna Cento Bull
University of Bath
a.bull@bath.ac.uk

Working through the violent past. Practices of restorative justice through memory and dialogue in Italy. *

Introduction

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s Italy suffered a prolonged period of political violence, consisting of bombing attacks on innocent civilians and an 'armed struggle' against the state. While the latter was carried out by ideologically-inspired groups mainly from the left (though radical right groups were also involved), it was neo-fascist terrorists who were responsible for the bombing campaign. A heavy shadow still hangs over the role of the state, since parts of the Italian state are strongly suspected of having connived with the terrorists in pursuing a 'Strategy of Tension' aimed at curbing the increasing power of the Communist Party and fostering a turn to the right. In terms of promoting pacification, in the 1980s the state introduced measures aimed at facilitating an early release from prison for 'repented' terrorists and at re-integrating them into society. These measures were both successful and widely acknowledged as pioneering and forward-looking. Yet they also established a gulf between the state and former terrorists on the one hand and the survivors and victims of terrorism on the other, who felt that their legitimate demands for truth and justice had been ignored and sacrificed to political expediency. As Cento Bull and Cooke (2013: 50) argued: 'for many of the victims of terrorism, the laws on dissociation were extremely hard to swallow, and have led to the (arguably justified) perception that they have been victims twice over'. Furthermore, the failure of retributive justice to achieve truth and justice in relation to the bombing massacres impacted severely upon the victims and relatives of the victims.

To compound matters, the late 1980s and 1990s saw great attention being paid to the former perpetrators on the part of the media. As Andreasen and Cecchini (2016: 100) recall, an important television programme, entitled *La Notte della Repubblica (The Night of the Republic*), broadcast on a main state channel between December 1989 and April 1990, 'consisted of interviews with a wide array of people involved in the 'years of lead', such as judges, politicians, journalists, and the perpetrators of the violent acts'. Devised and presented by the journalist Sergio Zavoli, it was in part conceived as promoting a process of reconciliation. Yet, as the authors point out (2016: 101), 'All the more remarkable, considering the scope of the programme, is the disproportionate level of representation between the perpetrators and victims of violence'. As they clarify, while many former terrorists from both left-wing and right-wing organizations were interviewed by Zavoli in the course of the programme, there was only one interview with a victim. This was followed in the 1990s by the publication of a number of memoirs by former terrorists. While the latter vary in content and tone, many of them tend to cast their past deeds in a heroic mould, placing them in a ‘just war’ context.

While the end of the first Republic in the early 1990s arguably could have provided a context conducive to a wider process of social and political reconciliation, the acrimonious manner in which it ended and Berlusconi’s rise to power in alliance with the former neo-fascist party, Alleanza nazionale, prevented any reflective reassessment of the recent violent past. Memory remained sharply divided at both the social and political levels (Foot 2009; Cento Bull 2016). As Hajek (2013: 173) argued, ‘the wound remains open and continues to resurface in public debates, whereas the task of asserting the truth and coping with the trauma is delegated to victims’ families associations’.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, however, the country has introduced some of the elements recommended in the restorative justice literature to compensate for the failure of the judicial process and address the needs of the victims. First, Law 206 of 3 August 2004 introduced comprehensive measures providing compensation to the victims, even though this was largely the outcome of sustained pressure being exercised upon the state by active victims’ associations (Vettori 2007: 33). Second, in 2007 the Italian Parliament established by an overwhelming majority a Day of Memory to honour the victims of terrorism, and since then public commemorations have been held at the highest level every 9 May (Cento Bull 2008: 415). Most importantly, in recent years many victims and especially relatives of victims have spoken out on their ordeal, publishing their memoirs and making media appearances, after many years in which they either kept silent or were silenced and searched for justice largely in isolation. Finally, there have been encounters and instances of dialogue between former perpetrators and victims and relatives of victims of terrorism. These developments raise the question of whether Italy has embarked on a process of restorative justice through dialogue and collective remembering and, if so, what is the nature and scope of victims’ and perpetrators’ testimonies and of their encounters.

This article examines and explores these issues by adopting a critical view of restorative justice informed by the concept of agonistic memory, which argues that disagreement and conflict are constitutive of democracy. Can we detect elements of agonism in the Italian path to remembering the violent past and encountering the other?

The article is structured as follows: the first section discusses the concepts of restorative justice as well as memory and dialogue in post-conflict processes of reconciliation. The ensuing sections apply this interpretative framework to the prevalent ‘modes of remembering’ in recent memoirs by victims and perpetrators in Italy. The final section explores a sustained process of dialogue which in 2015 culminated in the publication of a book entitled ‘*Il libro dell’incontro*’.

