

Learning About Our Shameful Past: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Present-Day Historical Narratives of Italian Colonial Wars

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A computer-assisted content analysis (Bolasco 2000) of seven textbooks currently used for history teaching in Italian high schools was carried out to examine to what extent past atrocities perpetrated during Italy's African colonial wars are acknowledged and taught. More specifically, we investigated the relative importance these texts devote to teaching established historical facts or to achieve socio-psychological aims, such as advancing reconciliation processes and protecting the in-group's social identity. Social psychologists working in the field of intergroup reconciliation usually consider these two aims as partially competing. The models reviewed by Nadler et al. (2008a) all consider the need to protect personal social identity as a source of biases, which the search for historical truth has to accommodate. In contrast, a recent work by Pratto and Glasford (2008) stresses that social identity can play a *positive* role as a powerful motivation for reconciliation. They suggest that acknowledging historical faults may assist the difficult process of finding a balance between the need for self-esteem and self-integrity and the need to belong. Our results seem to confirm certain aspects of the first group of models, and other aspects of Pratto and Glasford's review. The crucial point seems to be the use of abstract or concrete terms to describe in-group wrongdoings. Strikingly, more than seventy years after the Italian colonial wars only three textbooks out of seven fully describe atrocities perpetrated by the in-group using clear, concrete terminology; this is consistent with the idea of a tension between reconciliation and justice. On the other hand, the more concrete descriptions, although less frequent, seem better able to protect the in-group's self-integrity by showing their young readers a clearer acceptance of moral responsibility for the historical faults of their group.

But now the air is so full of these ghosts
That no one knows how to escape their hosts.
(epigraph to Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*,
from Goethe's *Faust*).

1. Italian Colonialism: A "Potential" Collective Memory?

The general aim of our analysis of present-day historical narratives of Italian wrongdoings during colonial wars is to better understand the strategies used in everyday life when ordinary people, long after the end of a war, carry on coping with the violence that was enacted by their in-group. More specifically, we want to explore the idea that a lexico-textual analysis of historical narratives addressed to newly-born members of the groups of former perpetrators may reveal advances in these coping strategies. Our assumption is that

war violence may be coped with only through a very long social and psychological elaboration—leading, in the long term, to a socio-emotional reconciliation between former enemies (Nadler et al. 2008b)—and that narratives recollecting these difficult aspects of the in-group past change as well, according to the evolution of this same elaboration.

In this paper we explore, by analysing seven textbooks currently used for the teaching of history in Italian high schools, to what extent *historical narratives* may be revealing of the evolution of these coping strategies and reconciliation processes. In our opinion, in fact, although historical narratives are based on scientific methodologies and meant to teach established facts, what may be presumed to change

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according to socio-psychological processes of intergroup reconciliation are the *teaching aims* related to the expected effects on the young people receiving these narratives about their in-group past.

More particularly, when teaching a controversial aspect of the in-group past, such as the interpretation of sufferings that war violence brought both to the in-group and to the former enemies' group, the expected effect of teaching—that of fostering a sense of citizenship—partially competes with another, basic expected effect, that of giving young people a critical tool for orientation to allow them to correctly judge what really happened in past episodes of violence and consequently better interpret present-day social situations and conflicts.

This competition of expected effects represents a fundamental tension. Any historical narrative, in fact, pursues a never-ending struggle to reconstruct the past using, as far as possible, scientific methodologies. By verifying facts, this kind of narrative therefore tries to salvage as much as possible the perspective of those who were defeated and silenced. But, at the same time, facts are selected in order to reconstruct the past for young citizens of today's communities, and so over-represent the aspects of history closest to the readers' present-day sense of belonging.

Moreover, in our time historical narratives are intended for teaching to classes that are increasingly made up of young people originating—due to global mobility—from all over the world. Facing this historical novum, historians are divided between two main stances. A first option foresees that this situation will influence historical narratives in such a way as to reinforce the identity concerns of communities “hosting” these multicultural classes. A second option claims, on the contrary, that history teaching urgently needs to acquire a broader world perspective, instead of perspectives referring only to the past of restricted communities (e.g. national, European, etc.). In short, the dilemma facing historical narratives recounting past in-group wars seems, in the present day more than ever, to be based on the two opposing aims of teaching “our” history vs. teaching a history that might seem—insofar as it is possible—acceptable to everybody (Brusa 2009).

This general problem of all history teaching becomes a crucial one when narratives address controversial or difficult aspects of the past of the in-group hosting multicultural classes. When considering Western and European history in a broader world perspective, the colonial past and, more specifically, atrocities carried out during colonial wars, are easily one of the biggest sources of divided memories (Ferro 2003a, 2003b). In particular, one of the principal aspects that make colonial experience a highly controversial issue for history teaching seems to be that, while European colonial invaders coped in various ways with the history of violence that they enacted, colonized peoples were deprived of their history and either pushed towards a forced and somehow idealized traditionalism, or denied a well-balanced relationship with modernity (Fanon 1961; Memmi 1957; Chenntouf 2008).

Among the various strategies used by colonial perpetrators to cope with their past wrongdoings, the Italian situation may be considered a very specific case. Colonial experience is located at the very core of the historical narratives of those European nations that drew a relevant part of their power and economic wealth from their colonies. In contrast with these countries, Italy engaged later and less successfully in colonial expansion. Furthermore, shortly afterwards, and in parallel with the Second World War, a civil war sharply divided the nation, ending only in 1946, with the foundation of the Italian Republic. So, while younger generations of the major colonial nations tend in our time to cope with their in-group's past wrongdoings through such collective emotions as shame or guilt (Branscombe and Doosje 2004), young Italian adults, due to the largely unsuccessful course of their in-group's past colonial adventures, tend on the contrary simply to avoid remembering a facet of their collective past that has remained peripheral to the core of the economic and social life of their nation. Besides this amnesia, another frequent coping strategy for the few young Italians who think about this period is to impute all responsibility for these past wrongdoings only to the part of community that consented to the dictatorial regime, since the last phase of colonial wars was enacted under Fascism. So in this sense colonial wars may be seen as included not in “our” past but in “their” past, paradoxically implying that a sense of responsibility for in-group

wrongdoings might be misunderstood as a sense of sharing a Fascist perspective on the Italian past.

