The Commemoration of Traumatic Events: Expiation, Elevation and Reconciliation in the Remaking of the Italian Resistance

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Introduction

When Benedict Anderson [1991] first introduced in the human and social sciences the concept of "imagined community", he indeed glued together two rather challenging words.

Needless to say, sociologists have always dealt with "community" and "imagination". The concept "Imagined community", however, with all the aspects of social construction and productive discourse it implies, does not tell all the story. Anderson indeed ends up using a third, rather challenging and intriguing word: "style" [Anderson 1991], which denotes the fact that imagination is concretely pursued according to some community-specific principles, whose outcome (in terms of imaginative discourses and practices) may differ even greatly. Needless to say, social imagination actually involves social construction.

In this paper, I would like to deal with the dynamics of stylization by focusing on the role of commemorations as powerful cultural devices for the imagination of communities. Though imagined communities may not be haunted by their past each in the same way as the others, a successful management of the past is a crucial task that has to be accomplished in order to generate the overall impression of "naturalness", which is one of the main outcomes of the process of imagination.

Discourse is a crucial aspect of this process of memory making. Focusing on discourses, their producers and the commemorative patterns they produce in the public space, allows thus to link symbolic representations and the social life of institutions, in order to grasp the "specific worldviews [that] inhere in the specialized discourses of social organizations" [Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991, p. 383]. These worldviews, while they may well be incorporated in basic codes and narratives [Alexander 2003], resurface periodically in discourses.

Yet this process and its outcomes (collective memories as imagined products at any layer of complexity) are not straightforward as they are generally thought to be.

Representations can be contested in one of the many battles over the past that colonize modernity; practical ways to arrange and reaffirm representations (rituals and secular ceremonies, especially) may not work properly or may not work at all; the creation of jointly celebrated and shared visions of the past [Zerubavel 1996], as well as their relations to the present, may prove to be just a chimera.

I will take the case of commemorations as quite telling of these difficulties in arranging the imagination of community.

Commemorations are certainly one of the main symbolic devices by means of which a community (or a community's elites, usually) creates a sense of continuity with its past.

However, commemorations do not simply sanction the existence of a given past, bounded and detached from the present time of commemoration; they also contribute to reshape it both from a semantic and a syntactic point of view. Because of this reshaping activity, they potentially transform the naturalness of a community into something which is not taken for granted; rather, it becomes questionable. On the other side of the coin, however, commemorations (like other rituals and secular ceremonies) furnish social reality with an aura of tradition, somehow weakening the boundaries between the past and the present. As devices that produce a traditionalizing effect [Moore & Myerhoff 1977], commemorative rituals also help to attach new discourses about identity to both consolidated meanings and forms of expression; they thus play a major role in the innovation of the repertoires which are used to express the idea of "community" in the public space.

Despite such fixity (which results in the inscription of memories in traditions [Shils 1981] and which works as a powerful constraint), the fluidity of both collective memory and commemorative practices is nevertheless well rooted in the social process. It works both in ordinary times and in the "marked" times detached from the steady flow of everyday life [Zerubavel 2004].

It is in times of transformation and transition, however, that the work of memory making resurfaces, and permeates the public space in a way it usually doesn't in ordinary times. From this point of view, the past can be managed with a great degree of cultural

complexity in order to provide imagined communities which have sharp conflicting visions of their founding moments a (purported) unified narrative, able to overcome these contrasts in the evaluations, interpretations and management of the past.

What I will present here is a look at the attempted normalization [Olick 2003] of what has been a difficult past for most of Italy's republican history:[1] World War 2, the circumstances of the end of the fascist regime, and especially the Resistance against fascism that followed the collapse of the regime, i.e. the 1943-1945 biennium.

Within a political context like Italy in the last decade, where concerns about memory have become of paramount importance, it is the commemoration of victims and collectivities that appears to be one of the crucial features of the management of the past (especially, the difficult past I have chosen as my case study).

The commemorative trajectory of such type of victims seems to be especially important also for another reason. What the discourses, narratives and practices about the commemorative and moral management of such collectivities show is that the construction of the sense of continuity (as an important outcome of imagination) is an activity deeply embedded in discourse and representation, and especially in the narrativization of events and protagonists (both in the active and the passive role). These narratives of the past are designed in order to provide an anchor for the production of continuity and memory. Far from being simply an unproblematic product of commemorative entrepreneurship, continuity can thus be analyzed as the result of the selection and production of interpretive frames that are grounded in the complex articulation of the relation between actors in the present and the socially constructed images of the actors in the past whom the commemorating agents conceive as valuable objects for memory making.

I will thus approach the questions that rise from the attempt to manage these victims, with a special focus on the management of their perceived public status (and therefore deal with the continuous process of reincorporation of victims within a given

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[1] See Focardi [2005] for an extensive review of this debate during the 1945-2005 period.

society). In order to describe some prominent aspects of the way collective memory is reconstructed in contemporary Italy, I will deal with three basic symbolic repertoires (namely, the dynamics and language of expiation, reconciliation and elevation), that are present at the intersection of the processes of commemoration and victimization. All of them deal with the highlighting of some alleged positive qualities of the people remembered, considered in the perceived and publicly available relation with the collectivity which is commemorating, most of the times via its delegated and legitimated spokesmen.

At the end of the paper, I will sketch some further issues in the analysis of the link between commemorations and the management of victims, especially within the framework of a processual and extended case analysis of commemorations and collective memories.

1. Data and methods

The present research focused on the management of the past by the President of the Republic Ciampi since the day of his election in 1999. In this paper, I have decided to deal only with three events that are emblematic vis a vis the problems of continuity and management of past victims with which I have decided to deal in this article.

Each of them had a main protagonist in the President of the Republic Ciampi, who has been a major political entrepreneur in the production of a public discourse on national identity in Italy. These events were: the joint commemoration, made by Ciampi and the President of Germany Rau, of the nazist massacre of a huge number of civilians in Marzabotto during World War II (17/4/2002); the commemoration of the Italian and Allied soldiers dead in the battlefield of El Alamein in 1942 (20/10/2002); the battle of Porta S. Paolo in Rome (8/9/2003).

These three events are however embedded in a larger plot where the celebration of April 25 (Liberation Day, one of Italy's most important national holidays) is the final point of a complex chronology.

They are also part of a larger sample regarding the activity of the President of the Republic as an entrepreneur of memory; it is made of 179 single commemorative occurrences regarding 70 commemorated events. The two years of the Resistance period account for 26 events and nearly half of the total amount of commemorative occurrences have identified (86).This is by large the most dense mnemonic period in Italy's post-war history.

Methodologically, I have used a heterogeneous set of methods for the analysis of text, dealing mainly with socio-semiotic analysis of textual and visual data, frame analysis, and performance analysis of events.

2. *The incorporation of peripheries and the classification of victims*

The imagination of a community involves the creation of a sense of continuity between the ones involved in imagination and their past. This continuity is a necessary condition for the construction of the perceived naturalness of community itself, and it is created (or at least attempts to create it are made) by making use of complex symbolic tools that can ultimately lead to very different representations of both the commemorated community and the commemorating one.

This freedom to exploit and arrange the past by the selection of meaningful elements is however not absolute.