Reconciliation through memory and dialogue

According to Renner and Spencer (2011: 12), reconciliation is a complex process, as it aims at ‘overcoming the “terrorist” conflict through a profound societal transformation’. Reconciliation tends to go hand in hand with restorative justice, as opposed to traditional forms of retributive justice. While the latter refers to criminal law proceedings and court trials, which provide redress for the victims through prison sentences for the perpetrators, the former refers to alternative (or complementary) processes of justice that involve an obligation to set things right for the victims (Zehr, 1990). Focusing on truth telling, acts of reparations and commemorative practices, restorative justice is deemed able to promote healing. This type of justice has often been applied through the creation of specific Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation, following the example established in South Africa in 1995 (Hayner 2011).

Advocates for this kind of justice argue that it is victim-centred and as such brings redress through public acknowledgement of their suffering (Minow 1998; Llewellyn and Howse 1999; Rothberg and Thompson 2000; Shea 2000; Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd 2000; Hayner 2011). Critics, on the other hand, argue that reconciliation may be prioritized at the expense of justice and the rule of law while victims may feel under pressure to forgive their perpetrators for the wider societal good (Abrams 2001; Christodoulidis 2000; Crocker 2000).

Remembering plays a very important role in restorative justice, yet it is also a highly contentious issue. As Huyse (2013: 30) acknowledged, ‘memory is a two-edged sword. It can play a crucial role in making reconciliation sustainable. But it also has the capacity to hinder reconciliation processes’ (p. 30). Group memories, in particular, can be mutually antagonistic and they may perpetuate feelings of enmity across generations, explaining the long-term nature of many conflicts (Tint, 2010, p. 239). According to Volkan (2001: 87-88), a traumatic event can be transformed into a ‘chosen trauma’, whereby all members of a group ‘share the mental representations of the tragedies that have befallen them’. While the historical truth about the past event is forgotten, what matters is the transgenerational transmission of feelings of ‘helplessness, shame and humiliation’ among the group, which then becomes prone to developing a collective will for revenge vis-à-vis another group.

By contrast, remembering is often promoted as part of a process of reconciliation. Brewer, for instance, advocated ‘recasting social memory as a peace strategy’ (2006, p. 217), through practices of storytelling and ‘sites of remembrance […] that bring together victims across the divide’ (2006: 224). As Shaap (2006: 267) reminds us, ‘reconciliation is often predicated on the unwarranted assumption that collecting memories through testimony will lead to the establishment of a collective memory’. Social communication and dialogue are also often advocated in order to heal the wider community after a conflict. According to Braithwaite (2002: 11), ‘restorative justice is about restoring victims, restoring offenders, and restoring communities’.

However, it is precisely the vision of a ‘restoration’ or ‘recomposition’ of a consensual and harmonious community and of a shared collective memory following a period of violent conflict that is critiqued by many scholars, who do not subscribe to a communitarian or deliberative understanding of democracy. As Crawford and Clear (2003: 221) put it,

> What is actually meant by the claim to ‘restore’ or ‘reintegrate’ communities, as advanced by proponents of both community and restorative justice […]? Is it born of a nostalgic urge to turn back the clock to a mythical golden age of genuine human identity, connectedness and reciprocity? Or does community constitute a dynamic force for democratic renewal that challenges existing inequalities of power?

In terms of remembering the past, Bell argued that a single overarching narrative must be avoided in favour of a multiplicity of perspectives: ‘a just society would strive to acknowledge the multiplicity of historical narratives existing within it’. Considering specifically the role of memory in transitional justice, Brown (2012: 465) argued that we have to both acknowledge and challenge divergent memories of the past. In his words, ‘what may be possible is transitional justice processes that somehow allow for combative, challenging forms but that, crucially, encompass respect for the “other”’.

Bell, Brown and other scholars propose instead an agonistic conception of society, memory and indeed reconciliation. Mouffe (2000a, 2005) defines agonism as a relationship between political adversaries who share the same symbolic space and respect the democratic rules established as conditions for the struggle for hegemony. These democratic adversaries are the ones ‘with whom we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality’ (Mouffe, 2000a: 101-102).

With specific reference to post-conflict societies, Mouffe, Đorđević and Sardelić (2013) argued that ‘what democracy should try to do is to create the institutions which allow for conflict – when it emerges – to take an agonistic form, a form of adversarial confrontation instead of antagonism between enemies’. In other words, Mouffe maintains that total reconciliation or indeed consensus is neither possible nor desirable. In contrast to advocates of deliberative democracy, largely inspired by the political theories put forward by Habermas (1984, 1992) and Rawls (1971, 1993), Mouffe argues that conflict is constitutive of democracy, even though she accepts that conflict and contestation should take place within certain shared parameters.

Mouffe’s approach also rehabilitates the role of passions in democratic politics, again in disagreement with advocates of deliberative democracy. The latter, in fact, equate passions with dangerous and irrational sentiments, which inevitably lead to antagonistic relations. As she argues: ‘The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to “tame” those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs’ (2000b: 149). Building on Mouffe’s theory, Mihai (2014) argued that emotions are culturally constructed and as such they can both promote understanding and lend themselves to being transformed (from antagonistic to agonistic).

