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HOMELESS MEMORIES: HOW SOCIETIES FORGET THEIR PAST

This paper addresses the issue of collective memory, focusing on the relationship between form and content. The implied idea is that cultural forms of memories affect the content itself. In this perspective, cultural artefacts play a crucial role, insofar as they profoundly influence the social processes of commemoration. If memory is embodied in different cultural forms (e.g., diaries, monuments, or museums), the genre of remembering and the specific relationship between code and event become a key to understanding the social, political, and cultural trajectories of the negotiation process that results in a specific context. By comparing the results of different studies on this topic, it is argued that, when formless, collective memories are homeless. The analysis of «cultural amnesia» (i.e., the lack of any cultural form) represents a useful strategy to study how societies forget their past.

Keywords: collective memories, commemoration, forgetting.

1. The past as space for institutional «work»

How societies collectively remember has been a central concern of many studies on social memories. As Urry (1996: 48-49) maintains: «The past is endlessly constructed in and through the present [...]. All representations of the past involve remaking in and through the present»[1]. The implied idea of this kind of theoretical perspective, originally derived from

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Halbwachs' work (1925, 1968), is that the ways in which the past is conceived are shaped by the concerns and the transformations of the present. According to Halbwachs (1941: 7), «collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past [which] adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present». Following this line of thought, collective memory[2] can be viewed as a general category of knowledge. The past is not an eternal given, but instead can be conceived as a work in progress being constantly shaped by institutional and individual conditions.

Schwartz stresses that most of the literature dealing with collective memories either attempts to address the question of «how present conditions affect perceptions of the past» (1990: 82), or considers the implication of collective memories as a strategy for reconciling cultural continuity with cultural revision. While the works of Mead (1929) and Halbwachs are considered as belonging to the first approach, Shils' (1981) concept of tradition expresses the second one. In his work on the reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln, Schwartz (1990: 82-83) maintains:

> «Society's memory of its great men is one part of this 'symbolic code'. Emphasizing the revisions and discontinuities of collective memory, men like Mead and Halbwachs make this code seem more precarious than it actually is. By stressing the continuities of collective memory, however, men like Durkheim and Shils underestimate the extent to which the code is maintained by revisions that conform to society's immediate needs and inclinations».

In spite of these contrasting theoretical approaches, there is a common feature in the more recent literature on collective memories that provide general evidence for the socially constructed nature of the past (Middleton and Edwards 1990). If the past is a social construction, one must ask to what extent. In other words, are there any constraints to the social production of memories? If not, one would not be able to explain deceit, unreality, and disremembering. In fact, neither are all memories allowed, nor are all constructions possible. The range of different possibilities in the reconstruction of the past is determined by the competing versions of

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[2] For the distinctions between collective and social memory, and between collective and individual memory see Halbwachs (1925, 1968), Jedlowski (1989, 2001), Connerton (1989), Cavalli (1991), Namer (1991), Jedlowski and Rampazi (1991), Cavicchia Scalamonti and Pecchinenda (1996), Giaccardi (1999).

the past (Schwartz 1982; Schudson 1993; Zolberg 1996). Many recent studies in the sociology of memory document how negotiation and competition among different social groups, actors, and institutions represent a crucial key to understanding the making of collective memories (Schudson 1990; Schwartz 1990; Wagner-Pacifici, Schwartz 1991; Zolberg 1996; Foot 2001; Tota 2001). In this process the limits are established by competition among conflicting and contrasting representations of the same event. Following this perspective, memories are conceived as contested, and the past becomes a very conflictual terrain[3].

Studies concerned with the issue of memory generally focus on documenting how social conditions (in a certain historical and political context) make individual and collective remembering possible. In doing so, they fail to give sufficient importance to the social conditions of forgetting. As Paul Ricoeur (1997: 436) underlines, while on the one hand, «in memory there is the original link of the consciousness with the past. Memory [...] is the present of the past»; on the other hand «speaking of memory necessarily means speaking of forgetting, as one could never remember everything. [...] Memory — and it may seem trivial to reiterate it — is very selective. Through the narrative structure, that memory and history have in common, the law of necessary forgetting becomes even more relevant» (ibidem: 448).