Commemorations are in fact embedded in social contexts that work as powerful constraints in the choice of the narratives, the meanings and the available events that can be commemorated. Commemorating a "wrong" event (that is, inappropriate, or an event that is perceived as profane and polluting), or trying to infuse equally polluting meanings to an event which is already part of a complex commemorative system, may lead to the rise of conflicts and generate the necessity of some reflexive mechanism (debate, discourse, deliberation, ritual, and so on) in order to recalibrate both the structure and the meanings of commemorations.

This seems to be particularly true in times of transition, or when attempts to reconstruct a nation state's official memory are

made.[2] Most of the times, these transformations of memory are in fact the product of greater changes, structurally affecting a society as a whole, or the political system in particular. Commemorations, in these cases, are less a way to reaffirm commitment to the state than a powerful cultural device used in order to instil new meanings to commemorated events, or to build a new coherent system that is aimed at the expression of political changes as being also great normative changes, proposing a discourse about what a society not simply is, but also about how and what it should be. The reorganization of both commemorative repertoires and systems creates distinctions between moments in a community's history, further differentiating sacred and profane moments, times and events, and constantly redefining the meanings of history and their relations to the present. The deliberate or implicit purpose, in all these cases, is to create simultaneously continuity and legitimacy.

Such attempts to reorganization usually involve actors in arenas where they either compete or cooperate relationally (though it is not an either/or matter, especially when we approach the issue from a diachronic point of view), from elites to moral entrepreneurs of the past, to (political) actors eventually at the periphery of a given commemorative system. These various kinds of actors altogether act as powerful, creative agents of memory (no matter, now, whether their activity is aimed at transformation, change or at the preservation of a status quo).

These reconstructions may highlight different aspects of national identity, focusing on commonalities and shared elements of the past. On the contrary, they may try to incorporate conflicting elements belonging to visions of the past other than the State's official one, in order to pursue a reintegration of past times, events and people who have been seen and portrayed in the public discourse as "distant", or even "evil". Transformations in commemorations or in the discourse about memories (and about possible counter-memories: Foucault [1977]) can thus be aimed at a redefinition of the centre/periphery relation [Shils 1975], providing new unifying narratives or a recognition of the new

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[2] For the notion of "official memory" I refer to Bodnar's [1992] distinction between official and vernacular memories.

centrality of events and symbols that for long time may have been at the periphery of a given commemorative system (as they were either neglected or polluted).

Incorporating (moral) peripheries seems to involve commemorations as special temporal and spatial settings for the display and production of the discourse about identity, its continuity and its eventual transformations. Events and people previously regarded as peripheral and normatively marginal can be in fact incorporated only by means of complex repertoires of symbolic manipulation and – which seems more important as far as memory is concerned – especially through the reconstruction of their social trajectory from periphery to centre. When it involves memory and commemoration, the public discourse on this trajectory may become extremely varied, dealing not only with past events but also providing a reconstruction of the way they were previously managed (on such feature of path dependency and its analytic relevance for the study of memory and commemoration, see Olick [1999]).

This detailed arrangement of such richness in form, content and interpretation is a peculiar aspect of the framing activity to which the past is subject. The shifts in the hierarchy and relevance of the objects of memory belonging to the center or the periphery must indeed be socially defined and justified in one way or the other. Actors who are engaged in the definition of the possible contents of collective memory and of the link between memory and the ultimate societal values usually articulate complex discourses that are aimed at making explicit why and how the past should matter for a given commemorating society [Irwin-Zarecka 1993, p. 8].

This activity suggests which the possible interpretations of the available past may be, trying to make sense collectively of the events being commemorated. It therefore has some very clear normative implications: it provides a given society a vision of the past and a definition of the social world, considering both the portion of this world which is commemorated and the one which is commemorating. Actors dealing with the production of commemorative frames and repertoires are thus engaged in an activity that affects both the past and the present, where the former can work most of the times as a source of authority and

legitimacy, while the latter is the arena where reconstruction is pursued in order to reach normative and political goals in the present. Framing the reincorporation of peripheral discourses or reshaping old official visions of the past, as a way to overcome a possible societal impasse in the present, is a cultural activity that deals with the public and collective management of meaning and the way it should be correctly understood.

At the core of this construction of meaning and social reality there are – among other framing devices that shape the discourse about identity – the portrayal of victims, the management of their status and the commemorative construction of the positive qualities of their liminality (on victims as liminal artefacts of social construction, in the betwixt and between condition, see Giesen's recent investigation on triumph and trauma: Giesen [2005]; for a recent contribution on the relationship between communities of memory and past victims, see Booth [2006]).

The discussion to follow will analyze the process of framing possible moral peripheries and liminal characters, with reference to the commemorative management of the perceived and changing status of victims of tragic events during World War 2 (battles fought and lost, slaughters, and deportations). The argument I will develop is focused on the relevance of victims as an element of the whole process of producing new frames of national identity in Italy, i.e. as special subjects for the construction of the perceived continuity between the past and the present.

3. Setting the context: the Italian transition and the problem of shared commemoration

During the 1990s and in the early 2000, such issues and claims about memory began to be very prominent in Italy's cultural and political agendas. Although the past has always been a matter of concern and political debate since the end of the war (a tendency that has increased in the mid-1980s), the sudden and abrupt change in the post-war party system led to a sudden reconfiguration of the actors, the themes and the major claims in

Italian politics. In 1994, the electoral success of populist, ethnic and right wing movements like the Lega Nord (Northern League) and the post-fascist Movimento Sociale (Social Movement), together with the effective political blitzkrieg led by the mass media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, shook like an earthquake Italy's frail political system. It was indeed a sudden change welcomed by many as the burial of the old system as much as it was feared by many others. The traditional symbolic repertoires of Italian politics were used to frame the victory of Berlusconi and the reaction to the appointment as members of the national government of leaders of the Movimento Sociale and of the xenophobic and populist Lega Nord.

From then onwards, political struggles in Italy became heavily ritualized, and the past a matter of bitter contention; this, since April 25 1994, when a huge crowd of 300,000 citizens walked the streets of Milan celebrating the 49th anniversary of the Liberation (in the end, this huge mass rally overshadowed even the important 50th anniversary and stands as an important event in the memory of the newer generation of left wing activists). Less than a month earlier, leader of the Movimento sociale Gianfranco Fini had praised Mussolini as being "the greatest statesman of the 20th century". The history of the Republic and of the Resistance were since then not simply confined in the scholarly debate. They were used as powerful weapons in the political arena, polarizing coalitions and parties between basic alternatives according to which symbolic conflict was displayed: democracy/freedom; communism/anticommunism; fascism/antifascism. Among all these alternatives, it was the relation between communism (and the Italian party) and antifascism that was heavily attacked, as well as the events of 1943/1945, in a debate where the public use of history and the findings of historiographic research have oftentimes merged together.

Then, in 1996, a further line of fragmentation emerged, when the Northern League, politically isolated after the fall of the first government lead by Berlusconi in December 1994, began making symbolic claims about the secession of the richer northern regions [Destro 1997; Albertazzi 2006]. The rise of these claims and the use of alternative symbolic repertoires, that were portrayed as national and natural in the attempt of imagining the so called

region of Padania as opposed and in contrast with the Republic, inaugurated another frontline of political conflict where the management of the past (from the Risorgimento to the Resistance) played a crucial role. Despite the ambiguous use of catchphrases like "secession" and "away from Rome", the unity of the Republic was – at least from the symbolic point of view – clearly questioned by claims that were, until then, largely unknown or marginal.