Italian colonialism in Africa actually began much earlier, in 1870, when the Rubattino Steamship Company bought the harbour of Assab in Eritrea as a facility for its ships. Soon afterwards the Italian government took over Rubattino and extended its control to the surrounding region, finally establishing the first Italian colony in Eritrea in 1890. Meanwhile Italy suffered an initial defeat against the troops of neighbouring Ethiopia, when a detachment of about five hundred men was annihilated in Dogali (1887). In 1895–96 the Italians tried to invade Ethiopia and were again defeated in the famous battle of Adua, destined to remain a wounding memory for a very long time. While Italian penetration into Somaliland, where a protectorate was established in 1889, continued successfully, a new attempt to conquest Ethiopia was ordered only in 1935, under the Fascist regime. A second phase of Italian colonialism in Africa was aimed at the conquest of the land facing Sicily to the south—Libya—in connection with the Balkan wars shortly before the First World War. The country was quickly invaded and taken over (1911–12), but Italy's control was very weak; above all during the First World War, and in the 1920s and 1930s it had a strong rebellion to deal with, which was repressed using harsh measures including deportation to concentration camps.

These events had all already taken place when in 1935 Mussolini launched a new campaign to occupy Ethiopia, which succeeded within a year. Italian troops used poison gas against the enemy, despite its prohibition by the Geneva Convention. Ethiopian resistance continued after the official end of the war, and the Italian repression was very severe, particularly in the response to a failed assassination attempt on the Governor, Graziani, in 1937, when some six thousand civilians—according to Western sources—were executed, among them the roughly three hundred monks of Debra Libanos.

For a long time, these war crimes have been ignored in Italy. Colonial wars are not remembered at all, or are considered as a short episode intrinsically linked only to the Fascist regime. Italian history textbooks have begun exploring this issue only recently, as we will see more in depth in the

second part of this article. The repression in Libya during the 1920s is also largely ignored by Italian public discourse. The myth of the good Italian soldier (often expressed in the slogan “Italiani, brava gente”; Del Boca 2005) is very popular and enduring. Memories of Italian colonialism seem thus to be something different from the already complex concept of divided memories. They seem rather to offer, in fact, a unique and excellent example of what Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1950) called a “potential” memory (*virtuelle*: Halbwachs 1950, 84). Speculating on relationships between individual and collective memories, Halbwachs proposed this concept to describe how some memories could remain very difficult to recollect for individuals for a long period, and then become salient and active again, sometimes many after years, only when they came to be shared again as common sense by the social groups the remembering persons belong to. In fact, memories shared by the vast majority (*tout le monde*: Halbwachs 1950, 92) are recalled more easily because each personal remembering act is helped by the memories of others. Paradoxically, then, Halbwachs proposes the idea that the more a memory is highly personal and is not shared with others as a collective one, the less easy it is to recall by a personal remembering act.

In a certain sense this is one of the most intriguing concepts proposed by Halbwachs's seminal—and in some ways controversial—theory on collective memories. Indeed, contemporary scholars (see for instance Assmann 1995) have argued that we can say communities “have a memory” only in a metaphorical sense. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that any lasting community “creates” a memory, by means of an active selection of content that is made more or less accessible in the everyday social environment of its members. This social selection is not, however, passively absorbed by the members of the community to which these memories refer. On the contrary, we may distinguish a collective memory from other kinds of memories by the fact of its being characterized by the inextricable intertwining of social and individual processes (Leone 2006; Bellelli, Curci, and Leone 2007).

From a social point of view, a memory is a collective one when it is prepared, cued, and triggered by a selection of pre-arranged aspects of collective identity that are made

accessible to individuals belonging to a group. This access is made possible not only by special social activities, as for instance commemorations, but also by making some memories embodied in concrete mediations, framing the individual remembering. For instance, a London citizen may often absentmindedly pass through an underground station named Waterloo, but no Paris citizen travelling around his town will ever encounter an underground station by the name of Waterloo. A large number of cultural artefacts characterizing minimal aspects of everyday life will therefore make some memories more easily recalled. Hints from the physical and social environment—as in the instance of underground stations—are able to build up associative tracks leading to specific content, so making easier for them to “pop up” apparently by chance in the stream of individual awareness.

If we look to these same processes from an individual point of view, we can see how a memory may be considered as collective not only by the actual remembering or forgetting of a socially pre-arranged series of events, but also by *monitoring activities* associated with memories themselves, as for instance the degree of confidence, evaluation of the personal and social impact and consequentiality of these memories, and so on (Leone 2006). These monitoring activities, showing the crucial capacity not only to remember but also to “turn around one’s own memories” (Bartlett 1932), are in fact an implicit yet fundamental expression of a personal adherence to a social and cultural frame of meaning, showing the importance subjectively attributed to an affective belonging to the community with this same frame (Bellelli, Curci, and Leone 2007).

A memory may be considered as a potential collective one, when there is a difficulty, in a social environment, to be in contact with artefacts that could frame the individual remembering acts (Middeltown and Edwards 1990), leading to remember a specific set of memories. Therefore, a potential collective memory is a clear example of how the difficulty of being in contact with a social selection of well-chosen artefacts may for a certain time actively suppress personal access to a constellation of memories linked with a controversial or shaming issue of the collective past, and/or limit its subjective resonance as experienced in monitoring

activities associated with this particular set of memories. Both simple suppression of memories *per se*, and limited monitoring (for instance when, even if a memory is not suppressed and comes to be recalled, the remembering person remains unsure as to its complete truthfulness, or evaluates it as a peripheral and meaningless one) contribute to the same self-serving bias, aimed at silencing past contents capable of disadvantaging present-day social belonging. Nevertheless, in the very concept of potential collective memories this bias is tempered by the fact that a growing psycho-social elaboration of difficult aspects of the in-group past, as in the case of shameful or traumatic memories, is always expected, for two main reasons.