Methodologically speaking, once it is recognised that oblivion is necessary to every process of individual or collective remembering, the focus should be shifted to the social and institutional conditions that let either a social actor or a social group forget a certain past. Mary Douglas (1986) in *How Institutions Think* considers systematic forgetting to be an integral part of organisations: her work focuses on «the forms of structurally instigated amnesia», i.e., on forgetting as a social institution. As John Urry (1996: 50) puts it, «There are complex rhetorics involved in the discours-

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[3] In this respect, another point of view to consider is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic space (1979, 1993) and the ongoing conflicts within this space. If applied to the analysis of social, collective, and individual memories, Bordieu's framework may represent a very useful key to understanding how the symbols of a certain past have been legitimated during time. Following this perspective, the social construction of the past appears as the result of different versions of a certain event competing within the arena of the public discourse. In other terms, it is here suggested that Schudson's analysis on collective memories as «conflictual terrain» might be usefully compared with Bourdieu's analysis of the symbolic space. The implied idea is that symbols of the past function as other kind of cultural symbols, therefore one could refer to a common framework for their analysis.

es surrounding memory-work. At the same time there are forms of insti-
tutional commemoration in societies which can silence alternative mem-
ories of the past [...]. Indeed forgetting is as socially structured as is the
process of remembering».

In the past few decades, certain aspects of the previous theoretical de-
bate on collective memory have been reconsidered in a critical light.
More precisely, both anthropological and sociological work within this
field is increasingly informed by new frameworks: there is a sort of shift
«from the sociology of remembering to that of forgetting». In place of
the prominence of studies on how societies remember, greater attention
has been accorded to the link between memory and oblivion (Douglas
1986; Shotter 1990; Engeström et al. 1990; Urry 1996; Ricoeur 1997).
Within this perspective, Ricoeur (1997) proposes to distinguish between
active and passive forms of forgetting: in the works of historians — he
states — one could find a systematic misrepresentation (if not total
oblivion) of the versions of the past constructed by the victims. Accord-
ing to Ricoeur this corresponds to an active form of forgetting in con-
trast with «forgetting as a form of flight», which corresponds to a passive
one (ibid.).

Another relevant distinction can be drawn between individual and in-
stitutional forgetting, where the former has to do with the oblivion of a
certain past due to a single or a group of social actors, who by remember-
ing something, simply forget something else; the latter is the implicit or
explicit result of the «institutional work» of a certain organisation. Fol-
lowing Mary Douglas, in fact, we can say that institutions are a very com-
plex matter: they think, elaborate, and profoundly influence the con-
struction of social representations. When concerned with memories, in-
stitutions become very effective machines that are able to produce and se-
lect not only pieces of information, but entire *Weltanschauungen*. Once at
work, institutions may produce complete versions of the past. This no-
tion of the past as a space for institutional work also informs our compre-
hension of individual forgetting. As Halbwachs puts it, «When remem-
bering we are never alone», but one could go further and ask: «And when
forgetting?».

In considering how societies forget their past, we must ask the follow-
ing questions: under which circumstances, to what extent, through what
processes, and in what cultural form. In fact, if the past is conceived as a
space and place for institutional elaboration, memories and oblivion have
to be analysed in relation to specific organisational settings, certain cul-

tural artefacts. In other words, applying this framework to understand how a certain version of the past becomes dominant implies devoting greater attention to objects (such as diaries, films, memorials, etc.), commemoration practices (such as the dedication of a week in honour of the Vietnam veterans), cultural events (such as a public display on the Enola Gay), and all possible outputs of institutional activities that may affect the reconstruction of a certain past. Methodologically speaking, this seems a very reasonable approach: the first step in analysing institutions at work, consists of studying their practices, contexts, and products.

2. Genres of commemoration: the cultural shape of the past

> «Remembering is something which occurs in a world of things, as well as words, and […] artefacts play a central role in the memories of cultures and individuals. [...] Artefacts survive in ways unintended by makers and owners to become evidence on which other interpretations of the past can be reconstructed» (Radley 1990: 57-8).