The new themes developed in the "green" Italy (the colour adopted as a sign of distinction by the diehard militants of the Northern League) strengthened the emergence of the discourse on national identity. This discourse was concerned both with the historical reconstruction and the management of the time of the Resistance on the one hand, and with the possible meanings of Italian-hood on the other. The present and the past, thus, almost merged together and for the following years their symbolic management by political actors and elites was deeply intertwined.

Again, the Resistance and the circumstances of the birth of the Republic, though under attack from many sides, provided the symbols for the production of counterarguments about the necessity of the unity of the Republic. Nor the use of the complex symbolic repertoire dealing with the 1943-1945 period was limited to the struggles between the two coalitions of center-left and center-right, or to the labelling of the Northern League efforts as inherently anti-national and thus morally polluting for a society that for decades had taken the unity of the Republic for granted. As a great source of meanings for the new discourse about patriotism made by the then president of the Republic Scalfaro, and a central event for the construction of the Republican identity, the Resistance draw considerable attention and was the territory of plural acts of mnemonic reconstruction.

The election to President of the Republic of former Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi led to further changes in the discourse about national identity. While Scalfaro had stressed patriotism and a more comprehensive vision of national memory during his 7 years mandate, Ciampi (a former soldier and partisan) soon characterized for a focus on the period of World War Two as the more dense centre of commemorative activity.

From the beginning of his service, Ciampi's role as a guarantor of the unity of the State (as prescribed by the Republican Constitution) was embedded in the aforementioned context of debate and polarization about the past. It is no surprise, then, that one of the main institutional roles of the President of the Republic (that is, the master of ceremonies of Republican values) was transformed progressively into the one of an entrepreneur of national identity and national memory. As a delegated figure able to manage the past, Ciampi began his activity as an entrepreneur of memory oscillating from the public reaffirmation of universal values (like in the case of the commemorations of the Holocaust during his state visits to Germany and Israel in 1999) and the definition of new narratives for Italy's republican past, in these cases walking initially the safe paths opened by his predecessors.

In year 2000, however, things began slightly to change. Back then, Italy's system of national dates and official narratives about the past was probably at its lowest [Ridolfi 2003]. April 25 had become more than ever a contested date; May 1 had been reframed to "labour day" rather than "workers' day" (a process that began during the 1980s, though); June 2 (the day of the referendum between the Republic and the monarchy) and November 4 (the anniversary of the armistice and the Italian victory in World War 1) had become mobile holidays celebrated on the first Sunday of, respectively, June and November (Law 63/1977). Ceremonial activity and public attention thus tended to concentrate on April 25, despite the numerous arguments and counterarguments about the date [Cenci 1999, 2001; Chiarini 2005]. Though labelled "Liberation Day", April 25 was rather the day of the National Liberation Committee's (CLN) call to the general insurrection, which took place in Northern Italy until the end of April (on April 28 former dictator Mussolini was arrested, condemned to death and subsequently executed).

Not only one of the Republic's most important holy days was open to contestation and opposition; because of long time factors affecting the official vision of the past, a unified narrative about the conditions that led to the Liberation was also very difficult to produce.

The situation was thus quite paradoxical: Italy's commemorative calendar was organized around dates that were

likely to be contested practically every year, and that proved most of the times to be the setting for vernacular interpretations of the past that asked for some kind social recognition. Moreover, celebrations of April 25 oftentimes reflected more articulated debates about revisionism and the responsibility of the partisans, or questioning the necessity to celebrate a day that was perceived as a further factor of polarization within Italian society. As a date and source of identity with hardly any explicit and detailed genealogy, April 25 was in fact seen and understood more as a founding moment rather than the ending point of a complex process. The Resistance against the Nazis Army was in fact a very impenetrable mnemonic black box; something that, however, was substantially becoming questionable both within the political right and within the left.

Ciampi's objective, since 1999, was to provide a new progressive frame in order to overcome the harsh conflicts of the past. "We have come a long way, and we have learnt the lesson from our past" is probably the best way to summarize this new frame. Incorporating both progress and time in the discourse about Italian national identity, Ciampi positioned himself at the centre of the official management of the past in Italy. At the same time, his activity was aimed at reducing the liminal and multivocal character of the period of the resistance, while simultaneously acknowledging the relevance of the period. What was made (and to some extent still is) was thus a complex emplotment of the links that unified the Resistance, the Liberation and the Republic, a normalizing interpretation that provided the discussion about April 25 with a teleological argument which was very detailed, as it had its protagonists, its key events, its places and its own metaphors, rationalizations and explanations.

This reframing of the Resistance, which was designed to incorporate some portions and new interpretations of the past in the wider discourse about identity, was grounded on the selection of relevant moments in the 1943-45 period. Ciampi's discourse about the past, thus, created and reshaped a chronology of the founding moments in Italian Republican history.

4. The status of victims and the construction of reputation

All these events were extensively commemorated since the end of World War 2, the Liberation and the founding of the Republic in 1946 (some of them – like the Battle of Porta San Paolo – were even part of the early commemorative system that was established during the 1943/45 period). They had, however, quite different public trajectories, as they belonged almost exclusively to, and were used by, very different political actors.

The main reason for this is that they belonged to the conflicting political subcultures of post-war Italy. The left/right cleavage shaped – among other things – also the development of a commemorative repertoire of the war and the Resistance, so that a synthesis of the plural discourses became impossible since the beginning of the Cold War and the increasing internal isolation of the left parties. The contradiction was striking: at the center of the Republic was a founding moment – the Resistance, commemorated with reference to its alleged victorious conclusion, April 25 – whose extensive commemoration would have led to a symbolic prominence in the public discourse of the forces that were excluded and treated as a threat to Italy's stability and democratic system.

The changes in the political context described above, however, demanded for a revision of the centrality of the Republic's founding moments, in order to solve Italy's peculiar paradox: a country that had spent 50 years of its history in a condition where the republican identity was very marginal in the discourse of the main political actors, and where for decades an inclusive vision of its war and post-war history was absent and even avoided by the ruling elites.

The new narrative about the national/republican identity which was produced by the State's leaders and rulers, thus, focused on inclusion and on the extension of the Resistance as a founding moment. That meant mainly two things: first, the production of an extensive chronology able to account for the complex chains of the events of the Resistance, and their causal link to the founding of the Republic; second, the definition of a renewed discourse about the protagonists of the war and of the Resistance, aimed not simply at reconciliation but also at a

definition of their morality and the normative boundaries of their actions. What was at stake was above all the preservation of a narrative about the Resistance as a crucial turning point. At the same time, the reincorporation of its neglected protagonists was dominant in the production of the new progressive frame that stressed that a strong Republican identity could be built only thanks to the collective recognition of the necessity of a reintegration of former conflicting parties, that stated the irrevocability of the lessons of the past.