Firstly, an innovative shift is regularly effected each time a *new generation* reaches adulthood (Arendt 1958). At each generational renewal, in fact, memories received from institutional and familial narratives alter accordingly, being elaborated by a different personal and social frame of meaning. Secondly, a potential collective memory may become socially accessible once again, and acquire new meanings related to its monitoring, whenever *inter-group relations change* (Mazzara and Leone 2001). Both for the regular shifts through generational changes and for the changed perspectives of rebalanced group relationships, the social silence surrounding a potential collective memory is thus predicted to act as a social force (Lewin 1948) similar to those labelled in chemistry as “meta-stable” (i.e. apparently unchanging but easily reactivated).

In this theoretical framework, recent qualitative studies analysing focus groups of three different generations of Italian participants show how, while memory of the Fascist past and of the Second World War was actively disputed and salient throughout the generations and suggested an on-going process of active socio-psychological elaboration of these difficult and controversial past contents, memory of the Italian colonial past was either silent or monitored as an unimportant part of the collective past (Leone and Curigliano 2009). Even in the very few mentions received in spontaneous focus group discussions on Italian history, colonial episodes were similarly defined by three generations as essentially uninformative of the overall imagination of the national community (Anderson 1983).

Taking into account these highly problematic specificities of Italian elaboration of in-group colonial violence, the question addressed in this paper is whether contemporary historical narratives intended to teach young Italians about their shameful in-group past may signal that the time has now finally come to turn the potential collective memory of Italian atrocities into an actual one. In other words, we aim to understand better if historical narratives, addressed to present-day Italian students, now offer them a more balanced version that clearly admits and acknowledges past in-group atrocities against African populations during colonial wars, or if they try, on the contrary, to veil these shameful aspects. In fact, thanks also to generational changes that have introduced new individuals, while the people who lived through these wars have gradually disappeared, we expected that the collective elaboration of past violence perpetrated by Italians during their occupation of colonies in Africa would have reached a critical turning point in the present day, despite an amnesia of these matters in everyday Italian social discourse (Pivato 2007), evident in the above-mentioned exploratory studies of the historical identities of Italian participants of different generations (Leone and Curigliano 2009).

Speculating on the relationships between controversial collective memories and reconciliation processes, Paul Ricoeur (2000) proposes that the socio-psychological elaboration allowing this collective coping with in-group war violence is in a way similar to the individual *elaboration of mourning*, as described in classic Freudian works (Freud 1917). Although it risks overstressing the metaphor describing social life as highly akin to the life of the individual, this idea proposed by Ricoeur implies some suggestions that seem heuristically convincing. First of all, both the personal processes of the elaboration of mourning and the socio-psychological processes of intergroup reconciliation after a war are long, difficult and easily reversible. Moreover and perhaps more importantly, they both perform mourning processes over a *loss*.

The accomplishment of a personal mourning requires coming to terms with the loss of an “object of love” that played a central role in the personal life of the mourner. Such an object is sometimes a person, who died or in another way

abandoned the mourner; at other times it may be a particularly meaningful and cherished *abstract idea*, such as a project or a hope, or also a personal quality or a gift once possessed and now lost, like beauty or health (Freud 1917). Similarly, the accomplishment of a collective mourning over war memories requires coming to terms with the loss of an abstract idea, i.e. the loss of an *ideal social identity*, undamaged by the violence either enacted or suffered by one’s own in-group. Nevertheless, important dissimilarities distinguish personal processes from intergroup ones, limiting to a certain extent the heuristic potential of Ricoeur’s theoretical proposal (2000). The most important of these dissimilarities concerns *time*. Personal processes of the elaboration of mourning sometimes take years, but are achieved (or fail) in one lifespan. On the contrary, for an intergroup reconciliation to be achieved, *more than one generation is needed*.

After a very brief review of recent developments in reconciliation studies, we will compare these advances in socio-psychological research on reconciliation with the insights suggested by Paul Ricoeur’s parallel between the personal and the collective *elaboration of mourning* (2000). Finally, we will examine how these theoretical models vary when *generational changes*—in the groups of both victims and perpetrators of war violence—modify the object of these collective elaborations from first-hand narratives of events occurring during one’s own lifetime to second-hand narratives of events in the lifetime of one’s ancestors.

2. Elaborating the Loss of an Ideal Social Identity: From Conflict Reduction and Settlement to Socio-Emotional Reconciliation

For a long time, social psychologists focused their attention on the two main issues of *reduction* and *settlement* of conflict (Kelman 2008). They framed conflict, in fact, within the classic “rational” model of intergroup interactions (Nadler and Shanbel 2008). According to this model, conflict arises from a competition, when in-group and out-group struggle to acquire important but scarce resources (Sherif et al. 1961). In this classic model, all strategies engaging rationality—e.g. strengthening the insight that stopping violence may be a superordinate goal, since violence causes suffering and losses for both groups—are expected to de-escalate conflict. Studying how to enhance

these rational choices is therefore seen as the primary aim of socio-psychological studies.

Nevertheless, a rational strategy, although absolutely necessary to reduce violence and resolve the conflict, is not enough to pass from the end of the conflict to the renewal of intergroup relations between the former enemies. After a peace treaty, in fact, much time has to pass before *socio-emotional barriers*—resulting from violence enacted and suffered by both groups—can finally be overcome (Burton 1969). This third step, following the two previous steps of conflict reduction and settlement slowly and with difficulty, is the issue addressed by studies on *socio-emotional reconciliation* (Nadler and Shnabel 2008).

Social psychologists have developed this third field of study only in recent years. One reason for this recent flourishing may be the evolution of socio-psychological models, now attributing increasing importance to emotional processes in general, and to *emotion regulation* in particular. This facet of research on the emotions stresses the importance of strategies that people can use in everyday life, not only to cope with their emotions, but also to extract from them signals that contribute in a meaningful way to their understanding of the situations that provoked these same emotions (Frijda 1986).

This theoretical advance in the socio-psychological understanding of emotions enables a better comprehension of how they might operate in a person confronting a stressful situation, and leads to a rejection of the dichotomy between reason and emotion. It was a shift in understanding not only of coping processes in general, but also of socio-emotional reconciliation in particular—since this kind of reconciliation may be conceived as a special example of the resilience shown by ordinary people when confronted with extraordinary events, such as the extreme degree of violence and danger experienced in wartime.