According to Radley this special property of things — the ability to convey meanings unplanned by their makers or owners — helps give «some artefacts a special place as symbols of the past» (ibid.: 58). The role played by artefacts in the collective processes of remembering (and forgetting) varies a lot depending on the different cultures one considers. In contemporary cultures the relationship between things and thoughts, artefacts and social memories appears to be particularly close, and to reflect all the inequalities which characterise modern societies. As Radley maintains, «in modern societies, with their inequalities in ownership and control of consumption, classes and groups differ in their relationship to things as potentials for remembering past times» (ibid.: 58).

By dealing with the relationship between artefacts and remembrance, greater attention is accorded also to the relationship between form and content. Once the role of artefacts in remembering is recognised, the next step is to focus on the problem of how objects may shape the very content of memories. This issue is considered by Wagner-Pacifici (1996) who maintains: «Memories are never formless. They come to us as narratives, pictorial images, textbooks, pamphlets, legal charters, wills, diaries and statues. And the forms do more than simply present the collective memory in each case» (Wagner-Pacifici 1996: 302). Her work provides a key

concept for the present discussion — that of «genres of commemoration» (ibid.). Addressing the issue of collective memories, this concept focuses on the relationship between form and content. The implied idea is that cultural forms of memories affect the content itself. Cultural artefacts play a crucial role, insofar as they profoundly influence the social process-es of commemoration. If memory is embodied in different cultural forms (a diary, a monument, or a museum), the genre of remembering and the specific relationship between code and event become a key to under-standing the social, political, and cultural trajectories of the negotiation process that results in a specific case[4]. Moreover, the concept of genre be-comes crucial insofar as it permits reflection not only on the fit between code and event, but also on the range of variations possible within a cer-tain commemorative genre.

> «When is a war memorial no longer a war memorial? This matter, the negotiabil-ity of genre, is germane to our study. Is there some essence of 'war memorialness' and can people identify it? Most important, how does this generic essence trans-late conflicting ideas about the Vietnam War into the monument-making process?» (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991: 381).

In their analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz document how the reciprocal accountability between the me-morial design and the Vietnam war is the result of constant adjustments. They maintain that there is a tension between the code and the event: their fit is not fixed for ever, but is constantly reconstructed and readjust-ed through internal elaborations or external pressures.

> «The adjustment process of code (memorial design) and event (the Vietnam war) led to successive approximations of memorialising the fallen soldiers of that conflict. These interactions included the designation of a specific calendrical week, the placement of a plaque at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the designing and constructing of the Memorial itself. Thus the codes/genres of cal-

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[4] Identifying artefacts as «potentials for remembering past times» with cultural forms or shapes and finally with a code, represents a new perspective of the empirical studies within the sociology of memory. In this respect, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz's research (1991) on the commemoration of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, Vera Zolberg's study (1996) on the Hiroshima case, Foot's research (2001) on the commemo-ration of Piazza Fontana in Milan, and Tota's study on the massacre at the Bologna sta-tion (2001) may provide the reader with useful examples within this new trend.

endrical time and monumental space were progressively gainsaid as the 'best' match-up with the event. And the very design project itself provoked a series of approximations within what only appeared to be a stable genre (that of the war memorial). Should it be a wall with names, a realistic statue of male soldiers, a flag, a fountain, another statue or a woman nurse?» (Wagner-Pacifici 1996: 305).

As the authors underline, the study of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial reveals the range of possible fluctuations within the war monument genre: «Unlike the kinds of monuments that mark popular wars, the Vietnam Memorial underwent frequent changes that both affirmed and modified the traditional conception of the war monument» (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991: 410). At the beginning it was simply a plaque, then it became a wall sculpture, and in the end it included a flag and a statue with three soldiers. The research documents how these changes reflect the different conceptions, circulating in American society, of how the Vietnam war should be commemorated and remembered. The research on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is particularly illuminating, as it represents the case of a monument commemorating a very controversial past. For this reason, the commemorative processes cannot lead to any common and consensual representation of the past: the memorial design does not solve the ambivalence, but simply articulates it by separating the cause and the participants in the war.