At the same time, trying to produce such a reincorporation was not aimed at forgetting. Historic responsibilities were not symbolically bracketed, but became a crucial aspect of the new narrative. Victims and the management of their status, in this context, played a crucial role. It is the symbolic representation of their nature that became progressively the main device used in the production of this narrative about the Resistance. Victims were nested in the context of the chronology of the Resistance and belonged to the events of the Resistance. As the stress on their liminality became more and more evident, however, they were also charged with an aura of universalism that allowed the establishment of a clear relation to the present.

This was mainly achieved by the recourse to the three major repertoires of symbolic elevation, expiation and reconciliation, often instantiated in public discourse.

Each of them articulates in a peculiar way the relationship between commemorated and commemorating communities. Elevation seems to rest on a quite equal distribution of symbolic power between perceived past and present communities, with the former serving as powerful examples of commitment to civil values; expiations are to some extent procedures of self diminishing that establish a subaltern relation between the commemorating agents and victims whose honour and relevance is recognized and established; finally, reconciliations focus not simply on the past-present link, but seek for an even allocation of symbolic resources between consensual commemorating actors (moreover, joint commemoration may serve as a device for grounding consensus on a normative basis).

5. Symbolic elevation and the management of a beginning: constructing victims at Porta San Paolo

The battle of Porta San Paolo in Rome has been considered by the Republican rhetoric as the starting moment of the one year and eight months long Resistance that led to the Liberation of Italy and the defeat of the German army between April and May 1945. On September 8, 1943, there was a public announcement that an armistice with the Allied Forces had been signed 5 days before, on September 3 (see Aga-Rossi [2002] for a sharp reconstruction of the events and the political context of the armistice). Soon after, the Wehrmacht tried to occupy the city, while skirmishes began in several quarters of the city. When the skirmishes turned into a violent battle, fought especially around the area of Porta San Paolo, the citizens of Rome joined the few army battalions that decided to engage in the fight against the German soldiers. The battle happened in the chaotic context of the first days after the armistice, when no order was given to the infantry that were to defend Rome from the German attack. The few Italian divisions that autonomously decided to resist were soon forced to retire near the area of Porta San Paolo, where they were joined by thousands of citizens of Rome, either spontaneously or organized by the Antifascist parties. When they were definitively defeated, 414 soldiers and 156 civilians were killed during the battle (among them Raffaele Persichetti, who was the first combatant awarded with the Gold Medal of the Resistance).

Commemorative ceremonies, even the ones that deal with the most polluted events, treat the commemorated past as something special and detached from the flow of ordinary life.[3] It is no surprise, then, that in these "marked" times [Zerubavel 2003] commemorated actors and protagonists undergo a process of characterization that stresses their extraordinary qualities (I take extraordinary as a very lay term without any evaluative implication) in relation to their behaviour, in or during the events commemorated.

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[3] This vision is of course rooted in the Durkheimian qualitative theory of time developed in the section on the negative cult of the *Formes* [Durkheim 1995].

When commemorations deal with such protagonists, stressing their peculiar positive qualities and making them the focal point of remembrance, it is likely that some form of elevation of the actors portrayed in the commemoration occurs. Those who are elevated this way, by the recognition of the prestige and morality accorded to them because of their actions, are also simultaneously subject to a process of classification, which retrospectively deconstructs their liminality (their being – by virtue of their action performed back then at that particular moment – out of the normative order) and reincorporates them in the structure of the commemorating group, a structure that they have contributed to create by setting new parameters for moral action, opposed to those of the discredited past. From this point of view, such victimized people (who, however, share some crucial characteristics of the heroes) are nearer to the commemorating society than they were to the one they escaped from. They end up being regarded as subjects worth of remembrance for the very fact they were normative path breakers who established (at such a crucial turning point in time) the possibility that real moral action can be pursued. And they did it by positioning themselves in what at their time was regarded as the normative periphery which subsequently became the center of the commemorating society.

Such commemorations usually stress the exceptional task these dead collectivities tried to accomplish. When in the Park of the Resistance commemorating the battle of Porta San Paolo, President Ciampi acknowledged and publicly sanctioned in a celebratory way the actions of the defenders of Rome:

60 years later, we understand how important it was for us, and how important it still is for our children, that those men and women ultimately decided to have a reaction.[4]

Reaction alone is, however, not a sufficient condition for being worth an elevation. It lacks justification and – therefore – some further steps should be done into the social construction of the

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[4] This, and the other quotations from Ciampi's speeches, are taken from the website of the President of the Republic, www.quirinale.it.

elevated collectivity, in order to inscribe it in the moral and political community that regards it as a valuable predecessor. The language of elevation in the commemoration of the beginning of the Resistance stresses in fact several other qualities, that clarify how and why reaction is not an unproductive act of rebellion, but the sign of the rise of national awareness that will ultimately be the seedbed of renewed national and republican identity.

By September 8, 1943, in Ciampi's authoritative words, Italians were left "alone by themselves, facing their own consciousness". This solitude and alleged impossibility to gather together in order to take effective decisions is crucial in the process of portraying victims as objects of future elevation. Despite the sudden fall into the abyss of antistructure [Turner 1969], one where there was a "deplorable absence of clear orders" for the militaries and the civilians, the discourse of the crisis following the armistice and the first battles against the German is shaped around the vocabulary of increasing awareness; it is also important to see how individual choices progressively leave room (as liminality leaves room to structure) to awareness and, step by step, to the embryonic structures of the State.

Before "structure", however, there is loosely structured community. While engaged in a complex reconstruction of the vicissitudes of the Resistance in the context of the commemoration of one of its starting moments, Ciampi, is therefore concerned with the portrayal of anonymous protagonists. The process of normalization of the Resistance is accompanied by a process of personalization. The "many Italians", the "militaries and the civilians", the protagonists of "myriad minor episodes", the "citizens" are substituted by important political figures such as the prime ministers of the period of the Resistance and the years immediately following the end of the war (thus making a further step in the construction of continuity).

One should notice, however, that the incipit of this chronology of the Resistance is focused on the celebration of collectivity. On September 8, Ciampi attempts to remember people with no name before entering into the details of the Resistance. Two years earlier, he had on the contrary celebrated also the deeds of single soldiers and civilians (those awarded with the gold medal),

although the stress on the crowd as a whole was nonetheless still present. The dialectics between generalization and personalization is decidedly most striking in the commemoration of September 2001.

Ciampi, in fact, addressed the small crowd of former soldiers, politicians and citizens by remembering the role of

Grenadiers of Sardinia, Lancers, Montebello Lancers, the infantry and the artillery of the "Sassari" brigade, tankers and soldiers of the divisions "Ariete" and "Piave", the cavalry of the "Genoa", bzigade carabineers and policemen, women and men of Rome, they all fought here for two days and two nights, after September 8, 1943.

Porta San Paolo is thus the place where these different kinds of people converge. It is also the place of individual heroism, which enters the commemoration thanks to the reference to the soldiers and citizens who where later awarded the gold medal.

I would like to remember each of them: the lieutenant colonel Vannetti Donnini, captain Sabatini, second lieutenant Floritto, the tankers Lo Pizzo and Baldinotti, the labourer Cecati (from the Testaccio quarter), professor Persichetti, Ricciotti; last, second lieutenant Nicoli, who was forced to drive an enemy track, and purportedly drove it to a minefield.