Another major development linked to the flourishing of studies on socio-emotional reconciliation concerns the *role assigned to ordinary people*. Conflict reduction and settlement lie firmly in the hands of leaders, and ordinary people are “only” asked to accept and internalize the new

intergroup balance that was negotiated for them (Kelman 2008).

Socio-emotional reconciliation, on the other hand, is a renewal of relations that not only permits but indeed requires a bottom-up elaboration. The measure of its success, in fact, is when ordinary people no longer incorporate hostility against former enemies in the core of their own social identity. This *marginalization of the enemy's image* from the characteristics that predicate in-group belonging (Kelman 2008) is obviously unreachable merely through a passive acceptance of leaders' decisions. It implies, instead, that the vast majority of ordinary people of both groups have performed a long elaboration—to the point that they can see their relations with the other group in a new way—in which memories of past violence have not disappeared, but have taken a different and somehow less important (“marginal”) place.

To our thinking the speculative assumptions of Paul Ricoeur (2000) quoted above could be extremely interesting to utilize for a better understanding of the multiple facets of this concept of the marginalization of enemy's image proposed by scholars of socio-emotional reconciliation. This theoretical proposal of Ricoeur's—tracing an insightful parallel between mourning over personal loss (Freud 1917) and mourning over the collective loss of an idealized social identity—suggests that the marginalization of the enemy's image from the core of one's own social identity is achieved only when such a difficult loss of idealized features of the in-group identity is no longer avoided or postponed. The enemy's image acts, in fact, as a privileged target, onto which it is possible to project all responsibility for the suffering caused by war violence; therefore, this image allows no attention to be paid to all the in-group's faults and wrongdoings, which could also account for these same sufferings and damages. Nevertheless, the more these shameful aspects of the in-group past are coped with, the less the enemy's image is needed as a protective shield overshadowing such a difficult awareness. As suggested by Ricoeur's parallel between Freud's remarks on the individual elaboration of mourning and the field of research on intergroup reconciliation (2000), in fact, this “work” of elaboration is less difficult—both in personal and social processes—when

the object of the mourning processes comes to be considered less ambivalently.

In a similar vein, Ricoeur's suggestions can also be compared with the recent Needs-Based Model of Socio-emotional Reconciliation (Nadler and Shnabel 2008). In a way, this model supplements Kelman's model, because it proposes the idea that *the socio-psychological needs of victims and perpetrators differ*: victims need to acquire a new control of their social environment, and perpetrators need to avoid social exclusion. According to the model, a valuable reconciliation can be achieved only when both victims' and perpetrators' needs are *simultaneously* taken into account. Ricoeur's idea of reconciliation as a collective mourning over the loss of an idealized social identity (2000) may help to better understand how both of these needs might be fulfilled. Referring to the historical development of Freud's concept of mourning, Ricoeur stresses how Freud gradually seized on the idea that memory, as well as mourning, may be conceived as a kind of "work" (*Erinnerungsarbeiten*: Freud 1914, as quoted in Ricoeur 1999, 6). Referring to the "work" of mourning, however, Ricoeur also emphasizes why it differs from the "work" of memory. He writes: "Mourning is a reconciliation. With what? With the loss of some object of love; objects of love may be people, of course, but also, as Freud says, abstractions like fatherland, freedom, ideals of all kinds" (Ricoeur 1999, 7). Therefore, he defines his theoretical proposal on the collective elaboration of war memories as an attempt "to bring together these two expressions: 'the work of memory' and 'the work of mourning', because it is quite possible that the work of memory is a kind of mourning, and also that mourning is a painful exercise in memory" (ibid.).

If we look at the fulfilment of the needs of victims and perpetrators of war violence, as defined by Nadler and Shnabel (2008), from the point of view of this "work" of memory in conjunction with the "work" of mourning, we might better conceive reconciliation based on victims' needs as requiring a working-through that—due to their powerless experience of suffering violence—is aimed at accepting the loss of an abstract idea of their social identity idealized in terms of power. Conversely, we may also conceive reconciliation based on perpetrators' needs as requiring a

working-through that—due to their in-group responsibilities in enacting violence—is directed at accepting the loss of an abstract idea of their social identity idealized in terms of moral dignity. Here again, however, the question arises: How much *time* is needed for such an elaboration to be worked through?

Certain recent historical situations (for instance, the unprecedented and somehow culturally unique experience of truth and reconciliation commissions in South Africa) present an elaboration that has directly involved victims and perpetrators of violence, called to face each other before their village communities and authorities *immediately after the conflict settlement*. In this case, forgiveness—if freely given by victims to perpetrators—was able to empower victims and avoid moral exclusion for perpetrators, i.e. to simultaneously fulfil both the model's basic needs in socio-emotional reconciliation (Nadler and Shnabel 2008). Conceptually, this view echoes research and theory on apologies as the way to mend severed social bonds (Tavuchis 1991) and the research by McCullough and his colleagues on forgiveness in close relations (McCullough 2000; McCullough, Pargament, and Thorensen 2000).

But many other elaborations of wartime experiences—including those related to memories of colonial wars, which we are considering in the focus section of this issue of the *IJCV*—show that socio-emotional barriers may last for a very long time, becoming a *kind of "debt" passing from one generation to another*.

We might speculate that this passage is quite immediate when responsibility for wartime violence may be clearly attributed. Sometimes, as also for instance under the apartheid regime, all the kinds of violence used for aggression against a weaker group make their oppressive aims so evident that, once the victims have at last gained enough power to free themselves, patronising or exonerating excuses can no longer be used. Sometimes, on the contrary, attributions for wartime sufferings and violence are less clear. This is the case, for instance, with wars that may be justified as being fought for "good" reasons: for instance as self-defence, or in response to particularly dangerous enemies, or as an extreme solution to stop more evil (Bobbio 1979). In all these

more complex situations, when the in-group violence may be plausibly attributed partly to the enemy's guilt, then the end of the war does not simultaneously end the symbolic war to gain a more honourable position for one's own group in the interpretation of the violence's ultimate causes. In this case, the working-through of war memories, eventually leading to socio-emotional reconciliation, passes from the generation that experienced wartime to their descendants not only as a healing of war sufferings, but also as a dispute over war responsibilities. Therefore, the issue at stake changes.