> «This sense of the war's incompleteness is reproduced, but not resolved, in the incompleteness of the Memorial. Each addition to the Memorial can be read as an attempt at bringing us closer to reconciling ourselves to the war and its participants. However, the reconciliation process diverges along two different paths. One path — the addition of flag and statue — aims at legitimating the cause (perhaps belying our desire to rewrite the story of Vietnam by turning defeat into victory). The other path concerns the participants, which each addition (starting with the women veterans) opening the door to new constituencies demanding special recognition. In both cases, complete reconciliation remains elusive. but if we are right about the Memorial's articulating rather than concealing the nation's ambivalence toward the war, then the Memorial's open-endedness may actually be one of the features that contribute to its salience» (ibid.: 410).

In this respect, the main aim is to understand how cultural meanings are produced, how an external object (such as a memorial, or a museum) can deeply interfere and intervene in the reconstruction of a certain past. The

results of several studies within this field (Schwartz 1990; Wagner-Pacifi-ci and Schwartz 1991; Zolberg 1996; Foot 2001; Tota 2001) have clearly shown how the genre of commemoration plays a central role in the content of commemoration itself, and how this notion may be used to further analyse «the shapes of things that went» (Wagner-Pacifici 1996).

Following this perspective, the cultural encoding of an event becomes a key to understanding the conflicting versions of its representations in terms of social and cultural memory[5]. In other words, this kind of study has shown that the forms of memories available for public inscription of a certain past (the content) deeply intervene in the definition of meanings attributed to that past. Thus, meaning does not depend only on the content, but emerges out of the dynamic tension between code and event (Wagner-Pacifici 1996). The analysis of the shape of remembrance introduces very relevant issues both on the theoretical and empirical levels such as the issue of cultural amnesia.

3. Cultural amnesia: how societies forget their past

Focusing on the case of the genealogy of the Gonja, originally analysed by Goody and Watt (1968), Ong (1982) describes a process called «structural amnesia». This refers to the systematic suppression of pieces of social memory that become obsolete. This is the case of those parts of the past that, since they no longer reflect the concerns and interests of the present, become redundant in the process of selective reconstruction of the past. Ong illustrates this process referring to the genealogy of the Gonja: according to their oral tradition, the founder of the state, Ndewura Japka, had seven sons, and later each son became governor of one of the seven provinces of the state. But this is only the first version of the myth. Approximately sixty years later, when, at the time of British colonisation, the oral traditions on the myths relating to the foundation of the state were collected again, two provinces had disappeared. In these more recent versions of the myth, Ndewura Japka, had five sons instead of seven (as in the originally tale). Moreover, there was no mention at all of the two old provinces. For the Gonja the past is a value to preserve and main-

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[5] The notion of cultural memory is due to Assmann (1992) and refers to all the symbols, representations, monuments, memorials, and rituals aimed at the transmission of cultural and social meanings.

tain. They are devoted to their myths of genealogy, but the parts of the past that have lost their salience for the present are simply forgotten. The present imposes its economy on the remembrance of the past (Ong 1982). In oral cultures structural amnesia is a very common process that corresponds to the typical functioning of remembering and forgetting. Several studies (Ong 1982; Havelock 1986) have documented the effects of oral cultures on the social processes of reproducing and representing the past[6].

The case of the Gonja is particularly illuminating as it focuses on a methodological problem that arises when studying the social processes of oblivion. Ong is able to observe structural amnesia (i.e., how the Gonja forget) only because he can compare the Gonja way of remembering and forgetting with another way of forgetting (that of the English colonisers who collected the myths on Gonja genealogy twice). In the case cited the researcher is dealing with two cultures where remembrance and oblivion function in different ways: this is the only way, therefore, to observe how the Gonja forget. This example seems to suggest that when studying how societies forget, there is always the methodological problem that being part of that society, one faces the very complex situation of analysing what one has forgotten[7].

If structural amnesia describes how oral societies forget, the corresponding form of forgetting within contemporary societies seems to be cultural amnesia. How can cultural amnesia be defined? It is a process occurring when there are no forms of collective memory available to preserve the content of a historical event. In these cases there is no opportunity for the public inscription of a certain past. The process of cultural amnesia leads to the phenomenon of «homeless memories», i.e., collective memories that are not articulated in any cultural form. Total cultural amnesia is, of course, just a theoretical possibility: A collective memory needs some kind of form (almost a narrative) simply to exist. But this notion introduces the very question of the strength of the code, its capability to last over time (e.g., oral tales are less likely to survive than a monument). In reflecting on how societies forget, it has to be noted that cultural amnesia could be a good indicator to establish the very beginning of

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[6] On collectively remembering in ancient societies see also Assman (1992).
[7] On the one hand, this is just a possible hypothesis not documented by any data, but on the other, there is general evidence for the lack of research on social conditions that make forgetting possible. It is here argued that to study how we collectively forget, we must first remember that we have forgotten.

the process of forgetting. The lack of any cultural form (or the presence of very weak forms of representation) is the first step in collective forgetting.