Pursued identification with the anonymous collectivity and the individual combatants, however, is not the crucial point of the whole discourse and commemoration. Porta San Paolo, as a commemoration aimed at establishing the narrative structure of a beginning, is characterized by the condensation of protagonists who acted in distant places and different period of the Resistance into a same place charged with symbolic power. The complexity of the Resistance comes to a synthesis in the chronology and rationalization of the events that Ciampi expresses at Porta San Paolo. Very important, from this point of view, is the reference to soldiers who where kept captive in concentration camp (a phenomenon which hardly had any recognition as an act of "Resistance", especially according to the interpretation of the

Resistance as eminently a military guerrilla against the fascists and the occupying forces).

Shall we remember, whenever we can, the 87000 falled of the Armed Forces. Among them, we can count the heroes of Kefalonia, Corfu, the ones who fought the Germans in the islands of the Aegean sea; the seamen of the "Roma", and many others who refused to give up arms. Shall we remember the 600 thousand Italian soldiers that with awareness refused to collaborate with the Nazis and, subsequently, chose to be imprisoned in concentration camps.

Here, the two main threads of the military connotation of the Resistance are brought together in a single narrative. The reconstruction of the commemorated event, chosen as a crucial turning point and moral beginning, is structured so that in the same place and time convened actors with similar and to some extent shared characteristics. The connotation of this beginning as inclusive, rather than articulating identities clearly identifiable with a given faction, has allowed the production of a commemorative narrative where all the main protagonists can be portrayed as actors able to make a sudden choice. The framing of the Resistance as the founding moment of the Republican (and thus present) identity is decidedly strengthened by the possibility to produce a commemoration (actually a chain of commemorations) that is focused on the past as being the setting of an event that was characterized by a unity of place, time and action (the normative breach, the autonomous decision, the upheaval, the fighting and ultimately the defeat, all condensed in the same, symbolically charged setting).

In both commemorations, however, what is at stake in the elevation frame is the fact that the collectivity which passes through this process of symbolic management of its positive characteristics is perceived as an active agent both from the cognitive (it becomes fully aware of its role as the subject of moral and practical transformation) and performative point of view (this awareness leads to action infused with morality). This activism is the effect of an autonomous decision of being engaged, the one and only common point between all the actors commemorated.

The features of engagement shared by all the combatants provide the basis for an argument that makes a synthesis of the role played by very different actors until then regarded as unequal in the narratives about the Resistance: proto-partisans and soldiers of the disbanded Italian armed forces, citizens and soon to be deportees, political activists and people that happened to be engaged and killed in the fights just by chance.

The framing of such dead people is open to both the language of piety and the celebratory exaltation of their deeds. Yet there's room also for the language of victimization and its overcoming, as a peculiar framing strategy able to cope with the liminality of actors. From this point of view, the problem of framing the relation to the dead, as an issue dealing with the recognition that the former perceptions of the past were basically wrong, reveals further implications of the dynamics between imagining community, liminality and the remembrance of victimized people.

6. Distance and the language of expiation: El Alamein and the incorporation of peripheral memory

On October 23 1942, the desert region of El Alamein, 100km far from the Egyptian city of Alexandria, was the theatre of one of the hardest battles in the history of World War 2. Ultimately, the battle decided the fate of the Afrikakorps of Erwin Rommel and stopped the supremacy of the German and Italian forces in the African scenario. Until the November 4, the British infantry commanded by general Montgomery engaged with 230,000 soldiers the divisions of the Italian Army supported by German paratroopers and by the 21st Panzerdivision (80,000 soldiers in total). Though defeated by the overwhelming superiority of the enemy and because of a series of tactical errors, the Italian troops obeyed the order to engage with the enemy till the end and to hold the position. 17,000 Italian soldiers died, and among them 4,700 paratroopers of the "Folgore" Brigade, which was the last to surrender. The 304 survivors of the Folgore later received military honours by the British military command.

The memory of El Alamein shaped the identity of the Italian right wing movements (especially the Movimento sociale). It was also especially strong in the armed forces (October 23 is still regarded by the Italian Army as one of the most important dates, together with November 4). Under many respects, it became the battle the Italian infantry and artillery fought during the second World War. The military connotation of the event, however, was one of honour (as recognized also by the British army soon after the battle), and around this meanings a very peculiar memory condensed for both the army and the right wing parties that were founded after the end of the war (mostly the monarchic movement and the right-wing, neo-fascist Movimento sociale).

Communication and the construction of community is given added weight by the selection of specific repertoires of representation, by means of which past events, victims and their relation to the present are framed. Framing, however, deals not only with the respectful celebrations of people whose status is managed during the process of elevation. The rhetoric of expiation represents in fact a good example of how the management of the past works as a device of reincorporation of peripheral actors. It can be described as an attempted reduction of a normative cleavage that has been produced through time.

Rather than dealing with valuable objects of memory positioned at the center of a given commemorative system, framing commemorations as an act of expiation is a way to seek a new balance between center and periphery. It does so by the explicit recognition that a process of expulsion has occurred and that it has produced a breach that somehow has to be reduced in order to overcome the continuous reproduction of contradictions and conflicts about the center/periphery relation. Expiation, in dramaturgical terms, serves thus as a clear attempt at producing a redressive action [Turner 1974]. Its final goal is a certain kind of reintegration between factions, polarized around the interpretation of the past (and whose memory, in Giesen's words, is divided: Giesen [2004]), which are likely to regard such past and its interpretation as actually and potentially disruptive.

The frame of expiation and the redressive mechanism it implies work thus as if they were able to forge the construction of a new identity, which shares some basic and fundamental visions

about the past (it is important to note, however, that consensus is more a desideratum than the normal condition). Such a new identity is defined also by the fact that it has grown enough to be able to overcome the vicissitudes of the past, the wrong deeds and also the wrong interpretations of past events. Expiatory frames, thus, generally involve a reflective attitude towards both the events and their historical reconstruction.

The commemorations of the battle of El Alamein (held in 2000 and 2002) probably epitomizes in the best possible way this periphery-to-center path that is at the core of the expiatory frame.

As an event and as an object of memory, El Alamein is completely external to the narrative about the Resistance. It represents the political culture of the "others": the right as opposed to the left; the armed forces as opposed to the partisans; the period of the "fascist war" as opposed to the liminal and liberating period of the Resistance.

To some extent, El Alamein is decidedly symmetric to the facts and the representations of the defence of Rome. There are in fact some examples and framing devices of commemorations that are surprisingly similar.

In commemorating the first battle of the Resistance, Ciampi had produced an extensive and progressive narrative that included the neglected protagonists of the struggle for the Liberation: the soldiers of the Italian Armed Forces. At the shrine of El Alamein, erected to commemorate the Italian troops – a very special site of mourning, one of a series of places devoted to the soldiers dead in the battle – he adds a further brick to the construction of the socially meaningful trajectory of soldiers as protagonists of the war and the Resistance.