According to Cento Bull and Hansen (2016), the way a conflict is remembered can play an important role in fostering the transformation of antagonism into agonism in a post-conflict context. They distinguish between three potential modes for representing historical conflict: the antagonistic, the cosmopolitan, and the agonistic. Drawing on Mouffe, they define antagonistic memory as a discourse that relies on sharp distinctions of friend and foe, refuses to recognize the other’s view of history and fuels a historical sense of enmity. The mode of cosmopolitan memory (Levy and Sznaider 2002), in turn, prioritizes compassion for the suffering and passive victim over political passions and adopts an abstract approach to the fight between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, de-humanizing the perpetrators and erasing their perspective. By contrast, agonistic memory is multivocal and multiperspectivist, aiming not at achieving consensus but at recognising conflict and agency, as well as understanding the turn to violence.

> An agonistic mode of remembering, in addition to exposing the socially constructed nature of collective memory and including the suffering of the ‘Others’, would rely on a multiplicity of perspectives in order to bring to light the socio-political struggles of the

> past and reconstruct the historical context in ways which restore the importance of civic and political passions and address issues of individual and collective agency. (12)

Hence, an agonistic mode of remembering would promote reflexivity and dialogue in an open-ended manner and incorporating emotions, along the lines argued by Bakhtin, rather than striving to achieve a unifying conclusion through rational argumentation, as in the approach favoured by Habermas. The latter argued that dialogue should be based on rationality, which is the only channel which leads to knowledge: ‘we suppose that there is a close relation between rationality and knowledge’ (1984: 8). By contrast, Bakhtin (1981) views dialogue as relational, involving human beings with their own subjectivity, individual and collective experiences, affective stances and different/contrasting standpoints, not aiming at any specific conclusion.

As well as memory, dialogue itself must therefore be conceived in agonistic terms. This kind of dialogue has been explicitly, even if somewhat controversially advocated for post-conflict societies. Maddison (2015: 1019) argued that reconciliation should aim to ‘transform the conflict rather than to resolve it’. This is not to say that participants in dialogue cannot reach consensus, yet ‘where a consensus might emerge it is most likely to be treated as partial, fragile, contingent and temporary’ (2015: 1023). As suggested by Maddison (2015: 1016), agonistic dialogue must be intensive, relational, sustained over time, and mediated by skilled practitioners, to allow participants to understand each other’s experiences and perspectives. Most importantly, this kind of dialogue should openly address the violent conflict of the past, while also acknowledging that ‘conflict remains central to a peaceful but democratically engaged polity’ (2015: 1027).

The next sections will assess the extent to which this interpretative framework can be applied to the memoirs written by former terrorists as well as survivors and relatives of victims in Italy, and to instances of dialogue between these two groups. The focus of the analysis will be on modes of remembering (antagonistic, cosmopolitan and agonistic) and specifically on four key themes highlighted by Cento Bull and Hansen (2016) which help us distinguish between them. These themes revolve around: narratology (monologic, consensually dialogic, after Habermas or open-endedly dialogic, after Bakhtin); perpetrator/victim perspective (binary opposition in terms of friends/enemies, focus on victims’ perspectives or multiperspectivity); nature of the conflict (presenting conflict and violence in moral terms, abstract terms or in historical context); role of passions and emotions (focusing on ‘our’ emotions, generic compassion for the suffering of all or emotions as functional to understanding).

Antagonistic testimonies by former perpetrators and victims

In the 1990s and 2000s, as noted in the introduction, many former perpetrators wrote their memoirs. While their corpus of works comprises several modes, one strand of testimonial writing tends to adopt a military rhetoric. Going back to the four key themes characterizing the different modes of remembering, these memoirs can be described as monologic, based on a binary opposition between friend and foe, portraying conflict in uncompromising moral terms and focusing on ‘our’ emotions while ‘their’ emotions are ignored or berated. We can conclude that the prevailing mode of remembering is explicitly antagonistic, which precludes any possibility that this kind of memory can help promote or support a process of restorative justice.

The authors portray themselves as combatants in a just war, thereby safeguarding the political identity of the ‘armed struggle’ beyond military defeat. Furthermore, they represent the turn to violence in terms of a defensive strategy in the face of a brutal attack carried out against their group by the Italian state and/or their ideological enemies (fascists or communists). The portrayal of the past conflict as a fight to the death between opposing sides continues to dehumanise the victims and treat them simply as casualties. Doubters and bystanders are viewed with contempt, while ‘spies’ and ‘traitors’ (including those ‘comrades’ who decided to avail themselves of the state’s lenient legislation by dissociating from terrorism) are berated as the lowest of the low.

This is the case with memoirs from former leaders of the Red Brigades (Barbara Balzerani, 1998, 2003; Renato Curcio 1993; Prospero Gallinari 2008; Mario Moretti 1993), as well as Prima Linea (Sergio Segio 2005, 2006) and other organizations (Teresa Zoni Zanetti 2000). It also applies to the few memoirs written by right-wing terrorists (Pierluigi Concutelli 2008; Paolo Signorelli 1996; Vincenzo Vinciguerra 1989, 1993, 2000).