3. Working Through Memories of Wartime: From Witnesses'

Narratives to "Mature" Reconciliation Processes

When the children of direct witnesses of war violence become old enough to be told about their parents' difficult past, the problem of *how past violence is narrated to newly born individuals* comes up alongside the older problem of working through a personal experience of wartime. Of course, different kinds of narratives may be offered to newly born individuals. According to the classic distinction traced by Halbwachs' work on "social frames of memory" (1925), historical narratives, in their attempt to find a comprehensive schema for *facts* influencing the evolution of a war and explaining its consequences, must be cleanly differentiated from narratives on "*lived history*", which describe what it was like to live during wartime, coping with fear, food shortages, and the incessant threat of death to oneself and others. The latter type of narrative is usually offered to the nearest and dearest (as a principal example, Halbwachs refers to the social sharing of memories during family conversations). In the famous sociologist's view, these narratives aim to consolidate a positive idea of the family, as an indirect yet forceful empowerment of new-born members of this social group. According to Halbwachs (1925), in fact, older family members, by telling their memories to younger ones, who have not experienced the way that life changes in wartime, implicitly convey to them a message that we could phrase as: "That's our resilience, and you have received it as a family gift, because that's the way we are." A similar, though less emotionally charged, role may be seen in all the wartime memories that are narrated to young generations not through family, but through other "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) such as, for instance, national communities.

Then a second moment arrives, when direct witnesses reach the end of their lives, and narratives of "lived history", i.e. of what it was like to live through the wartime (Halbwachs 1925, 1950), can no longer be passed directly to newly born individuals. At this moment, when the grandchildren of war witnesses are old enough to have children themselves, all narratives of war are thus destined to quickly become second-hand narratives, without the living characteristics and biases linked to the memories of events that happened during one's own lifetime. The essential feature of the direct narratives of witnesses of wartime is, in fact, that they are transient. So, as the death of living witnesses approaches, the need for a linkage of these war memories to more enduring intermediations arises too.

This working-through of wartime memories thus inextricably intertwines socio-psychological processes of elaboration of the meaning of violent episodes of war with biological processes that gradually introduce new individuals into the life of the group. In this sense, Hannah Arendt's idea that any turning point in the historical life of a society can be considered a consequence primarily of a generational change, introducing *new individuals* into the social scene while older ones gradually disappear (Arendt 1958), applies perfectly, in our opinion, to reconciliation processes.

From this point of view, we maintain that processes of reconciliation involving people who lived through wartime and their children and grandchildren must be distinguished from the processes performed by their descendants during the period of the gradual disappearance of witnesses. To better clarify this distinction, we propose to call the latter type "*mature*" *reconciliation processes* (Leone and Curigliano 2009). In this paper, we try to examine whether, in the crucial period when the witnesses of Italian colonial wars are gradually disappearing, the teaching of historical facts to young Italians attending the last years of high-school may finally make them aware of the war violence enacted by their in-group. We assume, in fact, that present-day generational change may at last be enabling a shift from the protective strategy of face-to-face family narratives—intended to enhance the positive aspects of "our" way, in resilience and wartime survival—to another protective strategy, enacted by more institutional narratives and directed not

at identity enhancement but at the teaching of history. This time, protective intentions towards newly born individuals may be realized not through the very fragile and short-sighted tactic of total or selective amnesia of in-group moral indignities (Pivato 2009), but through the more solid and durable solution of an opportunity to learn the truth about in-group responsibility and shame.

To achieve such a difficult elaboration, however, historical narratives must be aimed at making these young students face *the historical truth of the in-group's past violence*, undermining in a profound way their own idealized social identity. However, different models elaborated by social psychologists working in the field of intergroup reconciliation (for a review, see Nadler et al. 2008a) usually consider the need to protect social identity to be a source of biases, which the search for historical truth has to accommodate.

In contrast, a recent work by Pratto and Glasford (2008) evaluates this idea as an oversimplified solution to the highly complex problem of the trade-off between the needs of reconciliation and the demands of justice. Reviewing the socio-psychological literature on social identity, in fact, they arrive at a distinction between the different facets of social identity—which may be considered at various times by scholars as a response to either the need for belonging, the need for self-esteem, or the need for self-integrity. If social identity is seen in this more complex perspective, acknowledging historical faults may be expected to ameliorate the need for self-esteem and the need for self-integrity, although threatening the need to belong (Pratto and Glasford 2008). This kind of theoretical explanation could be particularly apt to describe current attitudes of young Italians to colonial wars if we consider, as already mentioned, that they are mainly attributed to a wrong decision of the Fascist regime. This attribution to the decision of the “other” might thus lessen the threatening aspects that the search for historical truth may have for the need to belong, since young Italians usually consider themselves as citizens of the new Republic that was born out of the partisan struggle and the defeat of the Fascist regime.

Our empirical research analyses seven textbooks currently used in Italy to teach history to pupils approaching adult-

hood (at this point in their school career, they are usually expected to be 18 years old), exploring whether narratives of atrocities enacted by the in-group during colonial wars still seek protect social identity, or contrarily to openly acknowledge past wrongdoings, thus in line with the more complex conjectures of the model proposed by Pratto and Glasford (2008).

4. Research Methodology and Data

The purpose of the present research is to explore differences in the presentation of historical narratives regarding specific subject matter from Italy's past involving a loss of in-group moral dignity. The chosen period is the colonial one, and more specifically the concrete event of the war in Ethiopia as a shameful memory. We chose the war in Ethiopia because it may be considered the primary event of Italian colonialism, a bona fide invasion of the African country in 1935 lasting one year, in which the Italian army, among other atrocities, used internationally outlawed chemical weapons—roughly 2,500 mustard gas bombs, which caused about 200,000 Ethiopian civilian casualties. In order to understand the context of the research, some background is needed.

The presence of Fascism and Italian colonialism in Italian school history textbooks is quite recent. In 1960 a ministerial decree stated that the secondary school teaching program must cover historical events up to 1957, and in 1996 a new ministerial decree again strongly recommended the teaching of twentieth-century history. These institutional exhortations reflect a general reluctance in Italian history teaching to face such controversial memories. Moreover, the timing of these legal recommendations matches our description of “mature” reconciliation processes (Leone and Curigliano 2009), i.e. collective elaborations involving the third and fourth generations after war violence.