Being the only situated event of the "fascist war" to be commemorated, El Alamein turns out to be at the center of the chain of commemorations of soldiers killed during the war (especially the ones dead in the Russian campaign and on the Eastern front). More than in the all the other cases, however, the trope of sacrifice is dominant and evident:

Today, we are once again in this desert, together […] honoring the memories of the ones who fell here fighting, coming from every nation

and every homeland. Shall we remember their sacrifice in these places that are now sacred.

In the commemoration (the first of the two he had at the place) he said similar words, thus producing a very fixed interpretation of the battle, which rests on the recognition that the soldiers are not to be considered responsible for the tragedy.

The memory of the sacrifice of the soldiers, of the officers who fought in this desert is uncancellable; among them, so many comrades in arms, so many friends of my youth days who never came back.

Yet memory and the normative necessity of remembrance do not imply obligatorily that some expiatory mechanism is displayed. Ciampi, however, implicitly acknowledges that remembrance of the dead is a way to avoid that social oblivion affects the memory of the soldiers. Stressing so strongly the necessity of remembrance he addresses a sharp criticism to the common vision of the dead of El Alamein (especially the ones of the Folgore brigade, a powerful symbol for the political right wing positions).
Ciampi says:

The dead – most of all those who face death following the voice of honor, loyalty and duty – never die. The soldier fallen at El Alamein – surrounded by the silence of the desert – will go on living in the memory of all Italians.

It is quite important to see how polluted honour and loyalty are given full rights of moral citizenship (in the vision of the President of the Republic) through commemoration. The dynamics of expiation present in the two discourses is clearly meant at the redefinition of the boundaries of belonging and identity. As subjects with a very questionable status, the dead of El Alamein have to be symbolically processed in order to become important figures for a widened pantheon of the Republic. An echo of this creative activity of Ciampi resonates in the discourse for the 60th anniversary of the battle, when Ciampi acknowledges the importance of those who committed themselves to the care of

the dead (it is noteworthy that the main moral entrepreneur of the memory of El Alamein – Paolo Caccia Dominioni – was postumously awarded by Ciampi with the gold medal).

For years, their remains were looked for and after with religious piety. We are grateful to all of those who accomplished this pious task, who built the graveyards, who erected the monuments to honor the sacrifice of the fallen.

The discourse of expiation, however, is less about words pronounced than actions performed. If one were to consider only the short speeches of Ciampi and the words of the survivors, the complex arrangement of the expiatory frame would be missed. From this point of view, it is quite remarkable to notice that these commemorations that involve some kind of expiation and recognition that a given society has been on the "wrong" side vis a vis a part of its people (the victims) are usually performed as political pilgrimages that express the themes of ritual inferiority. Movement in space, in other words, is accompanied by the display of humbleness in relation to the victims, so that a kind of structural inversion in made visible in the process of reintegration of the perceived victims from the periphery to the symbolic centre.

The two complex commemorations held in the battlefield and at the soldiers' shrine of El Alamein (in 2000 and 2002, for the 60th anniversary of the battle) shared this peculiar quality of pilgrimage. Action, in fact, is all constructed around and thanks to being in a periphery, both geographical and moral, at the borders of what until then had been considered the normal and accepted discourse on the social identity of the victims of El Alamein.

From a merely spatial point of view, expiation and its enactment during a "pilgrimage of memory" (Ciampi's discourse on September 8 2003) rest on a peculiar decentralization, where consolidated ceremonial centers are partially substituted by alternative loci of commemoration. The process of incorporating victims in a wider community, which acknowledges the fact that something wrong has been done to the victimized people, is thus dependent on a parallel reconstruction of the image of victims,

and of the moral and geographical spaces they inhabit. In other words, pilgrimage and commemorative ritual as the final point of pilgrimage help in broadcasting the periphery and its various connotations to the center.

The morality of victims managed within the context of commemorations designed as expiations, rests thus on the complex articulation of distance and the reduction of this distance, whether it is ceremonial, discursive, or spatial. It is important to note, as a final point in this excursion in the dynamics of the expiatory frame, that the dead collectivity can undergo such a process of transformation in a peculiar way, one in which the inferiority of the commemorating agents is expressed both verbally and performatively. From this point of view, there is a complex management of a double liminality, the one of the victims that are reincorporated and the ones of the agents of memory who happen to be in a phase of passage. From this point of view, such kind of expiations affect greatly the nature of the relations between the two poles of commemoration (the active subject and its object of memory). Compared to this, the dynamics at the core of the frame of reconciliation are characterized by an overwhelming focus on the commemorating actors and agents.

7. Reconciliation and the focus on present relations: joint commemoration at Marzabotto

The last event I will deal with calls into question the problem of responsibility of the German troops and the violence at civilians during the war. The most notorious of a series of massacres perpetrated during 1943 and 1994, and one that shaped the Republican narrative about the Resistance, was the slaughter of Marzabotto (in the Apennines near Bologna) at the end of September 1944. Marzabotto, like most other sites of violence during that year, was in a strategic position for the German troops (it was in the rearguard of the Gothic Line), and the partisan brigade "Stella Rossa" (Red Star) was active in the area. On September 29 1944, the 16th battalion commanded by Walter

Reder began an operation of cleansing in the area, as well as killing civilians (including women and children) in the villages of Marzabotto, Grizzano and Monzuno. At the beginning of October, 1830 people were killed; among them there were 266 partisans and the commander of the brigade Mario Musolesi. From then onwards, Marzabotto became a powerful symbol of the violence at civilians, as well as a strong ceremonial and commemorative centre of the Resistance. In this area, as well as in other areas on the Gothic Line, most commemorations of the Resistance concentrated, especially the ones focused on the sufferings of civilians and ordinary people, neither partisans nor members of the Italian Liberation Army.

Expiations frame commemorations as an attempt to incorporate a collectivity which is perceived as distant, both morally and chronologically. More often than not, the reincorporation process of victims is aimed at the recognition that, at some point of the commemorative Wirkungsgeschichte of a commemorated event, something has gone wrong according to the interpretation of the event of the commemorating agents. Some kind of reparatory activity (usually enacted through commemoration) serves thus to solve this problem of interpretation (or conflicting interpretation). From this point of view, the application of expiatory frames to a commemoration involves thus also a reflexive focus on the commemorating society and a closer look at its story conceived as a trajectory, where issues of interpretation and moral exclusion become very prominent.

The frame of expiation (so focused – in the case I have studied – on the quasi-religious implications of pilgrimage as performance and piety as a dominant mood of relation with the dead) is under some respects germane to procedures of reconciliation; there is however one particular and crucial difference in the dominant focus on commemorating society. Commemorations where the frame of reconciliation is dominant result in the peculiar saliency of the relations between actors in the present, with the commemorated past oftentimes depicted and perceived as an instance of the events that have produced social and moral distance.

Reconciliations are a way to acknowledge - or even to produce ritually - the fact that the concrete social breach inaugurated by the events has now gained a different relevance to the development of relations between actors. Such relations have developed through time in a way that the existence of such a historical breach has become very difficult to manage, and thus it has to be reframed according to the new status of social relations between commemorating actors who have developed over the years other less conflicting elements of their past.