In these books, as argued by Betta (2009: 693), the narrative

> describes a war context, in which the bodies and faces of the enemies and the victims, as indeed those of the other combatants, do not appear. The need to relegitimize oneself in defeat, or after the failure of the armed struggle, leads to a

> substantial removal of the political sphere, to reifying all conflicts into a simple military fight between the state and the Red Brigades.

The book *Clandestina* by Teresa Zoni Zanetti (2000) epitomizes the combative mode of narration adopted in many of these memoirs. The narrator explicitly uses the term war to define the ‘armed struggle’ she had engaged in and portrays with vivid imagery the military defeat suffered by the small group of ‘comrades’ she was part of. While the latter are presented in a highly positive light as generous human beings fighting for social justice and linked to each other by ‘a pact of solidarity and honour’ (p. 102), the policemen who defeated them are dehumanised and portrayed as aggressive and bloodthirsty beasts. The author places the blame for the arrest of the group’s members on an act of ‘betrayal’ by one of them. Taking up this issue in his preface to the book, Corrado Alunni, former leader of the Red Brigades and later founder of his own organization, berates those comrades who had ‘repented’, attributing their behaviour either to ‘the persuasive techniques’ adopted by the state or to negative personal characteristics (‘psychologically weak or despicable or poorly motivated subjects’ (p. 8). In a war, as he makes clear, there is no possible justification for any type of behaviour that deviates from a sharp contraposition between friend and foe.

The mid-2000s marked a turn to the victims (Glynn 2013), with the publication of numerous memoirs written by survivors but above all by the sons and daughters of the victims of terrorism. In many cases, the authors expressed feelings of bitter resentment both towards the state and towards the former terrorists, especially since many felt they had been victimized twice over, because of the neglect of the state and the media attention paid to the perpetrators. Among this type of memoirs, we find a book written by Alberto Torregiani (2006, in collaboration with Stefano Rabozzi). In 1979, at the age of 15, Torregiani was left paralysed in an armed attack against his father. One of the perpetrators, Cesare Battisti, managed to escape to France, where he took advantage of Mitterrand’s policy of granting Italian terrorists the status of political refugees, and later achieved fame as a novelist. He later moved to Brazil, after France revoked the Mitterrand policy in 2002. He was never extradited to Italy to serve his sentence. The book expresses bitterness and rage for this situation and adopts a war genre to depict the author’s fight for justice against the state and the former terrorists. In another memoir (2008), Andrea Casalegno, son of Carlo, journalist at *La Stampa*, killed by the Red Brigades on 16 November 1977, portrays the former perpetrators as devoid of any humanity, having shown no clemency for their victims. His view is that they should therefore be shunned by society, rather than rehabilitated. More recently, Massimo Coco, son of Francesco Coco, a judge killed with two of his bodyguards by the Red Brigades in 1976, published a very combative book (2012). The author reclaims the right to hatred on the part of the victims and condemns the lenient legislation approved by the state in the 1980s whereas in his view the perpetrators should have been sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Furthermore, Coco berates those children of the victims who came to terms with the state and the perpetrators, accusing them of doing this for careerism rather than out of conviction. This stance against the 'betrayers' on the victims' side recalls the previous testimonies by former terrorists depicting those 'comrades' who had 'repented' as having been motivated by reasons other than personal reflection and/or regret.

According to Caviglia and Cecchini (2009: 109), the narratives and reconstructions of the past put forward by perpetrators and victims represent 'a plurality of voices without dialogue'. Indeed, in their view 'public discourse on terrorism, present or past, is in Italy plagued by monovocality'. However, as Cento Bull and Cook (2013) and Andreasen and Cecchini (2016) more recently highlighted, another set of memoirs written by both former terrorists and victims and relatives of victims has gone some way towards facilitating encounters with the 'other' through a dialogic attitude. We will now turn to these other memoirs.

A cosmopolitan approach to memory

Some former perpetrators have recounted their own pain and suffering, while also acknowledging those of the victims. A few memoirs by left-wing terrorists, including Arrigo Cavallina (2005) and Anna Laura Braghetti (2003, with Paola Tavella), sought to establish a dialogue with the relatives of the victims by emphasizing their suffering and regret for the harm they had caused. These texts often dwell on the harsh and brutal conditions experienced during imprisonment because the authors feel that this experience makes them reflect on the pain they inflicted upon the victims. As former terrorist Arrigo Cavallina wrote, 'Paradoxically our situation allows us a better understanding, it brings us closer to the victims' (156).