Cultural amnesia also represents the most effective way of forgetting, since the lack of any cultural form undermines the possibility itself of a «social memory» (Halbwachs 1968) and «cultural memory» (Assman 1992). As cultural amnesia works at the level of social memory, it undermines any further possibility of constructing «collective memories» (referring to Halbwachs' notion) of that historical event. What in the present can be defined as «homeless memory» (most likely) corresponds to what will be forgotten in the immediate future.

An example would be the collective memory of Pasolini's murder in the sea-front near Ostia. According to a sort of «metropolitan tale», the French leader Mitterand, who was once in Rome for an official meeting, asked to visit the memorial dedicated to Pasolini near Ostia (where he was murdered). The story runs that there were intense diplomatic efforts to prevent an official visit to the memorial, which in actual fact does not exist. Mitterand's wish to visit the commemorative site had given expression to the embarrassment of a whole nation. This could be a good example to further illustrate the concept of homeless memories: I am not of course suggesting that Pasolini's memory is formless (there are his works, his movies, books about his story, etc.), but only that the remembrance of his murder is still not fixed in any «adequate» cultural form.

On the other hand, there are many examples of pieces of the past that can be defined as «still alive», and these are of course not formless at all. Once Norberto Bobbio introduced the distinction between «dead and alive memories»: homeless memories are more likely to die in the immediate future. The meanings of alive memories are usually fixed and expressed in many forms. The Vietnam Memorial is again an emblematic case, as it represents a very successful cultural object, able to reproduce itself (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz: 413): «In the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, this reproduction process has been swift and vigorous. A replica of the Memorial wall is currently traversing the country and is booked beyond 1992. It is an exact, half-scale copy of the original, made of aluminium panels coated with black enamel». In the case of the Vietnam War, both social and collective memories are still very alive, and reproduced in many different forms.

But cultural amnesia is just one indicator of the very beginning of the social process of forgetting. In her analysis on a national museum's at-

tempt to problematize the end of the Second World War (the contested remembrance linked to the Hiroshima exhibit controversy), Vera Zolberg (1996) introduces the notion of «communities of memory»: referring to Halbwachs' notion, they could be defined as the natural basis for the construction and transmission of collective memories. The lack of any community of memory in relation to a certain past can also be a good indicator of the very beginning of the social process of forgetting. It has to be noted that this way of forgetting seems to be less effective than cultural amnesia (i.e., the lack of any cultural form available to express the content of a historical event), as it undermines the possibility of constructing collective memories but it could in principle co-exist with a very sedimented social and cultural memory. This would be the case of many monuments which do not have any particular meanings for the present generations, but still represent the memory of a certain past. On the other hand, it must also be noted that when there is a very active community of memory, the cultural forms to express the content of a certain historical event tend to increase.

This theoretical framework becomes more complex if one takes into account a distinction introduced by Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) and related to the nature of the past being commemorated. Analysing the social functions of commemoration, the authors distinguish between the case when commemorative rites and symbols celebrate and preserve the traditional beliefs (following Durkheim's approach), and the case when the object of the commemorative rituals is a very controversial past. In the latter, commemorative rituals do not seek to construct any common and consensual version of the past, but instead their function is to articulate the competing versions of that past by providing them visibility in the public discourse. This distinction could be extended further and applied to the present discussion on how societies forget: in dealing with very controversial pasts, commemorative rituals and symbols function only when able to provide visibility to the competing versions of that past. But more often the controversy cannot be articulated at all, it cannot become visible in any way. In the latter case it is reasonable to suppose that cultural amnesia will take place, and this memory will be homeless.