Such a theme is dominant in the commemoration of the slaughter of Marzabotto. For the first time, both the Italian head of the state and the President of Germany, Johannes Rau, meet together in the site of the massacre for a joint commemoration of the victims, which in the end becomes another peculiar pilgrimage to a decentralized place of memory. The commemoration of April 17, 2002, is not part of the exact commemorative path walked by Ciampi between October 2002 (El Alamein) and April 2005. Yet it serves to set the commemorative parameters for the celebration of mourning and of all the slaughters remembered during 2003 and 2004.[5]

The events of Marzabotto are described according to the same vocabulary of liminality and antistructure generally used for all the other victims of the events of the war and the Resistance. While awarding the municipality of Vergato with the Gold Medal (Vergato is one of the villages where the violence of the German soldiers reached a horrible peak), Ciampi characterizes the region during the events as suspended from any given recognizable position. The slaughter, the product of a "satanic ideology", happened in a context of impossible normality. So, in autumn 1944, Vergato was actually "a no man's land", while once it was a "mountain inhabited since ancient times, made a gentle place by the work of generations of men".

It is according to this context that victims are inscribed into the dynamics of both commemoration and reconciliation. As poles of a structural and irreducible opposition between the evil

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[5] The 8 slaughters commemorated by Ciampi are probably worth further analysis, as they deal with the very difficult issue of responsibility of the massacres. Who has the final responsibility? Is a challenging question in the political debate, aimed sometimes at reducing the role of Fascist soldiers and German troops.

deeds of the Germans and their being absolutely unable to react, the victims of Vergato and Marzabotto are given social meaning by their inclusion into a wider characterization and classification of agency and passivity. Agency, contrary to the elevation we have seen in the commemoration of Porta San Paolo, deals directly with evil and the deeds of the Germans (and implicitly with the fact that further pain was caused by the Allied bombing on the area, in the middle of the Gothic Line). The process of victimization is developed according to a framing of this passivity, as opposed to immoral deeds, but also to the more understandable military pattern of relations that opposed the Wehrmacht to the partisans.

In San Martino di Marzabotto, the main center of the commemorations celebrated in the area, Ciampi classifies the events as a clear example of martyrdom, thus making a further step in the characterization of victims as civil martyrs. Monte Sole is described as the "mountain of the martyrs", and it can be characterized this way mainly because the dead were "women, old people and children, who were slaughtered […] in villages, in the churches, in the squares, in the buildings of this mountain". Sacred places of religious cult and mundane places of every day's work, that were violated by the perpetrators and that proved no safe refuge for the victims, strengthen the impression that Marzabotto and the other villages witnessed a horrible suspension of morality.

Similarly, President Rau frames the event in terms of the relation between activism and passivity, evil and good, linking the ones he calls "the murderers with the black uniform" to the "women and children". Yet his speech introduces a further theme which turns out to be the dominant characterization of the event. Unable to position himself in the complex network of relations between commemorators, perpetrators and victims as a spokesman of the latter, Rau frames the management of victims according to the frame of guilt, responsibility and – finally – reconciliation. His intervention is centred about an overcoming of the past that does not bracket the historic and normative legacy of the past. Not surprisingly, Rau's role in the commemoration strongly echoes Ciampi's attempt to define the master frame of commemoration pretty much in the same way.

Rau's explicit definition of the event is built around a plea for forgiveness, and also on the assumption of guilt (in this, he had been more willing than Ciampi to express in a clear way the historical responsibilities of his country):

Personal guilt falls on the ones who perpetrated those crimes. But the consequences of such a guilt must be faced also by future generations.

Again, the explicit reference to victims highlights the distance he establishes between him as a legitimized representative of a New Germany and the German soldiers:

When I think about the kids and their mothers, about women and families, victims of such the slaughter that happened that day, I deeply feel in myself a sense of pain and shame. I bow down to the memory of those dead.

Again, such an act of humble recognition of the superiority of the victims as a consequence of past deeds is pretty close to the dynamic of expiation. Rau, however, links directly this management of his and the victims' respective status to the more general problem of memory. But memory, in his interpretation, is just a step to a wider mutual recognition and integration of both the heirs of victims and perpetrators.

Speaking to the audience composed by partisans, survivors, members of the city councils and children of German and Italian schools (a strong indicator of pursued reconciliation per se), he directly addresses the Italians and acknowledges that

You have conserved and kept alive the remembrance of the victims. You haven't done this in order to keep hatred alive, or to pursue a revenge. You have done this for the love of our shared and common future.

At the ends of his speech, he remarks that the citizens of Marzabotto have devoted a great effort to the creation and

preservation of the memory of the massacre, and thanks them for making "Marzabotto a place that does not divide the Italian from the Germans".

This characterization of Marzabotto as a place of unity is strong in both Rau's and Ciampi's arguments. Yet it is not simply rooted in the development of bilateral relations. Marzabotto as a place of unity and newly expressed togetherness is rooted in the larger process of European integration. The frame of reconciliation is thus, more than the others, linked with contingent issues of how to imagine Europe as a community; moreover, it faces the problem of how to construct and imagine a European identity in cases where different national memories may clash.

Memory (even memory of the evil) serves thus as a potential seedbed for the construction of a consensual European identity. Reconciliation to victims and thanks to the existence of victims, thus, play a part in a larger project of identity construction. Ciampi expresses this idea in Vergato, addressing the audience and remembering that

the act made by President Rau with is presence here, will be remember by future generation as the foundation of a New Europe, a Europe centred on values, freedom, justice, respect of human dignity, solidarity, and peace.

Similarly, Rau speaks in such a strong place of normative disruption and division of the necessity of a "new Europe, a unified Europe".

Seeking reconciliation with victims and their heirs thus prove to be the context for the commitment to newly established and expressed values, values that rest on the recognition of the importance of the victims themselves, as normative founding fathers of present relations between various commemorating actors. From this point of view, the tight relation between reconciliation, acknowledgments of victimhood and trauma, and progress constitutes the peculiar lenses through which one could read the whole process that leads to such a positive and of the reintegrative management of victims and of the actors who have played a part in their sufferings.

8. Conclusions

There is always something conservative in "the past made present and perfect" [Warner 1959]. Yet liminal times challenge the quest for the stability of the past, which is an important cultural trait of social reproduction. Because of this lack of stability, they happen indeed to be very charismatic (on charismatic founding moments and commemorations see Spillman [2003]), and it's no surprise then that in what nations regard as founding moments features of liminality (horizontal I-Thou relations, togetherness, commitment to peripheral sources of political anti-power) are present to a very high degree. Commemorations, in the way I have portrayed them, result in ambiguous attempts to simultaneously vivify and domesticate the socially recognized perception of this charismatic character.

In this paper, I have described how the commemoration of the Resistance in Italy at the beginning of the 2000s was characterized by the creation of a complex chronology of events. This chronology was at the basis of a plot aimed at clarifying the meaningful steps to Italy's Liberation and to the end of the war. Within this peculiar arrangement of official commemorations, victims – as figures to whom a normative discourse about identity could be attached – played a very special role. They were in fact the object of a specific aspect of commemorative activity, one that pursued community imagination by the explicit reference to the changing link between past victims and present entrepreneurs of their social recognition as special objects of collective remembrance. They were, in other words, regarded as some very important founders of the Republic, despite their status during the 50 and more preceding years had been varied and at times even questionable.