The corpus analysed is taken from seven Italian history textbooks currently used in high schools with students who are usually 18 years old. We selected specific texts relevant to the issue of Italian colonialism.¹ A preliminary qualitative analysis showed that these texts spoke more or less openly of Italian atrocities during this colonial war. This was evident from examining which kind of lemma (that is a set of words

with different inflections but with the same root) was more represented in each textbook when narrating the colonial war. Not all textbooks used unambiguous lemmas. The lemma *aggression* appeared in five textbooks out of seven, the lemma *expansion* (in terms of expansionistic designs) in four textbooks out of seven, and most importantly the word *gas* appeared in only three textbooks out of seven. We chose to consider *gas* as the crucial term in differentiating between these texts, because it was the one referring explicitly to the use of chemical weapons by the Italian army and to incidents that caused mainly civilian casualties.

On the basis of these initial findings we decided to divide the corpus into *two different subtexts*, differentiating textbooks that used the word *gas* (Benigno and Salvemini; De Bernardi and Guarracino; Prospero and Viola) from those that did not (Camera and Fabietti; Detti et al.; Giardina et al.; Lepre). In order to explore their differences, the two groups of textbooks were compared using a quanti-qualitative content analysis. At the end of this analysis, we had one subtext more oriented towards *factuality* and a second more oriented towards *interpretative abstraction*.

The quanti-qualitative analysis was performed with TalTac2.5 (a program for automatic lexico-textual content analysis), with the aim of determining the characteristics of the content and structure of the texts (Bolasco 2000). The first step was normalization and lemmatization, in order to standardize the text and to associate specific grammatical categories to each lemma. The quantitative level of analysis was focused on *analysis of lemmas' specificities*: a statistical coefficient which indicates when a specific lemma is utilized more intensively in one specific sub-corpus relative to others. This analysis identifies the sets of words that may be indicated as "characteristic" (i.e. typical) of a specific text. Once a lemma was statistically selected as characteristic of a sub-text, a qualitative co-occurrence analysis was conducted. This meant returning to the local context in which each

specific lemma (characteristic of a single sub-text) was used, verifying, by a qualitative reading of the context, the actual meaning to be attributed to each use of the lemma, and thus cumulatively defining its semantic space of discourse.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Analysis of Corpus Vocabulary

The corpus is composed of seven texts classified by textbook author and is divided into two groups (textbooks oriented towards *factuality* vs. textbooks oriented towards *interpretative abstraction*). The corpus thus obtained accounts for 76,727 occurrences (word types) with 11,194 different words (word tokens), therefore exhibiting a medium to high lexical richness index, equal to 14.59 percent (see Table 1). In textual analysis, a "word token" is an occurrence in a textual unit and a "word type" is a textual unit defined as a string of letters taken from the alphabet of a language, isolated by means of separators (blank spaces or punctuation marks), which may be the same as or different from another string. Word tokens represent the entire corpus, while word types represent the entire vocabulary of the corpus.

Table 1: Lexical measures

| Lexical indicator | | Value |
|--|--------------|-------|
| Number of occurrences (corpus dimension) | N | 76727 |
| Number of graphical forms (corpus width) | V | 11194 |
| Lexical extension | $(V/N)*100$ | 14589 |
| Hapax percent | $(V1/V)*100$ | 14589 |
| General mean frequency | N/V | 6854 |
| G coefficient | V/\sqrt{N} | 40412 |
| Angular coefficient | a | 1206 |

A more analytical look at the same lexical indicators shows that their distribution among the textbooks is well-balanced (see Table 2).

1 We were directed to the textbooks by the Italian historian Luigi Cajani, whom we thank for his advice, who judged them to offer good examples of current history teaching. The corpus submitted to analysis was extracted by choosing from the texts the paragraphs dealing with colonialism and the war in Ethiopia. History textbooks are: Benigno, Salvemini

(2002); De Bernardi, Guarracino (2006); Prospero, Viola (2000); Camera, Fabietti (1999); Detti, Gallerano N., Gozzini G., Greco G., Piccinni (1997), Giardina, Sabbatucci, Vidotto (2000); Lepre (2004).

Table 2: Distribution of occurrences by textbook

| Textbook | N occurrences | N forms | N hapax |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------|---------|
| Benigno, Salvemini | 8446 | 3058 | 2113 |
| De Bernardi, Guarracino | 8651 | 2941 | 1997 |
| Prosperi, Viola | 9780 | 3338 | 2227 |
| Camera, Fabietti | 5132 | 2168 | 1554 |
| Detti et al. | 12285 | 3746 | 2451 |
| Giardina et al. | 10289 | 3469 | 2364 |
| Lepre | 9235 | 3129 | 2087 |

5.2 Analysis of Specificities

The group-by-group analysis of specificities performed enabled us to retrieve information about the characteristic lexicon used for speaking about colonialism. In the first group of textbooks oriented towards *factuality*, words revealing the more shameful aspects of Italian colonialism tend to emerge.

Table 3: Lemmas used more in the textbooks oriented towards factuality

| Lemma | Total occurrences | Sub-occurrences | p-value |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------|
| gas | 13 | 11 | 0.000 |
| nitrogen mustard | 6 | 6 | 0.000 |
| aggression | 15 | 7 | 0.001 |
| expansion | 12 | 7 | 0.000 |
| colonial | 14 | 6 | 0.003 |
| occupation | 11 | 6 | 0.001 |
| attack | 8 | 5 | 0.001 |
| superiority | 7 | 5 | 0.000 |
| invasion | 9 | 4 | 0.014 |
| First World War | 9 | 4 | 0.014 |
| deployment | 6 | 4 | 0.002 |
| territories | 6 | 4 | 0.002 |
| bombs | 6 | 4 | 0.002 |

Notes: The first column lists lemmas used more in this set of textbooks (sub-text) than in the other set of textbooks (text).
 The second column lists occurrences of each lemma in the entire set of seven textbooks (text).
 The third column lists occurrences of each lemma only in this specific set of textbooks (sub-text).
 The fourth column lists probabilities assigned (by chi-square tests) to the difference between actual sub-occurrences and expected sub-occurrences (Bolasco 2000).