The following section tries to briefly compare the process of remembering two controversial pasts which have characterised the recent history of two Italian cities: Milan and Bologna. By comparing the results of two studies on these cases (Foot 1999; Tota 2001), it is argued that the com-

bination of a partial cultural amnesia with the lack of a stable community of memory may provide a key to understanding why Milanese citizens seem to have forgotten this controversial past, while the Bolognese still remember it[8].

4. Piazza Fontana, Milan 1969 and Bologna railway station, 1980: how to commemorate a very controversial past

A similar framework has been adopted to study the disaster at Piazza Fontana, Milan in December 1969 (Foot 1999) and the massacre which took place in Bologna in August 1980 (Tota 2001). Both studies have sought to document how cultural artefacts shape the very content of the collective memories linked to a specific event. Following this perspective, both the studies mentioned have claimed to deal with the problematic issue of the genre of memories, as a space and place where cultural artefacts affect the reconstruction of the past, and to understand how two different cities remember two horrific events of Italy's recent past.

The implied and common idea has been to analyse how Milanese and Bolognese citizens remember those events and how their memories are visible in the public discourse. By comparing the results of these two studies, we aim to document how the visibility of collective memories in the public discourse may be considered a useful frame for understanding the very different circumstances which permit Bolognese citizens to still remember their recent past, while the Milanese appear to have already forgotten theirs.

4.1. Milan, 1969-1999

The study on the Milan case deals with the disaster which took place at the Bank of Agriculture in Piazza Fontana in December 1969: a bomb exploded, 16 people died, and 88 were injured. Among the left-wing activists arrested after the massacre, there is also Giuseppe Pinelli, a Mi-

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[8] It has to be noted that by comparing the results of the mentioned researches we are dealing with unequal temporal distances (1969-1999 for Milan and 1980-2000 for Bologna), that might introduce some biasing factors into the comparison. On the other hand, there are several reasons that make those cases comparable (e.g., the similar theoretical framework their analysis refer to, the controversial nature of the past they represent, the common geographical area, the common period of the recent Italian history).

lanese anarchist, who «precipitates from the fourth floor office window of the police official in charge of the investigations into the bomb» (Foot 1999: 1). Three years later, in 1972, Luigi Calabresi, the chef of police in charge of the investigations, is shot dead outside his house in the centre of Milan, and one year later, in 1973, during the commemorative ceremony held in his honour in the courtyard of the central police station in Milan, «a bomb is thrown into the crowd, aimed at ex-prime minister Mariano Rumor. The bomb falls amongst a group of by-standers. Four are killed and 46 injured» (ibid.). After 17 years of trials and investigations, in 1987 «the high court confirms the not guilty verdicts on all the accused for the Piazza Fontana bomb» (ibid.). The commemoration takes place every December in Piazza Fontana, but after twenty years only a few Milanese citizens take part in the anniversary ceremony. As Foot underlines:

«In 1991 Corrado Stajano, a key journalist linked to the slaughter and its aftermath, worried openly in the satirical magazine *Cuore*, as to whether the 1990s generation knew anything at all about Piazza Fontana. His concerns, entitled provocatively *Piazza Lontana*, seemed to be confirmed the following week with the publication of a series of essays written by students concerning the bombs of 1969. Many clearly had no idea about the bomb or what followed. A majority attributed the outrage to the Red Brigades, a far left terrorist group formed in 1970. Others simply pleaded ignorance. The newspaper's editor and the students' teacher were appalled. Anxious letters flooded into *Cuore*». (ibid.: 4).

Analysing the process of forgetting Foot (ibid.: 4) asks himself: «How is it that the shocking, controversial and violent events of 1969 and afterwards have been either forgotten or simply ignored? How can we tally the centrality of 12 December 1969, a centrality affirmed by all those who have written on this subject, with the apparent indifference of the 1980s generation?».

Within the present discussion, the first question to raise has to do with the notion of cultural amnesia: can it explain how and why Milanese citizens have forgotten this controversial past? This seems to be only partially the case. If one considers the cultural forms that fixed the collective memories of Piazza Fontana, they are not as many as in the case of Bologna, but they are still considerable: memorials, volumes, movies, theatrical performances, and other kinds of commemorative rituals.