Some relatives of victims, in turn, have emphasized feelings of suffering and regret across the divide, suggesting that a process of reconciliation could be based upon such shared awareness. Prominent among the latter is the position adopted by Agnese Moro (2008), daughter of Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic statesman kidnapped and assassinated by the Red Brigades in 1978. She acknowledges that many former perpetrators and victims share feelings of pain and mourning for what happened in the past and has met in public with one of her father’s kidnappers. As she wrote, ‘the terrorists, the aggressors, are also men and women, who made terrible mistakes often without understanding them […] These people are not evil. They committed terrible, evil acts. But they are human beings’ (2008: 150). From her perspective, a shared humanity offers a ‘common ground from which to restart’ (150). The suggestion that a process of reconciliation could be based upon shared feelings of suffering is promoted also by Mario Calabresi (2007), son of a police officer killed by a left squad in 1972, and by some other relatives of victims. This stance is often associated with a strong religious faith and the idea of forgiveness. The case that better epitomizes forgiveness is provided by Giovanni Bachelet, son of a Christian Democratic politician assassinated by the Red Brigades in 1980. At his father’s funeral, he publicly stated that ‘we want to pray also for those who struck my father, because, without wishing to undermine justice that must triumph, our mouths should always express forgiveness and never revenge’. For Bachelet and others, forgiveness helps the victims themselves to rebuild their lives. Mario Calabresi (2007: 66) also speaks of forgiveness in his book: ‘My mother is a person who is focused on […] working for reconciliation, forgiveness, she is supported by a vital and very strong faith’.

The approach adopted by these former terrorists and relatives of victims is obviously dialogic, and indeed has led to various encounters between victims and perpetrators. However, the dialogue tends to rely mainly on the emotional level and aims at closure through the restoration of a common humanity. What seems to be missing from this kind of dialogue is the political dimension of reconciliation which, as Schaap (2008: 258) put it, requires the victims ‘being willing to countenance sharing the same political institutions with their former oppressors’.

What is also missing from the dialogue is a process of reflection of the political context and nature of the bloody conflict of the past. While shared emotions allow a dialogue to develop, they do not appear to promote a process of reflection and understanding in relation to the past. This is also made difficult by the fact that the memoirs analysed here tend to view good and evil in either moral or abstract terms. For former terrorists like Cavallina, for instance, politics and ideology are seen as being at the roots of his past deeds and hence evil in themselves. Furthermore, they become incomprehensible, thus Cavallina refers to the ‘absurdity of the armed struggle as political strategy’ (2005: 34). Solidarity and friendship should replace them as the foundation for society. As he writes (2005: 114):

> I used to believe that ‘comrade’ was more than friend and brother, that our values would be able to impose their superiority; instead, when everything collapsed I found that the only stable anchor, the only solid foundation of coexistence, that is to say, solidarity, resided in age-old values: the family, religion, friendship in the traditional sense.

This shows clearly that what he aims at is a return to a solidaristic and harmonious society where conflict is eliminated. Cavallina himself is a strong advocate of restorative justice, which he views from a Christian perspective as the restoration of love and forgiveness as the foundation of human coexistence, together with a commitment on the part of perpetrators to strive for good and avoid any repetition of evil. In short, compassion and shared suffering facilitate encounters between victims and perpetrators but these encounters do not aim at a full understanding of the other viewpoint.

Agonistic remembering: some victims’ memoirs

A few of the victims opted to remember in a different way. Benedetta Tobagi, the daughter of a journalist assassinated by a leftist group in Milan in 1980, published her memoir in 2009. She went on to write a book (2013) on the bombing massacre carried out in Brescia by neofascists in 1974. Silvia Giralucci, the daughter of a member of the neofascist party MSI assassinated by the Red Brigades in Padua in 1974, published her memoir in 2011.

In these texts, the human suffering is a starting point for a journey of remembrance aimed at both acknowledging and understanding what happened in the wider historical and political context. Tobagi’s first book is a case in point, especially when compared to the book published in 2007 by Mario Calabresi. The latter focused on the emotional experience of his family and hardly touched on the political controversies surrounding his father’s death. Tobagi’s 2009 book, while aiming to restore the private and public figure of her father, also delved into the historical and political context in ways that made remembering a key to understanding. Tobagi herself explained the importance of Calabresi’s memoir:

> If you want to understand why it is so difficult to speak about certain topics you must bear in mind that there was this human emotional experience both on the part of former terrorists and on the part of families who had lost a loved one. […] these matters have to do with pre-political, pre-rational, not rational issues. (Interview with the Author, 25 January 2011)

She also explained why in her view that position had to be seen as just a starting point, which led her to adopt a different perspective when she wrote her 2009 book:

> If you move only on the emotional aspect you don't have the instrument to open a space for dialogue and rethinking, or sometimes even thinking seriously for the first time - in the sense that Hannah Arendt speaks about thinking - and so as far as I am concerned my choice was to build up a book that was really tailored to keep together these two aspects in a way that emotion is functional to intellectual understanding. (Interview with the Author, 25 January 2011)

Tobagi's book on the 1974 Brescia massacre is a clear example of this. The massacre took place at an anti-fascist demonstration and many of the victims were leftist activists in the trade union movement and in the Communist Party. In this book she starts by remembering the individual victims of the massacre with the help of their surviving relatives and any remaining artefacts, then gradually moves on to focus on the victims' political agency and values. Through her reconstruction of the victims' activism, Tobagi is also able to remember Italian Communism in ways which, while condemning the ideology as such, fully acknowledge the civic and democratic stance of most of its supporters. Furthermore, with the help of judicial material from the most recent trial on the massacre, she reconstructs the political dynamics behind it and throws light on the perpetrators, including parts of the Italian state.