Lemmas more frequently used in this specific sub-text, such as *aggression*, *expansion*, *occupation*, *invasion*, and *attack*, denote, albeit with differing degrees of connotation, a clear stance on the Italian role during the war. Moreover, the crucial words *gas* and *nitrogen mustard* refer explicitly to the atrocities perpetrated against Ethiopian civilians by Italians. This aspect is even more clear when reading the local contexts in which these lemmas are used, as shown by the following examples:

In October 1935, without any declaration of war, the Italian army *attacked* the African country, and had to apply itself to the full in a campaign that turned out to be much more difficult than predicted. Ethiopia did not possess heavy artillery or an air force, while Italy used its own for massive bombardments, that from January 1936 utilized toxic *gas* to lethal effect. *Nitrogen mustard* billowed over the army and over the civilian populations, over the pastures, over the livestock, into the waters. The large-scale use of toxic *gases*, personally authorized by Mussolini and ordered by marshals Badoglio and Graziani, commanders of the two *invasion* corps, was recently proven conclusively, despite having always been denied by the Italian authorities. (translated from Prosperi, Viola, 109, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

Not even the Catholic Church opposed the *aggression*, despite the initial chagrin at the *attack* on a country that for a millennium had defended Christianity—even if it was Coptic Christianity—against Islam. ... The ‘need’ for conquest of Italy meant more than the survival of Ethiopia. The Jesuit review *Civiltà Cattolica* was more explicit: ‘The reason of vital need for *expansion* is valid and enough basis to establish the legitimacy of a *colonial* conquest’. (translated from Prosperi, Viola, 108–109, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The reputation of the Italian army was harmed by grievous atrocities against the civilian population. It is often forgotten what the Italians did in Ethiopia. Italy suffered limited losses, deaths of around 4,000: half those of the African campaign of the Crispi era, and less than the number slain in the single battle of Adua. The Ethiopians on the other hand counted at least two hundred thousand dead. In a few months the *occupying* army reached Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian emperor, Negus Haile Selassie, took refuge in England, where he remained until the Second World War, when he was able to return to his own country. (translated from Prosperi, Viola, 109–110, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

Furthermore, reading the local contexts of lemmas characteristic of this specific sub-text reveals how this group of history textbooks explicitly narrates Italian responsibility

for atrocities perpetrated during colonial wars using documents, testimony, and evidence that clearly convey these in-group wrongdoings in concrete language:

On the night of the 2nd of October 1935 the Italian troops stationed in Eritrea penetrated into Ethiopian territory, beginning a war that would lead within a few months to the conquest of the capital Addis Ababa (5th of May 1936), to the expulsion of the legitimate sovereign Haile Selassie, and to the elevation of the Kingdom of Italy to the rank of Empire, proclaimed in Rome on the 9th of May 1936 to an applauding crowd. The Italian forces suffered few losses, but to suppress the resistance of the Ethiopians the Italian army resorted to indiscriminate bombardment and the use of asphyxiating *gas* which caused thousands of casualties, also among the civilians. (translated from Benigno Salvemini, 168, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

I have the duty to inform you that on the 14th of January 1936, for the first time, *gas bombs* have been employed by the Italian air force. These *bombs* killed twenty peasants. I have personally treated fifteen cases of persons affected by the *gas* bombardment, among them two children. Burns have been caused by *nitrogen mustard*. (translated from Benigno Salvemini, 169, quoting *verbatim* the report of Doctor Schuppler to Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recorded in the official journal of the League of Nations; specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The war was started on the pretext of incidents that occurred on the border of the Italian possessions in Somalia and Eritrea. The Italian Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, at the head of an imposing deployment of munitions and men, brought it to an end within a few months (May 1936), distinguishing himself for the ferocity with which he conducted the military operations: he utilized chemical weapons banned by international agreements drawn up at the end of the *First World War* and involved the civilian population in the conflict. (translated from De Bernardi, Guarracino, 330, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The lemmas used more in the second group of textbooks are quite different (see Table 4). Events are described more frequently using terms that are military (lemmas such as *war*, *annexation*, *expedition*, *endeavour*) or abstract (lemmas such as *imperialism*, *ideological*).

Table 4: Lemmas used more in the textbooks oriented towards interpretative abstraction

| Lemma | Total occurrences | Sub-occurrences | p-value |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------|
| war | 115 | 39 | 0.000 |
| foreign policy | 31 | 13 | 0.000 |
| sanctions | 28 | 15 | 0.000 |
| troops | 13 | 7 | 0.000 |
| Rome-Berlin Axis | 9 | 7 | 0.000 |
| endeavour | 12 | 6 | 0.002 |
| empire | 12 | 6 | 0.002 |
| goods | 8 | 6 | 0.000 |
| expedition | 5 | 5 | 0.000 |
| Negus Haile Selassie | 5 | 5 | 0.000 |
| Ethiopian | 7 | 5 | 0.001 |
| ideological | 8 | 5 | 0.001 |
| annexation | 8 | 5 | 0.001 |
| imperialism | 8 | 4 | 0.013 |

Notes: The first column lists lemmas used more in this set of textbooks (sub-text) than in the other set of textbooks (sub-text). The second column lists occurrences of each lemma in the entire set of seven textbooks (text). The third column lists occurrences of each lemma only in this specific set of textbooks (sub-text). The fourth column lists probabilities assigned (by chi-square tests) to the difference between actual sub-occurrences and expected sub-occurrences (Bolasco 2000).

The local contexts of the lemmas characteristic of this specific sub-text reveal how this second group of history textbooks is oriented towards interpretative abstraction. It tends to underline narratives that, relating more to the territorial dimension and to Italian foreign policy during Fascism, describe the colonial war in a more ideological perspective.

Colonialism seems to be somehow justified by the general imperialistic policy also adopted by other European states. The Ethiopians are presented as a weak population unable to offer resistance to the Italian army. The effects of the conflict on African civilians are largely ignored, along with Italian responsibility for war crimes: political and economic consequences for Italian internal affairs, on the contrary, are more frequently specified.