Such an activity of imagination was not an easy task, though. The social construction of victimhood may involve facing a community's past in an unprecedented way. Together with other cultural modes of social construction, commemorations treat victims as both distant objects (at least temporally, but most times also cognitively) and as objects that must undergo a process of vivification (hence the stress on their legacy and the frequent use of the present tense when someone refers to them).

It is in this very passage to a condition where victims are given full rights of moral citizenship, and their subjectivity is recognized, that their liminality works at the same time as a powerful symbolic resource and as a series of characteristics that must be managed carefully. As subjects who belong to the past, and yet not completely segregated in its social and normative enclosures, victims (and collectivities wich became identified as victims in particular) are in a position that always demands some kind of publicly legitimized treatment, in order to both reduce the polluting and indeterminate aspects of liminality, and to enhance their positive qualities (here, what Giesen refers to as the cultural archetypes of the hero and the victim obviously merge, as there's always something heroic in victimhood understood and framed as martyrdom, like in the cases of Marzabotto). Heroism, too, shapes the perception of the soldiers of El Alamein, though the discourse about the symbolic elevation of the dead lies politically on a normative razor's edge, and it is open to contestation and interpretive differentiation. Who were they? And what did they do? Become crucial questions.

From this point of view, looking at the repertoires by means of which the symbolic elevation of victims was performed during the commemorations reveals not only how hard to manage Italy's various and difficult pasts currently are, but also – from a more general point of view – how the dynamics of such commemorations are shaped by the recourse to very specific framing activities. Framing the moral status of past events by managing the status of the protagonists who were involved in them is a mode of social construction that lies at a very detailed layer of generality and complexity.

At first glance this may seem old fashioned, instrumental and political use of the past, pursued by a nation state's rulers in order to provide a generalized, widespread and shared vision of the past and, simultaneously, to fulfil particular political interests.

Things, however, are not exactly just like that. I have identified three major frames as important parts of the cultural repertoires used to manage the nature of the diachronic relation within a commemorating community. They clarify also the moral nature of those victims as communities.

The frame of reconciliation, so predominant in the commemoration of Marzabotto, seems to be particularly affected by the problem of representing positive changes in the relations between actors, present and past. It involves not only a public recognition of victims as objects of special commitment, but also a redefinition of the symbolic relations between actors in the present as a product of facing victims – and thus this frame deals with further connotations of quasi-religious forgiveness, public awareness and historical responsibility. From this point of view, it goes one step further as it is not only aimed at the social construction of remembered subjects, but also at making explicit – from a symbolic point of view – how remembering in that way is possible only thanks to the progress of time which has led to morally sustainable situations in the present.

Reconciliation, probably more than the expiatory frame and the one that deals with plain and simple symbolic elevation, lies at the core of the dynamics of commemoration in Italy. It is decidedly closer to the master frame and narratives about progress. It also deals very closely with the claim that the past can be overcome in a responsible way, an aspect that has been driving the production of the renewed discourse about national identity in the last decade. As such, reconciliation is more open to the management of the self-representation of Italian national identity, because victims are only a pole of a large number of relations. Reconciliation, in the way I have dealt with it in this paper, is not only about the past, but also (and most of all) about reconciling collectivities in the present.

While reconciliation's main focus is the present, expiation stresses decidedly the social trajectory of victims from the past to the present. The public discourse of expiation acknowledges that something has gone wrong during the process of moral management of the victims. Either they were perceived as being not worthy the status of victims, or they were even put in the domain of the polluted. From this point of view, expiating is all about repairing a moral injustice that resulted in wrong classifications of the victims. The process of victimization enters thus another specific process, one where an attempt at recognizing that the victims actually were not what they were thought to be, and where at the same time the ones who recognize

are forced to change their position vis a vis the victims. While expiation is about the symbolic representation of the awareness of a historical wrong, it may end in a recognition of rights and somehow in a more general attempt at a legal reintegration of the expelled victims (this is probably a point which ought to be studied with greater attention, as it is central for the analysis of the reincorporation of victimized people and individuals into the wider social and cultural systems).

Last, elevation. This is by far and large the most celebratory frame, and the one which is less specific to the process of victimization. It deals with victims whose positive characteristics have long been established and whose liminality has been already routinized to some extent into the stability of the discourse of identity. Among the examples I have dealt with in this paper, Porta San Paolo is probably the most telling. Regarded for decades as a starting point of the Resistance, it was represented and narrated as a condensed moment of spontaneity and collaboration between the most important collective actors that were to play a relevant role in the 1943/45 biennium and soon after: the citizens, the army which refused to leave Rome in the Germans' hands, the antifascist leaders and activists. Though they were regarded as standing in a high moral position, the commemoration of their deeds and the interpretation of their status does not usually involve a parallel diminishing of the celebrating elite's legitimized position. Elevation, as a frame of commemoration and as a specific repertoire of remembrance, distributes symbolic power in a more equal way between actors in the past and in the present. What we are facing, then, is not simply an attempt at community imagination that rests on the management of actors dead in the past. It is the whole relation between the actors and their mutual status position that is transformed.

My analysis has been aimed at showing how crucial it is - in commemorations of liminal times - to manage effectively also the characteristics of liminal actors. This task is accomplished by the definition of the specific repertoires of commemoration that shape the way those actors should be normatively perceived and commemorated. Other frames may of course be very prominent: to make just a couple of examples, I have not dealt with the rise of

claims in the public sphere that call for a reincorporation of victims in a way that does not involve the implicit stress on liminality but their more structural characteristics (the case of former fascist combatants of the Republic of Salò springs to mind); and I have not considered the management of the negative and polluting characteristics of collectivities (in this case, moral excommunication and degradation seem to be equally relevant repertoires and frames).

Despite interpretive pluralism and vernacular alternatives to the official representation of the past, however, it is in this framing activity and in the declared attempt to renew the discourse about identity that one can witness the work of culture structures and culture makers, and their productive role in the process of managing difficult pasts, and even more difficult memories. Imagining a community, from this point of view, is less a matter of "style" than a detailed and specific task that demands its narrated stories, its protagonists and – more than ever – a key to read the stories social agents try to tell.

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The Commemoration of Traumatic Events: Expiation, Elevation and Reconciliation in the Remaking of the Italian Resistance

Andrea Cossu

Dead collectivities become socially recognized as victims and, as such, worth of remembrance by a process which seems to be a very specific one, where repertoires and frames of interpretation are utilized. In this paper, I focus on the relation between the commemorating agents and the image they portray of the commemorated collectivity. The paper stresses the importance of the analysis of the specific cultural devices by means of which this link is created and shaped. By focusing on three important events for Italian Republican history, I sketch three basic and idealtypic frames that deal with the relation between past and present collectivities: each of them stresses in a different way the overall distribution of symbolic power, the relevance of relations in the past and in the present, and the recognition of the social diachronic trajectory of the interpretation of the victims. The paper deals with the frames of elevation, expiation and reconciliation as important devices for the social construction of such relation.

Andrea Cossu is completing his PhD in Sociology at the Department of Sociology of the University of Trento, with a dissertation on cultural performance, identity politics and memory in contemporary Italy. His interests are in the fields of social theory, analysis of political symbolism, and collective memory.