The memorials of Piazza Fontana appear to be particularly contested: as Foot (1999) stresses in his study, the period since the massacre has

been characterised by several conflicts over the most adequate ways and forms of commemorating the massacre. By dealing with these «marble memories» (ibid.: 44), the author's analysis focuses particularly on three memorials: piazza Fontana, Calabresi, and Pinelli. The plaque to Pinelli represents, of course, the most contested: it remains «abusiva» (without official written permission) for several years, and causes very much controversy both in the national and local context. The more contested issue has to do with what should be written on this plaque. The controversy that divided Milan for years can be summarised by three different versions of that past which are summarised by three different terms to write on the plaque: «died», «killed», «murdered».

4.2. Bologna, 1980-2000

The research on the Bologna case (Tota 2001) deals with the social and collective memories related to the massacre which took place at the railway station on 2 August 1980. A bomb exploded in the second-class waiting room. The city reacted very quickly, despite the fact that most Bolognese were already on holiday. Help arrived within a few minutes. The people who lived opposite the station came with sheets, bandages and improvised tools for moving the rubble. They began to help the injured and to dig with their hands to free the trapped bodies. The emergency medical service immediately began to coordinate the arrival of ambulances. In this massacre 85 people died and 200 were injured. In the imagination of some of the interviewees the memory of those moments when help was organised frantically is represented symbolically by Bus 37 and its driver. This bus had just reached the station when the bomb exploded and was due to leave with its passengers. Instead, it was used to transport the dead, so as to allow the ambulances to help those who had been injured. The driver extended his shift without stopping until he had moved all the bodies:

> «I remember the bodies, poor things, put in a bus and taken away because obviously the ambulances took away the living, the dead were loaded into the bus which took them to the mortuary [...]. That was my first impression of the event, seeing those people, those sheets next to one another ... it was an improvised hearse, and it affected me, because it was like being in a war (14, B-II)» (Tota 2001).

In the citizens' imaginary, twenty years on, Bus 37 with its cargo of bodies is still an important symbol of how the city reacted to the massacre, so

much so that it is soon going to be placed in a new historical museum by the Bologna Public Transport Company (Azienda dei Trasporti of Bologna [ATB]). In other words, this bus has become an 'object of memory' in relation to the massacre: the collective memory of these events has taken form also in this bus, it has become objectified in it.

Comparing the cultural forms of the Bologna case with that of Milan, the commemorative artefacts of the Bologna disaster appear to be more diversified, and more visible within the spatial context of the city. The ensemble of the commemorative artefacts at the station comprises two plaques with the names and ages of the bomb victims, the Pope's prayer, the gash in the wall, and the bomb crater on the floor of the waiting room. This set of artefacts was inaugurated a year after the massacre and since then, on every 2 August, a commemorative march has crossed the city of Bologna, through Piazza Maggiore and via Indipendenza, and on towards the station. To the commemorative march many and many Bolognese citizens take part every year.

As regards commemorative artefacts, at first there were the two plaques, the gash in the wall and the mark on the floor. The Pope's inscription was added after a visit by John Paul II in 1984. The way in which the group is laid out corresponds, according to the aims of the 2 August Association of Victims and Families of Victims, to a series of functions. First, the memory of this event is located in a place that both the citizens of Bologna and tourists visiting the city pass through on a daily basis. (This type of reasoning led the Association to reject the plan for a commemorative monument on the hills around Bologna proposed by a previous Mayor). The aim is that the waiting room should be a kind of «living monument, which people pass by every day, without the need to visit it specifically» (Tota 2001). Second, there was a desire to situate the artefacts in a place that «can never be used for false ends» (ibid.). Since the day of the bomb, one of the most worrying and traumatic aspects of the public experience of the massacre has been the constant circulation of false versions of events. This is probably connected to the series of cover-ups and false trails identified by investigators. What matters here is that the location and planning of the commemorative ensemble aims to leave few doubts. From this point of view the community of this memory considers the crater left by the bomb and the gash in the wall as guarantees of the truth of any possible future versions of this past, a barrier against potential revisionist versions which could falsify reality.