On the 2nd of October 1935, Mussolini decided to launch the invasion. Most Italians received the decision with approval, partly because the *war* against Ethiopia was represented as one

of a proletarian populace against rich nations. According to the Fascist propaganda, indeed, the true enemy of Italy was Great Britain, which supported Ethiopia in order to block the Italian people from winning their 'place in the sun'. This *ideological* justification made the Ethiopian *endeavour* popular... Ethiopia was governed by *Haile Selassie*, an emperor (*negus*) who had absolute power. It was a very poor country: agriculture, which constituted the prevalent economic activity by far, was very backward in its methods and commerce was obstructed by the scarcity of roads. Although it received help from Great Britain, the Ethiopian army remained weak and badly armed. The *war* was easy and short.

(translated from Lepre, 283, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The ruthless war, useless and costly (the last colonial war and the first war *endeavour* unleashed by a European power after 1918) was very significant from the point of view of international relations... The sanctions imposed on Italy were no more than a formality lacking any effectiveness (for example raw materials such as oil, essential for war operations, were excluded from the embargoed goods).

(translated from Detti et al., 197, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The Ethiopians posed scant resistance. The League of Nations proclaimed economic *sanctions* against Italy that, however, proved ineffective and had the sole result of increasing consensus in favour of the regime, which transformed into enthusiasm on the 5th of May 1936, at the announcement that the Italian troops had entered the capital Addis Ababa and that Ethiopia had become Italian.

(translated from Lepre, 283, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

The Italian *expedition*, begun on the 3rd of October 1935, was entrusted from November to the leadership of Pietro Badoglio and concluded in May 1936 with the conquest of all Ethiopia. The ex-kingdom of the *negus* was thus united with Somalia and Eritrea to form the *empire* of Italian East Africa, the crown of which naturally belonged to Vittorio Emanuele III, promoted for the occasion to the rank of emperor ...

The member states of the League of Nations committed themselves not to give credit to Italy, not to supply the country with certain *goods*, to boycott exports, and so on. The *sanctions* however were not serious, and had little effect except to shore up support for the Mussolini regime even in some anti-fascist circles.

(translated from Camera Fabietti, 448–49, specific sub-text lemmas in italics)

6. Concluding Remarks

Within the general theoretical framework we have briefly sketched in the opening pages of this article, our analysis shows how long it may take for the perpetrators' group to elaborate the *loss of moral dignity* blemishing their social

identity after violence enacted against an out-group. In this research line, the elaboration of in-group responsibility after a colonial war seemed particularly important, since in this case victims have often not gained enough power to propose their own interpretation of the history of violence they have suffered.

In this case especially, we show that several generations are needed before the perpetrators' descendants eventually hear the historical truth about their in-group violence, in narratives that abandon the self-serving biases of attempts to defend the image of the in-group in the eyes of new generations in order to make them experience positive feelings towards the "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) in which they happen to be born.

The results of our explorative research shows that the seven contemporary Italian history textbooks under analysis use two main strategies when presenting established historical facts about Italian colonial wars, such as the use of outlawed chemical weapons: one more oriented to protecting the in-group's social identity, the other recognizing more clearly in-group wrongdoings. The first strategy, characteristic of four of the textbooks, employs interpretative abstractions that somehow veil the in-group's moral indignities; the other, characteristic of only three textbooks, presents contrasting clear and straightforward factual descriptions of the in-group's moral indignities.

The narratives used by the group of four textbooks oriented towards interpretative abstractions seem to confirm the hypothesis put forward by many social psychologists working in the field of intergroup reconciliation (for an updated critical review see Nadler et al. 2008b). Although slightly different from one another, these models all consider the need to protect social identity to a source of biases, to which the search for historical truth characterizing the long and difficult period of socio-emotional reconciliation after a war has to accommodate.

The narratives used by the group of three textbooks oriented towards factual descriptions of in-group wrongdoings seem to confirm an alternative hypothesis advanced in the recent work by Pratto and Glasford (2008, see above).

By clearly acknowledging historical fault during colonial wars, these textbooks may in fact positively serve the need for self-esteem and self-integrity of young Italian students learning about this controversial chapter of their in-group past, although in a way threatening their need to belong (Pratto and Glasford 2008).

While a deeper discussion is certainly required, these first results echo the phenomenon of Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB). Linguistic Intergroup Bias (LIB) is the tendency to describe negative in-group and positive out-group behaviours more concretely than positive in-group and negative out-group behaviours (Maass et al. 1989). In fact, results of experiments investigating the role of in-group-protective motives, by varying the threat to the in-group identity of participants, suggest that the magnitude of LIB depends on in-group-protective motivation and that language favouring the in-group may be functional to the maintenance of self-esteem (Maas, Ceccarelli, and Rudin 1996).

Interestingly, the three textbooks narrating in-group wrongdoings during African colonial wars to present-day Italian students with very concrete and detailed words seem to show another facet of this bias. Rather than coming from protective motives directly functional to the maintenance of self-esteem, the use of this communicative strategy in historical narratives teaching negative aspects of the in-group past to young students might instead be directed to gaining a more clear awareness among the in-group of its past moral indignities. We could speculate that when used in historical texts (that are expected to be based on verified

facts), this kind of communicative choice may be useful not to accomplish a directly protective function, but to show a moral commitment that appears even greater in the context of the continued lack of power of the victims of yesterday, who even today seem unable simply to impose a forceful acknowledgement of past harm. This situation in which victims remain powerless over time might explain the current amnesia of these past wrongdoings. But, at the same time, it might also make the use of concrete words more meaningful when teaching young Italians about such a difficult page of their own history.

Of course, many questions remain open. What are the effects of these different kinds of narrative on young readers? What kinds of emotions are elicited, when either narrating frankly or omitting to convey facts? How might such moral blame be interiorized by younger generations, obviously free from any personal responsibility? What is the role played by historical identity—bound to the past of one's own "imagined community"—in the overall balance of social identity?

While only a first step, our exploratory analysis suggests that, in spite of the lapse of collective memory that characterizes present-day Italian social discourse about these shameful historical episodes (Pivato 2009; Leone and Curigliano 2009), evidence of a clear account of the historical truth of in-group wrongdoing is found in a minority of the history textbooks examined. This could be seen as an advance of "mature" reconciliation processes regarding the violence enacted by Italians during colonial wars.

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