Giralucci's book also clearly moves from a personal experience of pain and suffering to a search for explanations and understanding of the past violence. She decided to meet a number of former perpetrators, who, while not members of terrorist organizations, had taken part in the widespread political violence that struck the city of Padua in the 1970s. She allows them considerable space in the book to speak with their own voices, and compares and contrasts their testimonies with those of people who acted to put a stop to the violence, including a judge, a university professor targeted by left extremists and an activist turned police informer. Far from turning the dialogue into an encounter between different experiences of suffering, Giralucci's memoir brings to light the perspectives of perpetrators, victims, bystanders and informers, exposing their (past and present) justifications and motivations.

In short, these are examples of a mode of remembering which is both dialogic and reflective, but which, unlike the cosmopolitan mode, also seeks to understand the political dimension of the past struggles and mass violence and the multiple perspectives of those involved without reducing the standpoint to that of regret and suffering. As Benedetta Tobagi explained, she believed it was difficult but possible to do this while also avoiding a political exploitation of the memory of past violence in the present. This is why for her regret and suffering had to be the starting point.

Agonistic memory and dialogue: *Il libro dell'incontro* (2015)

In 2015, the publication of an edited volume, entitled *Il libro dell'incontro* ('The Book of the Encounter') was both the outcome of, and testified to, a sustained and prolonged dialogue between a group of former left-wing terrorists and a group of survivors and relatives of the victims.[1] The dialogue lasted from 2009 to 2014, with the support of three mediators (who are also editors of the volume): Guido Bertagna, a Catholic priest, Adolfo Ceretti, a criminologist and expert on reparative justice, and Claudia Mazzucato, an expert on penal law and mediation. A number of 'external' third party representatives, made up especially of young people, and of guarantors drawn from a variety of judicial, cultural and media institutions also took part in the dialogue. The dialogue was sustained over time, as it lasted several years. It was intensive, since it involved over one hundred instances of dialogue (2015: 31). It was relational, not least because it included eleven residential stays each lasting two or three days as well as five separate weeks of living together and sharing a variety of tasks in a single building (2015: 32). Finally, it was mediated by skilled practitioners. Therefore, the dialogue seemed to present all the characteristics outlined by Maddison as pertaining to agonism.

However, in order to assess the nature of the dialogue, a number of important questions need addressing. Did it aim at achieving consensus or was it open-ended? Did it shun emotions or engage with them? Was the focus on shared pain and suffering or did it address the historical and political context? If the dialogue was carried out as part of a restorative justice process, how was reconciliation conceived by the participants: as the restoration of a consensual community or a transformation of former enemies into adversaries? To answer these questions the text is now examined in terms of the four main features identified above that help us distinguish between different modes of remembering.

First, the book is multivocal and multiperspectivist. The way the volume has been assembled by the mediators deliberately emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of the narrating/remembering voices: some of these voices are collective, others are individual; some are anonymous, while others are authored. The same event is revisited by different voices and the different viewpoints are left unmediated in the text. This approach may cause a sense of discomfort in the readers, as it goes against their expectations, but it also promotes critical reflection. The position of the victims themselves is also unsettling, especially their willingness to engage with former terrorists. As we saw in the section on antagonistic memoirs, the victims who demonstrated an openness to dialogue were already charged with ‘treason’ by fellow victims, an attitude which the publication of *Il libro dell’incontro* can only aggravate. Another way in which the book disrupts the binary divide between victims and perpetrators is by referring to these two categories of participants in the dialogue as ‘witnesses’ of a violent past. As this term indicates, the emphasis in the dialogue is placed on reflecting upon and understanding the past conflict and its consequences.

This process requires re-humanizing the perpetrators, a major concern for many narrating voices. Indeed the victims choose to author this viewpoint, rather than expressing it from a condition of anonymity. In a signed letter written in response to one received from the former terrorists (both are reproduced in the volume), the victims openly reject the ‘logic of contraposition’ and acknowledge that this logic had generated among them an incapacity to ‘penetrate’ the perpetrator’s evil (2015: 117). As the letter makes clear, this acknowledgement, in turn, both restores agency to the perpetrators and demands from them an acceptance of their ‘individual responsibility’ for their past deeds: ‘the ideological climate of those years did not compel you to do what you did’ (p. 117). In this context, the binary divide between victims and perpetrators can be overcome since, as the victims claim in their letter, both ‘are recognised, first of all, as citizens and not placed within their respective “categories”’ (2015: 118). In contrast to the cosmopolitan approach, therefore, perpetrators are not only re-humanized but their status as co-citizens sharing a politico-institutional framework is also asserted.