The victims' families association has played a key role since 1980 in

the collective remembering of the massacre. More than «authorities» of memory, these associations have become real guarantors of that memory. The moral force deriving from memories of the victims, as Jedlowski (1991) has argued, is translated in this case into the greater durability of certain versions of events to survive through time. The victims, or the people who are seen to be legitimately speaking on their behalf, are given the socially recognised *right to the last word* on everything relating to the way events are re-written.

Since 1996, the management of the commemorative site by the local council, the railway company and the Association has undergone some developments. The commemorative site has been at the centre of a series of cultural initiatives organised by the Bologna Town Council and some cultural cooperatives in the city. Every year, starting on 6 July and culminating on 2 August, a series of events entitled 'Under the sign of solidarity' in the waiting room and an area next to the commemorative site usually used to sell books and other items. In this area, every evening between 8 pm and 11 pm, private radio stations take it in turn to broadcast live from the station: in this way the waiting room and the commemorative site are filled with music, voices, noises and people watching the radio broadcasts. In addition, Bologna's art academy has organised a competition amongst its students for installations and performances to be set or held in the station for two weeks. This initiative was so successful that it was also presented in Paris.

Events like these link the collective memory of the massacre to various cultural activities: in the words of one of the participants, «ranging from traditional rice-workers songs to rock music». They are based upon a well-defined model of the commemorative site and its functions within the city, a model shaped by local institutions and pressure groups which have legitimately assumed the role of memory authorities. The public definition of the commemorative site and of the kind of actions that can be performed around it could well be encapsulated in the phrase «living monument». The results of the research reveal that the association has developed a poetics of memory display which has increasingly distanced itself from mourning and come closer to the idea of moral testimony. The association has elaborated a kind of marketing project for the transmission of the memory of the massacre. Such a project is made easier to organise by the way in which, twenty years on from the massacre, family memories, individual memories and collective memories have come together and stabilised within social memory of the event.

Before concluding, it has to be noted that in order to compare the Milan and Bologna cases, it is necessary also to consider that the Bologna event is more recent than the Milan one. This might play, of course, a positive role in the process of remembering. Moreover, the dimension and the consequences of the events differ considerably: 85 people died and 200 were injured in the Bologna massacre, in Milan 16 people died and 88 were injured.

But a comparison of the data from the two studies shows how differently the two cities remember their controversial past, and this seems to be linked to the different relationship between social and collective memories. In the case of Milan the study realised by Foot (1999) documents the existence of a codified and well-sedimented social memory, but also, thirty years on, the lack of a community of memory able to construct and transmit collective memories of these events to new generations. On the contrary, in the case of Bologna (Tota 2001) the collected data document that there is a well-established and active community of memory, able to construct and sustain collective memories of this past. On the other hand, the content of the event is expressed in several artefacts, and the recent activity of the Victims' and Victims Families' Association is intended to create new social objects of commemoration to keep this memory alive. This preliminary comparison between the two cases seems to indicate that the combination of a partial cultural amnesia with the lack of an active community of memory may represent a good key to understanding why Milanese citizens tend to forget their controversial past, while the Bolognese remember theirs. In other words, while the collective memories linked to the Bologna massacre seem to be neither formless nor homeless, but well-sedimented in the collective consciousness and visible in the public discourse (both at local and national levels), the same cannot be said in the case of Piazza Fontana, where even if not formless, the collective memories are too weak and unable to speak to new generations.

Conclusions

By dealing with the relationship between culture, collective remembrance and oblivion, it has been argued that the cultural shapes of memories are the space and place where power relations affect the social representation of the past. In this respect, the choice of representing a controversial past through a specific cultural form can be viewed as a good terrain to study

the process of selecting one of the competing versions of this past. Of course, this process is closely related to the category of power. In the case of controversial events, in particular (such as the Vietnam war, the Bologna massacre, the Hiroshima bombing), Halbwachs' and Namer's analyses on the social construction of the past become particularly evident. In these cases there is a conflict among different versions of the past, which can be analysed only by referring to the power relations among the different social groups related to that event. If collective memory is the content, and culture is the form of this content, power is the key to understanding why a certain content embodied in a specific form has been selected in a specific context. By comparing the results of different studies on this topic, it has been shown that, when formless, collective memories are homeless. It has been argued that the analysis of «cultural amnesia» represents a useful strategy to study how societies forget the past.

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