The former terrorists, on the other hand, testify to a process of reflection upon their turn to violence, particularly around the binary logic of ‘friends and enemies’ that led them to become convinced that the common good could only be achieved through the extermination of their perceived enemies (as well as of any ‘traitors’). As a former terrorist (who remains anonymous) states, the organizations that opted for the ‘violent struggle’ had ‘internalized the schematic contraposition friend-enemy and had added to these two categories that of the traitor and of treason’ (p. 120). Indeed an anonymous perpetrator voice attributes the process that led to ‘total enmity’ precisely to the mechanism which labels as traitors all those who disagree. As s/he writes: ‘If in the mid-1970s someone in the Red Brigades had said “Well, let us stop, let us see, let us establish a different relation with other forces”, that person would have been labelled a filthy traitor and expelled’ (p. 109). Another anonymous perpetrator voice indicates how ‘treason’ was closely connected to ‘friendship’ and how both have enduring power: ‘I continue to feel a strong sense of belonging. When I see some of “my people”, I have a feeling of coming home. When I was in prison I never felt abandoned. I experienced my greatest suffering whenever I learnt that I had been betrayed by someone for whom I would have given my life’ (p. 122). There is also a recognition that the antagonistic contraposition between friends and enemies was facilitated by rhetorical and linguistic devices and hence that this dimension must be taken into account. As an anonymous perpetrator voice puts it: ‘I no longer use the term enemy and the term war, except to criticise them’ (p. 119).

In order to disrupt antagonistic dualities, various voices in the book rehabilitate both traitors and treason, in ways which challenge stereotypical and long-established representations. An anonymous victim voice, for instance, states that ‘The victims, too, must be able to betray’ (p. 180). Here the reference is to the betrayal both of their presumed fixed status of ‘victimhood’ and of all those other victims who reject any possibility of dialogue (p. 180). An anonymous perpetrator voice, on the other hand, revisits in a positive light the phenomenon of ‘repentance’ among terrorists – a phenomenon which in the 1980s contributed significantly to the defeat of the ‘armed struggle’ and was strongly condemned as ‘treason’ by those who remained committed to the fight, as we saw. As s/he states, repenting represented a way in which perpetrators strove to re-humanize themselves (p. 94).

Agonistic dialogue and remembering, as was argued, should deal with conflict and disagreements as well as engaging with the troubling past. This is the position adopted by most voices in *Il libro dell’incontro*. The gulf that separates former perpetrators and victims is fully recognized. As an anonymous voice put it, ‘In reality *we are not abolishing differences* […] Together we are looking for medicines, for balsams to treat scars that will remain forever open’ (p. 248). This means that memory can be shared only by acknowledging difference, as opposed to suppressing it: ‘The memory to be shared is irreducibly different’ (p. 184). Reflecting on the dialogue, the third party witnesses observe that: ‘We experienced an example of civil and democratic cohabitation [while preserving] difference’ (p. 170).

While the confrontation between former perpetrators and victims was partially transformed into a ‘democratic cohabitation’ through the dialogue, the potential of conflict for both promoting positive societal change and for unleashing destructive violence is explored by various participants. As one voice states, ‘There is the issue of violence and exasperation of violence and there is the issue of conflict. Conflict should not always be refuted, conflict is an internal dynamics of society which allows the latter to grow’ (p. 100). Disagreement and conflict are, therefore, a legitimate expression of different interests and projects. This acknowledgement is accompanied by an awareness on the part of some perpetrators that their turn to violence was inspired by a desire to overcome all conflicts and achieve everlasting social harmony. As one anonymous perpetrator voice states, ‘I was convinced I was fighting the war that would eliminate all other wars’ (p. 108). In other words, former perpetrators reflect on the strong utopian dimension characterizing their violent antagonism and specifically on the risks involved in aiming to suppress conflict.

Finally, *Il libro dell’incontro* brings passions into dialogue and shows that communication happens despite involving what Habermas (1984: 57) would have defined as irrational modes of behaviours. In many passages, various voices refer openly to the emotions characterizing their dialogue. Passions are asserted, as observed by the third party witnesses: ‘From our side, we listened to words of pain and anger, silences, incomprehension, along with the resolute reciprocal will, constantly renewed, to find ourselves again and understand each other’ (p. 170).

The narrating voices in this book view passions as socially constructed, rather than the outcome of irrational drives, as theorized by Mihai in the context of agonism. An anonymous voice thus openly refers to ‘the social construction of hatred’. (p. 92), which occurs in the process of defining identity: ‘[hatred has a relationship with] the attachment to or the construction of identity’. (p. 90) This confirms Maddison’s (2015: 1021) view that hatred enhances ‘the potential for violence that exists in every construction of collective identities’. Former terrorists also relate feelings of hatred to the historical context, helping the reader understand the reasons behind their turn to violence, as well as the factors and circumstances surrounding it. In short, emotions and passions are brought into the dialogue in ways which enhance understanding, as Tobagi had advocated.

What kind of restorative justice?

The second part of *Il libro dell’incontro* contains a series of interpretative chapters, including by the mediators themselves. While the approaches employed by the authors differ considerably, they all share a commitment to the concept and practices of restorative justice, and view the dialogue from this perspective. The South African experience, in particular, which marked the establishment of the first ever Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is considered paradigmatic by the mediators. Indeed they state that it provided an inspiration to the Italian dialogue, even while fully acknowledging that the two cases are not directly comparable.

Despite being based on a variety of theoretical approaches, these contributions do not engage with agonism in any form – whether in relation to dialogue or to memory or indeed to reconciliation in post-conflict societies. The interpretation by Ceretti, however, appears to raise issues and themes which strongly recall an agonistic perspective and for this reason is worth analysing here. Following Lyotard's theorization in 'Le différend' (1983), Ceretti distinguishes between three types of conflicts according to their (ir)reducible degree of discord. The one defined as *dissidio* (dissidence), seems the most apt to characterise the socio-political fracture that divided Italy at the time of the violence. As Ceretti explains, we can speak of dissidence when there are contrasting interests at play, informed by unshared and divergent reference systems, in relation to ethical, juridical and constitutional principles or behavioural patterns (p. 384). Unlike conflict, dissidence (which can be equated to antagonism) cannot be reconciled. According to Ceretti (pp. 398-9), the only possible way forward for a society fractured by irreducible dissidence consists of a dialogue that:

1) accepts that any agreement needs to acknowledge disagreement;
2) does not seek a shared language to define the wrongdoing carried out by some and suffered by others;
3) develops a plural and multiperspectivist narrative of the past;
4) acknowledges the fragility of the dialogue;
5) does not seek to assign roles to the participants.

Ceretti also acknowledges that the Italian victims themselves advocated this kind of dialogue in preference to the approach favoured by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as the latter aimed at promoting national unity and reconciliation (p. 242). As Ceretti recalls, some Italian victims were averse to any attempts to structure the dialogue and even questioned the methodology proposed by the mediators, as in their view it aimed at channelling top-down the thoughts and narratives of the participants (p. 243). By contrast, they argued that the goal of the dialogue was neither consensus nor reconciliation, but 'recomposition'. Ceretti quotes the following comment by an anonymous (victim) participant: 'I do not support the use of the term reconciliation. If we must seek to recompose the fractures that were caused in this country, we must not talk of reconciliation, which measures the relationship between me and you, but rather of recomposition. Because [at stake is] the recomposition of the history of our country' (p. 249). Rather than implying the possibility of restoring a harmonious community assumed to have existed before the dissidence, the word recomposition, as used by the same participant, means simply re-establishing that shared 'sense of the institutions that underpins what we call civil society' (p. 250). Ceretti's contribution to the volume therefore represents an original take on the restorative justice approach, which is close to agonism, as discussed in a previous section.

Conclusion

This paper has argued in favour of an agonistic approach to restorative justice after a bloody conflict. Such an approach requires above all restoring a shared symbolic space in which opponents are no longer viewed as enemies and passion-driven conflict takes place within a democratic framework. This in turn can be achieved through an open-ended dialogue, a process of deconstruction of the binary divide between 'friends' and 'enemies', the re-humanization of both victims and perpetrators and an effort to understand the socio-political context in which the conflict originated.

The paper has explored the prevalent modes that have characterized the memoirs of, and the encounters between, former terrorists and victims as well as their relatives in the Italian context. It has argued that some of the recent victims' memoirs and above all the dialogue underpinning '*Il libro dell'incontro*' can be best viewed through agonistic lenses. This explains the eagerness of many victims and perpetrators participating in the dialogue to ensure that different (and divided) memories confront each other in a responsible manner, as opposed to seeking either to merge them into a single shared memory or to make one dominate over the others.

The reasons for participating in the dialogue, on the other hand, are not comparable, as they reflect the different experiences of victims and perpetrators. The latter seemingly feel that this is a debt they owe both the victims and society, as a form of reparation for past wrongdoing. By contrast, the former appear motivated primarily by a strong commitment to democratic principles and institutions, not least as a vindication of their dead relatives' values and stance. Indeed, Cento Bull and Cooke (2013: 207) argued that many victims of terrorism in Italy have chosen in their memoirs to transcend their victimhood status and to 'put themselves forward as "citizens" who tell broader stories of societal transformation and democratic renewal'. In *Il libro dell'incontro*, the participants representing the injured party seem to have gone one step further, as they have opted to engage in a dialogue as part of a process of ‘recomposition’ of a pluralist (and arguably agonistic) democracy.

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Endnotes

1. The analysis is only based on the ‘print-book’. The ‘e-book’, an appendix reporting in detail the dialogue between mediators, perpetrators, and relatives of the victims, has been excluded from analysis, since the author was unable to obtain or access this text.

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